

Draft Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy 2015



FOREWORD

Ormskirk is a vibrant and prosperous market town which has been serving the people of West Lancashire and beyond for over 700 years. We are proud of Ormskirk's unique historic character, long established market and of the increasingly successful Edge Hill University. Ormskirk has continued to remain vibrant despite the economic downturn demonstrating the strength and importance of the town centre to the local area and beyond.

Through the development and implementation of this strategy, I hope that Ormskirk town centre will continue to thrive, serving both the people of West Lancashire as well as visitors to the town. This strategy seeks to build upon some of the good work which has been done previously, whilst adding fresh impetus and vigour as we look to the future.

We all know that town centres are changing and now is the time to act to ensure that the town changes with the times. It is my hope that this strategy can help Ormskirk adapt to meet the requirements of these changing times. Although Ormskirk is doing well, through the implementation of actions contained within this strategy and with the support of the public and stakeholders, the town centre will go from strength to strength attracting new businesses and both local residents and visitors from further afield.

Councillor Ian Moran

Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Estates
West Lancashire Borough Council

PARTNERSHIPS

This strategy is endorsed by the following key partners who agree to work together to deliver the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan alongside West Lancashire Borough Council.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Ormskirk is an attractive and popular historic market town with a successful university in close proximity. The town centre is host to a market on two days of the week, which includes a midweek Thursday market and weekend Saturday market. The market has been operated continuously for over 700 years. Special continental and vintage markets are also held regularly, as well as the impressive annual Ormskirk Motorfest event. The town centre has an attractive airy feel with many historic buildings adding to the character of the town. As well as being host to main street retailers, Ormskirk's strengths lie in its independent retailers, cafes and restaurants. The town centre benefits from its unique features such as the town centre clock dating back to 1876, Ormskirk Parish Church with its origins in the 12th century, Chapel Gallery and Coronation Park in close proximity.
- 1.2** Although popular, the town centre and market could provide a wider offer, appealing to the resident student population and residents living in outlying areas. Although there are a relatively small number of vacant units in the town centre, there is a perception by some residents that the town centre is starting to decline and the condition of some buildings could be improved.
- 1.3** Ormskirk is home to the innovative and dynamic Edge Hill University and with around 4,000 employees contributing an estimated £800 million into the local economy in the last 5 years. The University has also contributed an additional £86 million into the local economy through staff and supplier spend, making the University an important asset to Ormskirk and a real jewel in West Lancashire's crown.
- 1.4** In 2008, Ormskirk was part of a Market Towns Initiative, which included significant community engagement and stakeholder involvement focusing on four key themes; Economy, Environment, Social and Community and Transport and Access. This piece of work resulted in a detailed Action Plan encompassing all these themes.

To take community and stakeholder involvements further, West Lancashire Borough Council in conjunction with West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Service (WLCVS) oversaw in 2009 the formation of Ormskirk Community Partnership (OCP). This is a voluntary organisation which acts as a voice for Ormskirk giving its residents the chance to have their say. Working with the Council, the partnership continuously addressed the wider ranging actions emanating from the Market Town Initiative Plan, aiming to fulfil its slogan 'Let's Make Ormskirk Better'.

- 1.5** This strategy will include a review of the actions contained within the Ormskirk Market Town Initiative Action Plan, to determine whether there are any outstanding actions that are still relevant to today's economy and will look to build on these where possible.

2.0 COMMUNITY WORKING



- 2.1** The Council recognises the value and importance in consulting with, and working in partnership with public, private and community/voluntary organisations as well as the local community. Ormskirk is fortunate to have a number of dynamic organisations working to help improve and support the town centre economy including Ormskirk Community Partnership, Ormskirk Community Safety Partnership, Love Ormskirk and OWL Business Focus. This strategy will seek to engage with these organisations to ensure that all stakeholders are working in a coherent manner to help achieve shared goals. In order to ensure that this strategy works it requires support from a range of local groups, as well as the local community and should be seen as a shared strategy.

3.0 PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGY

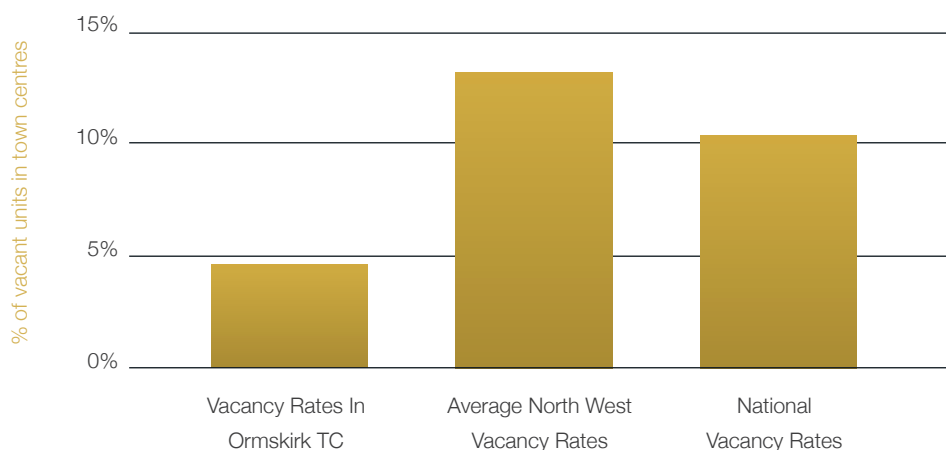


- 3.1** This strategy has been developed in order to help co-ordinate the approach of the Council, local traders and other interested parties and should help create a strong vision and identity for Ormskirk that helps set Ormskirk aside from its neighbouring areas. This vision and strategy should be one that is focused and achievable in the short term, but that also takes a longer, more strategic view. The strategy aims to use innovative methods to bring the history of the town back to life, animating spaces and providing a strong sense of place that will engender pride and community engagement.
- 3.2** With some fantastic transport links into Ormskirk, the strategy aims to capitalise on Ormskirk's unique location attracting people from neighbouring cities including Liverpool, Manchester and Preston.
- 3.3** Following a clear understanding of the current situation, the aim of this strategy is to recognise the town centre's distinctiveness and identify opportunities, with stakeholders and partners, to revitalise the town centre bringing new investment, business and visitors through a co-ordinated campaign and a strong marketing strategy. This approach should ensure the town centre has the right offer of retail, food and drink, community and leisure uses.
- 3.4** This strategy aims to build upon the work of the Ormskirk Market Towns Initiative and taking into consideration external factors such as the current economic climate, the aims and objectives of this strategy will be considered under three key themes:- Economy, Environment and Visitor.
- 3.5** Although Ormskirk town centre can be considered to be 'holding its own' compared to many local high streets, nationally high streets are changing and need to evolve to remain competitive. This strategy can be seen as an intervention to help prevent decline and to put in place an action plan to help Ormskirk prosper.
- 3.6** Although the action plan contained within this strategy is as up to date, it will be subject to change following annual reviews as actions are completed and new actions are required.

4.0 Property Market & Vacancy Levels

- 4.1** The buoyancy of the local property market is a manifestation of wider economic trends. Although some of these trends may be outside of our control there are a number of factors that can be influenced locally. This strategy must analyse Ormskirk's ability to compete with similar neighbouring centres and work to position Ormskirk town centre to be as vibrant and attractive as possible.
- 4.2** The UK retail sector is undergoing a fundamental change and this change can be seen in all high streets across the Country, including Ormskirk. The type of retailers in the town centre has changed reflecting national trends. Whilst the Council welcomes opportunities for vacant units to be brought back into use, it will be important to ensure that Ormskirk maintains a varied mix of units providing a mix of retail and non-retail units.
- 4.3** Council records show that in April 2015 vacancy rates for ground floor commercial units in the wider Ormskirk town centre area were 4.8%. Given the current economic climate this is an extremely positive figure and shows that the Ormskirk town centre property market is buoyant. According to Springboard UK (which is a market analysis company) in April 2015 the average vacancy levels were 12.9% for the North West and 10.2% for the national average. *(Source: Springboard, April 2015, Vacancy Rates Survey)*
- 4.4** However, there may still be opportunities to improve the buoyancy of the local property market, reducing vacancy rates further and even improving the types of units that are available providing a greater offer than presently exists. Although in real terms vacancy rates may be low, the perception may be higher, given the prominence of some of the units that are currently vacant. There may also be opportunities for re/development on some sites with and on the edge of the town centre. If these sites could be developed they could add to the offer presently available improving the appearance of the town centre and overall add to the vitality of the town centre. Although many of these sites are in private ownership there may be opportunities to help facilitate development.

Figure 1: Bar chart showing vacancy levels in town centres
(Source: Springboard, April 2015, Vacancy Rates Survey)





5.0 LINKS TO PLANNING & OTHER STRATEGIES



National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.1** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development which includes an economic role.
- 5.2** The NPPF requires that planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period.

West Lancashire Local Plan 2012 - 2027

- 5.3** The West Lancashire Local Plan supports growth and development within Ormskirk town centre including supporting the vitality and viability of the town centre. In particular, the following policies are of relevance to Ormskirk town centre:

- GN1 Settlement Boundary
- IF1 Maintaining Vibrant Town and Local Centres
- EN2 Preserving and Enhancing West Lancashire's Natural Environment
- EN4 Conservation Area
- EC1 The Economy and Employment Land
- EC4 Edge Hill University
- RS3 Provision of Student Accommodation
- IF2 Enhancing Sustainable Transport Choice
- GN3 Criteria for Sustainable Development
- GN4 Demonstrating Viability
- GN5 Sequential Tests

West Lancashire Economic Strategy

- 5.4** Improving Ormskirk as a market town is one of the key asks of the emerging West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy which aims to deliver economic growth across West Lancashire over a ten year time period. Being one of the key asks of the Economic Development Strategy demonstrates the Council's commitment to improving Ormskirk and provides a mechanism through which future funding bids can be supported.

6.0 Key Partners

6.1 As previously mentioned in order for this strategy to be successful it requires the support and buy in of a number of organisations and interested parties, as well as the wider community.

Some of the partner agencies include:

- Love Ormskirk
- Ormskirk Community Partnership
- OWL Business Focus
- Local business owners/developers
- Property/land owners
- Edge Hill University
- Edge Hill Students Union
- West Lancashire College
- Marketing Lancashire
- Ormskirk market traders
- West Lancashire CVS
- Lancashire County Council
- Jobcentre Plus
- Local press
- Skills, Employment and Training Partnership
- Letting agents
- Ormskirk Parish church/ churches
- Business In The Community (BITC)

Healthy High Street Pilot

6.2 Love Ormskirk has successfully submitted a bid in which Ormskirk town centre has been chosen as a Healthy High Street pilot area. This pilot will provide Ormskirk with support through engagement with high street champions.

6.3 The Healthy High Streets programme will provide intensive support over a 3 year period, providing business experience and resources to high street champions. The Healthy High Streets campaign's founding partners include Boots UK, the Co-operative Group, Marks & Spencer and Santander. These groups collaborate with town centre teams to develop and implement activities.

6.4 Through Love Ormskirk, Ormskirk has been chosen amongst the first group of towns and local teams. Along with other towns, Ormskirk will receive bespoke support. Stakeholders including the Council have already met with representatives from the Healthy High Streets campaign and we intend to use their experience and support to help implement many of the actions in this strategy.



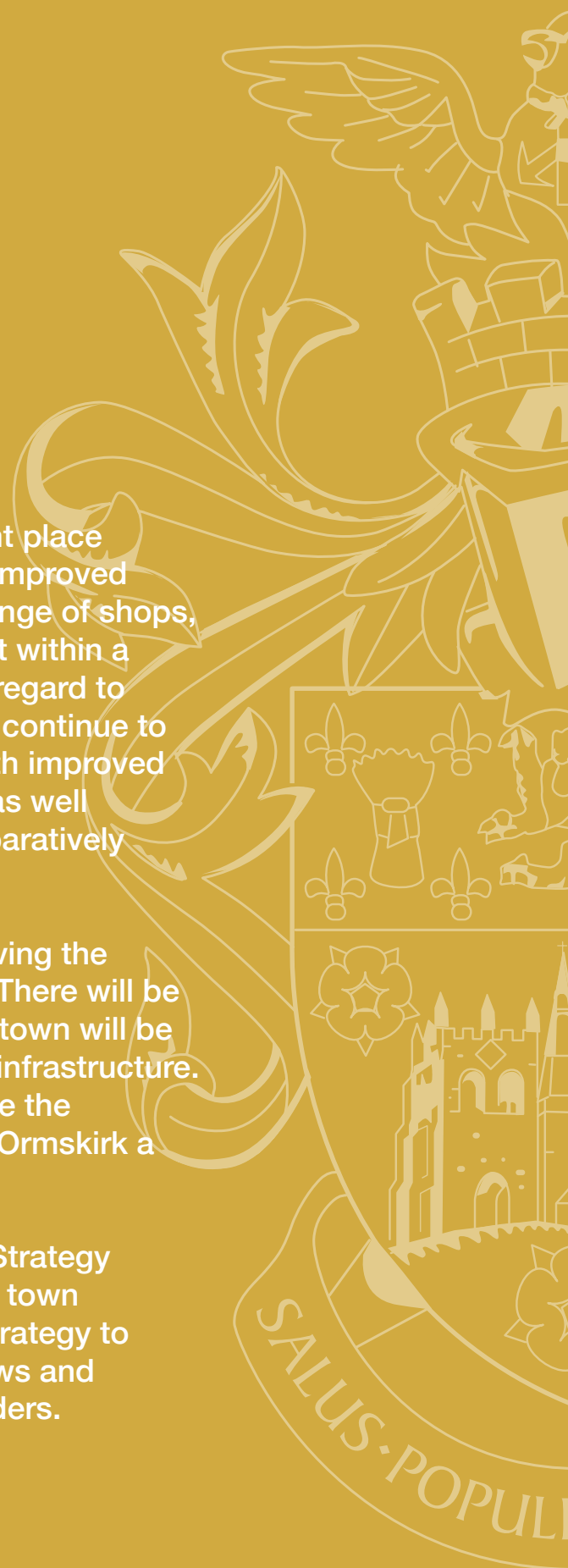
7.0 Vision & Objectives

VISION

Ormskirk town centre will continue to be a vibrant place to serve the people of West Lancashire, with an improved bustling and popular street market and a wide range of shops, bars, restaurants and other leisure attractions set within a high quality attractive environment that has due regard to its history, agriculture and market. The town will continue to be easily accessible by all forms of transport, with improved facilities for cyclists and public transport users, as well as having plenty of accessible parking at a comparatively competitive price.

Links will be made to maximise the benefit of having the successful Edge Hill University within the town. There will be a regular pattern of co-ordinated events and the town will be one of the most advanced locally in terms of I.T. infrastructure. A co-ordinated marketing effort will help publicise the attractions which Ormskirk holds and will make Ormskirk a destination for day trips across the sub-region'.

We believe that the draft Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy contains a strong vision and will help to deliver a town centre we can all be proud of. In order for this strategy to be successful, the vision needs to reflect the views and aspirations of the local community and stakeholders.





7.1 This image represents the views of the Council in consultation with the views of the local community and traders. It is believed that this vision will help deliver Ormskirk as a sustainable and vibrant town to the benefit of residents, traders and visitors alike.

Objectives

7.2 The following objectives have been used to deliver the vision for this strategy:

- Improve the appearance of Ormskirk's historic environment to help sustain and improve the character of the town.
- Deliver and promote a programme of events that will help attract new visitors to Ormskirk. This events programme should be delivered throughout the year when trade would otherwise be at a low level.
- Enhance the features that are already successful for Ormskirk including helping to facilitate improvements to Chapel Gallery in the town centre.
- Secure improvements to the public realm in Ormskirk to help enhance the natural environment and appearance of the town centre and the gateways into it.
- Make it easier for people to access the town by all means of transport and for those with specific mobility issues.
- Working with partners to develop a marketing strategy to promote Ormskirk as a brand, also utilising the latest digital/technology and social media.
- Build links with, and ensure that the town centre maximises the benefits of Edge Hill University.
- Improve the strength and offer of Ormskirk's markets
- Ensure the long term management and maintenance of the town centre as a whole, for shoppers, residents and businesses.
- Increase footfall in the town centre through a variety of initiatives.
- Help make Ormskirk a safe place to live, work and visit.

8.0 Brand, Marketing & Town Centre Management

- 8.1** Ormskirk is fortunate in that a number of groups actively work to promote Ormskirk town centre and the efforts and achievements of these organisations needs to be recognised and built upon. Some recent examples include the popular town centre map produced by Ormskirk Community Partnership and the Christmas Markets organised by Love Ormskirk.
- 8.2** However, although there are varied organisations, including different Council departments, working to improve and promote Ormskirk, there is no co-ordinated approach, with development and marketing initiatives tending to be 'ad hoc' and not co-ordinated. Ormskirk currently does not have a recognisable brand identity and there is no comprehensive management strategy for the town.
- 8.3** In order for Ormskirk to compete and prosper this needs to be addressed as soon as possible as a lack of co-ordination could mean that regeneration initiatives become fragmented with different organisations not working towards a common vision and goal.

Management

- 8.4** In order to ensure the successful management of the town centre, options need to be explored which could include the development of a town centre management forum, in which representatives from specific organisations could monitor the implementation of this strategy and drive forward certain initiatives. This group would need to have clear governance and support from all partners to ensure it did not become a 'talking shop'.
- 8.5** In order to help retailers the Council has introduced a new Retail Relief Scheme to replace the previous business rate discount scheme. The new scheme will provide a discount worth up to £1,000 a year - in both 2014-15 and 2015-16 - to retail premises with a rateable value of up to £50,000. This will provide support to retail premises including pubs, cafes, restaurants and shops.



Developing a Brand

- 8.6** The historic buildings and layout of Ormskirk is generally recognised by the people of the town and visitors as some of its greatest assets. This special historic character creates a sense of pride of place and affects how people use and are attracted to the town.
- 8.7** Working with partner organisations, Ormskirk's brand needs to be clearly defined and marketed. This brand needs to build upon the current strengths of the town, including the historic character, but also needs to be locally distinctive. Once decided upon, all organisations promoting Ormskirk need to agree and sign up to promoting this brand.
- 8.8** This brand should be developed through a marketing group/forum which could be a sub group of the overall town centre management group. Once this brand has been established it will be extremely important to ensure that it is actively promoted through as many mechanisms as possible, including a town centre website, promotional literature, information boards and public artwork etc.

Promotion and Events

- 8.9** In order to promote Ormskirk and develop a brand, Ormskirk town centre should ideally have one comprehensive website which is regularly updated and acts as a 'one stop shop' for town centre activities/events arranged by any key town centre organisations. The development of an events calendar should form part of the remit of the marketing sub group. This website must also be represented on social media including Twitter feeds and Facebook. This website may also have the capability for developing a contact database where users are regularly updated regarding events and activities taking place in the town centre.
- 8.10** Access to free Wi Fi is increasingly important for visitors to a town. Although large parts of Ormskirk town centre are covered by a free Wi Fi network, there is no promotion of this facility and many shoppers/visitors do not realise it exists. Opportunities exist to make better use of this technology including promoting the facilities which are available.
- 8.11** Some smaller scale improvements to gateways into the town centre could also make a big improvement including updating information boards and the information contained within them, in addition to environmental improvements.

KEY ACTIONS

- Develop a town centre management forum/group with a clear governance structure to monitor progress and implement other actions in this strategy. This group will set up appropriate sub groups to deliver specific actions contained within the strategy.
- The Council will assess how staff resources can be made available to support town centre initiatives.
- Monitor the new retail relief scheme to assess how successful it has been and whether it should be continued beyond 2016.
- Set up a Marketing Sub Group involving local stakeholders to:
 - Develop a brand for Ormskirk that all parties can sign up to and a marketing campaign with clearly defined outputs.
 - Develop a dedicated website for Ormskirk town centre and make arrangements to ensure that this webpage is regularly updated. This website should be mindful of existing websites promoting Ormskirk.
 - Investigate how Ormskirk town centre can be promoted using social media.
 - Promote the existing free Wi Fi available in Ormskirk town centre and investigate opportunities to improve/extend this facility.
 - Work with partners to develop and promote events such as town centre trails.
 - Work with Edge Hill University and the Students Union to develop events that will engage the student population, as well as staff, to use Ormskirk town centre.

Conclusion

- 8.12** The marketing and management of the town centre is currently fragmented and acts as a barrier to growth and development. In order for Ormskirk town centre to be successful it is essential that the marketing, management and branding of the town centre can be resolved. This must be done before other initiatives in this strategy are taken forward.
- 8.13** In order for any marketing strategy to work, it is essential that all partners are fully supportive and take ownership of the strategy. This strategy cannot be the responsibility of one organisation, due to the importance of the interventions needed and the amount of resources required.

9.0 Buildings and Place

- 9.1** Ormskirk has an attractive, historic town centre which boasts a number of listed buildings and is also located within a Conservation Area. The town centre maintains much of its historic character giving the town a unique sense of identity which helps distinguish it from neighbouring towns. This heritage has great benefits for Ormskirk and, if integrated and promoted correctly, can be used as a focus for positive change and regeneration.
- 9.2** Although the town centre generally looks attractive, a minority of the buildings appear to require some maintenance and there are some development sites where works on site have halted or indeed never started. Some vacant units are in prominent positions and in particularly poor repair.
- 9.3** The appearance of the condition of the physical environment in an area can really effect the perception of that area; this is particularly true for visitors and investors. If a town gives a positive first impression it increases the likelihood of return visits. This is true for both day-visitors and shoppers. A positive physical environment gives a perception of pride in an area and helps an area appear safe and inviting.
- 9.4** The Council is currently undertaking building appraisal work to highlight the prominence and condition of buildings in the town centre, so that the Council and partners can focus any available resources to those areas where it would provide the greatest benefit. These appraisals will provide a snapshot of the current state of the buildings and could also help track the deterioration or improvement of properties and prove an important monitoring tool. Although the Council is aware of the most important and prominent buildings, we have limited information on their condition. This appraisal work will help identify the most appropriate locations to help target resources, whether this is financial or in terms of officer time.
- 9.5** In addition, some gateways into Ormskirk could benefit from improvement/development and some of the main shopping streets in the town could benefit from refurbishment works/maintenance.
- 9.6** Like many towns in the United Kingdom the ownership of buildings and land within the town centre is fragmented, being mainly in the hands of a large number of private owners. Whilst some property owners are pragmatic in their approach, some property owners can be difficult to contact and work with to deliver improvements. The Portas Review said that ‘fragmented ownership is one of the main disadvantages of the high street. For many it is the primary constraint on change.’ Unfortunately, the Council has limited powers to force landlords to conduct maintenance, with the exception of the most severe cases where enforcement powers may be used.



9.7 The amount of street furniture, including shop 'A' boards, lamp posts, benches, council signs etc. further detract from the character of the town centre, making the main shopping streets appear cluttered. Although many of these items serve a purpose, some are unnecessary and with better management could be reduced. Some items could be removed, repositioned, camouflaged or be potentially combined. This approach to reducing street clutter will require street audits to assess the problem, as well as careful planning and coordination with interested parties; however, this approach could significantly improve the appearance of the street scene and enhance the historic character.

9.8 The Council is currently working with Lancashire County Council to secure major environmental improvements along Moor Street, which is at the heart of Ormskirk's retail centre. As part of this exercise, a consultation event was undertaken in June (2014). Major renovations have recently taken place on Moor Street, with new street furniture, a designated event space and bespoke artwork which all reinforce the character of the town. The new layout of Moor Street is also having a positive impact upon the market, helping to formalise the location for stalls. These improvements have improved the attractiveness of the town centre and it is hoped they will act as a catalyst to encourage further investment and development. The Council will continue to monitor public realm in the town.

Conclusion

9.9 Ormskirk is unique in that it still maintains a number of historic buildings and has a unique character setting it aside from neighbouring towns. This historic character should be protected and where possible enhanced so that it can be used as a tool for attracting visitors and investors.

9.10 Although a series of measures/actions have been identified which will improve the physical appearance of the town centre and build upon the heritage/brand of Ormskirk, there may be difficulties in delivering some of the proposals. Many of the proposals are reliant on factors which are beyond our control, for example co-operation from landlords, availability of finance and market conditions.

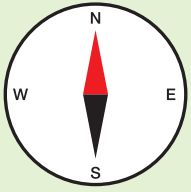
KEY ACTIONS

In order to help improve the physical environment of the town centre, including improving the appearance, the Council, along with partners, is going to actively work to:

- Identify the key potential development sites that should be brought forward which are causing the greatest negative perception of the town and start a dialogue with the relevant landowner/freeholder to encourage suitable developments in line with the Council's planning policy and aspirations.
- If development opportunities cannot come forward in the short term, it will be important to try and ensure that sites are at least made to look visually more attractive so that they no longer create a negative perception of the town.
- Identify the current condition of all buildings through a buildings appraisal.
- Investigate funding opportunities to improve the external appearance of buildings and the public realm.
- Where buildings have been identified by the Council as being of significance and their physical condition has suffered, the Council will contact the owners of the property, highlighting their condition and offering guidance/advice on how to adequately maintain these buildings.
- Explore opportunities to reduce the levels of street clutter in the town centre.
- As a pilot, and working with property owners, the Council will look to clean up and provide some form of public art within one of Ormskirk's alleyways. This artwork should be part of a community engagement project and should fit in within a brand which has yet to be established for Ormskirk. If this pilot is successful it should be rolled out across all of Ormskirk's alleyways where agreement can be reached with property owners.
- Work with LCC to secure maintenance to some high streets which could benefit from improvement.

LONG TERM ACTIONS

- Bring forward development sites. This may involve the Council using its own land or swapping land to help facilitate a better standard of development.
- The Council should consider options for acquiring land/property if landowners cannot be found or will not engage in dialogue.



ORMSKIRK IMPROVEMENTS MAP

Indicative plan showing potential opportunity areas within Ormskirk town centre.



Key



Event Space



Potential development sites



Car Park enhancement opportunity



Bus station improvement site



Proposed new car park

10.0 ORMSKIRK MARKET



- 10.1** It is clear that the historic market in Ormskirk is a key asset, bringing tradition and vibrancy to the town, whilst helping to distinguish Ormskirk from neighbouring areas. The market is enhanced by the pedestrianised nature of the town centre, providing a large yet open shopping environment. The market sells a wide variety of products but has traditionally been known for its locally grown fruit and vegetables, as well as butchers and fishmongers selling local produce.
- 10.2** As well as the traditional outdoor markets on a Thursday and Saturday, Ormskirk is also home to a permanent indoor market and has also hosted special continental and vintage markets on a regular basis. These special markets are also sometimes held in the Chapel Gallery.
- 10.3** Although both the Thursday and Saturday markets are proving popular, the Saturday market tends to attract less stalls and visitors than the Thursday market. This is partly due to the fact that there is greater competition locally for markets on a Saturday and also as markets tend to compete with larger retail centres for Saturday trade. In addition, the current layout of the market can appear cluttered, as some stalls tend to creep forward and extend onto pedestrian areas which can cause congestion for pedestrians and detract from a pleasant shopping experience.

- 10.4** As part of the redevelopment of Moor Street, some work has already been done to investigate how the market should best be laid out to accommodate the needs of the market traders, local shops, pedestrians and local shoppers. This work should continue and when a suitable solution is found it should be consulted on.
- 10.5** Although both markets are popular, appropriate opportunities still exist to better promote the market and this could be done with the development of a new brand for Ormskirk.
- 10.6** In order to diversify the appeal of the Saturday market which is not as popular as the Thursday market, consideration should be given to working with Edge Hill University to investigate if a section of the market could be used as student stalls, encouraging students to use the market and town centre.
- 10.7** Alternatively, encouraging a hub of new market stall holders who specialise in a particular area, for example; arts and crafts may help create a niche market which could help the Saturday market compete against other mainstream retail competition.
- 10.8** In order to ensure that the market remains as popular and competitive as possible and in consultation with the stall holders, the Council will consider investigating in infrastructure such as high quality, uniform stall covers, card payment systems and new electrical hook up points.

KEY ACTIONS

In order to take the market forward consideration should be given to:

- Assessing other markets to understand the best practise that could be applied to Ormskirk Market.
- Looking for opportunities to continue to promote the market to a wider area. Ormskirk is close to a number of urban conurbations and could potentially become a shopping destination of choice for specialist locally grown/farmed produce.
- Looking at opportunities to expand the appeal of the Saturday market, considering looking at opportunities to link in with and promote the market to Edge Hill University students/new traders.
- Consider attracting new specialist stall holders to create a niche market of a Saturday.
- Consider bringing forward an events programme of guest markets/vintage markets, subject to available resources.
- Work to improve the physical appearance of the market in regards to layout and introducing new, uniform stall covers.
- In consultation with the market traders, consider the introduction of new infrastructure to ensure the market has up to date facilities.

Conclusion

- 10.9** Ormskirk's markets are successful and do attract people into the town helping to create a unique selling point for Ormskirk. However, by exploring the interventions above the market should continue to thrive and may even attract new customers who traditionally may not have used the market. The market will also be a key consideration in developing a brand for Ormskirk.

11.0 Car Parking

- 11.1** The Portas Review highlighted the importance of parking for a successful high street. The role of car parks in the town centre is a multi-functional role serving a variety of purposes and includes supporting local shops and businesses, providing a service for local residents and visitors, generating an income and enhancing leisure opportunities for local residents. In order to better serve the town centre we believe that it is vital for this strategy to look to manage car parking provision in a holistic way.
- 11.2** The cost of car parking, as well as business rates etc, has helped to reduce the competitiveness of town centres generally, compared to out of town developments and some e-commerce retailers who do not have similar constraints.
- 11.3** Ormskirk town centre is well served with a number of predominantly Council owned car parks. At present there are 11 Council owned car parks providing approximately 750 parking spaces. As well as Council owned car parks there are a number of privately owned car parks which currently provide sufficient car parking spaces for visitors to Ormskirk.
- 11.4** The Council has a number of short stay car parks providing parking for up to 2 hours, as well as a number of longer stay car parks and some free car parks. In addition, there are a number of private car parks located around the town centre who charge for car parking.
- 11.5** Although the Council does have some free car parks these tend to be smaller and located in slightly out of centre locations which tend not be favoured by shoppers or visitors to the town centre. Although the cost of Ormskirk's town centre car parks are similar to the cost of similar sized towns locally, there is still an additional cost to visiting Ormskirk that is not found in most out of town retailers.

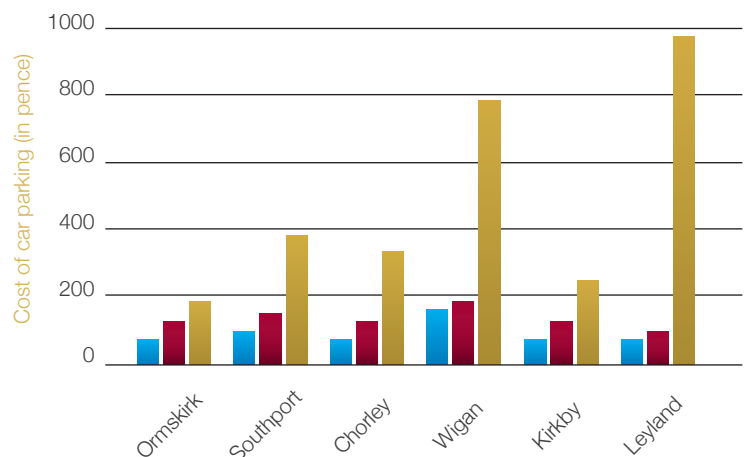
Comparative costs of car parks

- 11.6** Although prices vary from car park to car park within Ormskirk the average cost of a town centre car parking space is 70p for up to one hour, £2 for up to 4 hours and up to £3 for up to 9 hours. This compares very favourably to neighbouring towns, as shown in Figure 2.

- Key**
- Cost for up to 1 hour
 - Cost for up to 2 hour
 - Cost for 6 hours plus

(Figure 2 - Comparative cost of car parking in Ormskirk compared to neighbouring areas)

Source: Figures taken from local council websites



- 11.7** Although Ormskirk is well served by car parks, some of the car parks are difficult to locate due to the one way system which surrounds the town. This can be further complicated due to the fact that some car parks are long stay and some are short stay. In addition, some of the car parks may offer a poor first impression of Ormskirk to visitors, partly due to the presence of neighbouring derelict/vacant sites, and some car parks could be improved to make them more visually attractive.
- 11.8** The Council has recently upgraded some car parks, including Park Pool and Wheatsheaf car parks, and these upgrades have significantly improved the appearance of the car parks.
- 11.9** With some Council and privately owned car parks located in close proximity there are issues relating to confusion over parking costs and regulations.
- 11.10** Additionally, there are issues over how the public pay for their car parking. The Council car parks in Ormskirk only have pay on entry formats, whereas some members of the public prefer pay on exit facilities which provides flexibility allowing shoppers to be able to stay longer if required. In order to make the car parks as user friendly as possible a range of payment options should be considered including mobile top up facilities.



KEY ACTIONS

The Council needs to work together with private car park operators and shop owners to develop a comprehensive strategic car park strategy that will help support the vibrancy of the town centre. This should include:

- Reviewing the current pricing strategy of the town centre car parks. In particular, reviewing if offering free car parking for shorter periods of time (such as half an hour) would help attract shoppers who may want to pick up one or two items.
- Investigate the introduction of new car park technology where you pay on exit as opposed to paying on entry.
- Review if the Council should alter the time periods of the short and long stay car parks.
- Some of the Council's car parks could benefit from some environmental improvements in order to help improve their appearance and overall visitor experience of visiting the town centre. This should include updating Ormskirk town centre's information boards, planting trees, resurfacing some areas and possibly new artwork in appropriate areas.
- Better signage of car parks so visitors can easily distinguish between car parks including considering intelligent signage.
- Investigate the possibility of introducing additional user friendly payment options such as mobile payment top up systems.
- Promote the fact that Ormskirk has plenty of car park provision at competitive prices.
- In the longer term there may be opportunities to consider increasing the capacity of some car parks, for example extending car parks into vacant development sites or introducing multi-story/deck car parks. This may offer opportunities to develop other car parks which may have development potential.

Conclusion

- 11.11** The management of car park provision in Ormskirk is critical to ensuring the success of the high street. Whilst the position in Ormskirk is relatively healthy compared to some areas, improving the experience for shoppers is essential to maintaining existing and attracting new customers. Also as shopping habits change and the high street is used in different ways it will be important to ensure that the management of the town's car parks can be as adaptable as possible.

12.0 Transport & Access

- 12.1** Ormskirk is an extremely well connected town with good road and rail links. However, at certain times, Ormskirk does suffer from problems of congestion with the A570 running through the town carrying traffic accessing Southport from the M58. Additionally, there is room for improvement with the current rail service to Preston being infrequent, and the current one way system acts as a barrier for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 12.2** Lancashire County Council (LCC) have recently published their Highways and Transport Masterplan in which they say that they will produce a 'Movement Strategy' for Ormskirk including an innovative bicycle hire scheme centred on the university. The strategy will also focus on how removing longer distance traffic from the town can be a catalyst for making public transport, cycling and walking modes of choice in the town.
- 12.3** Many public transport interchanges are the first and last place a visitor sees when they visit Ormskirk and therefore it is important that these places leave a good impression. This includes Ormskirk bus station which requires updating.
- 12.4** The Borough Council has worked with Lancashire County Council to investigate and develop a number of schemes which will improve transport provision in Ormskirk and will continue to work with LCC as the 'Movement Strategy' for Ormskirk is developed.

KEY ACTIONS

Working with the County Council the Borough Council will:

- Seek to ensure that the aspirations for Ormskirk town centre are supported in the development of LCC's 'Movement Strategy' for Ormskirk.
- Explore opportunities to improve Ormskirk bus station to provide a modern, fit for purpose facility. This should include improving the existing linkage between the bus and rail station.
- Develop an integrated cycle and pedestrian link from Ormskirk train station to Edge Hill University providing the required infrastructure to enable students to get to the university by bike. This scheme should also help improve the link between the bus and train station and reduce congestion.

Conclusion

- 12.5** As LCC are the transport authority for West Lancashire it will be extremely important to ensure that we liaise to ensure that the aspirations of the strategy are fully integrated into the development of the Ormskirk 'Movement Strategy'.

13.0 NIGHT TIME/EVENING ECONOMY



- 13.1** With town centres changing, it is becoming clear that having a vibrant and safe night time/evening economy is a crucial element to the success of the town centre. No longer are town centres being seen as locations which close at 5pm. As well as the traditional night time economy the evening/leisure economy is becoming critical to meeting the demands of modern consumers.
- 13.2** Ormskirk has a prosperous night time economy with a good selection of restaurants, bars, pubs and other late night establishments. This helps diversify Ormskirk's appeal and extend the use of the town centre beyond the traditional 5 o'clock threshold. The evening/leisure economy is used by both residents, visitors and students with some facilities being located slightly out of the main town centre.
- 13.3** This night time economy is supported in part by the student population within the town, who tend to use these establishments more mid-week, whereas the majority of local residents tend to use the town centre night time establishments at the weekend.
- 13.4** The town centre is well policed and feels safe with a number of agencies working together through Ormskirk Community Safety Partnership to help provide assistance, protect residential amenity and ensure community safety. Ormskirk town centre is well served with CCTV, as well as being patrolled by police, community support officers and street pastors.
- 13.5** In order for the town centre to be able to meet the needs of both the day time, evening and late night economy the town centre will have to be attractive, safe and versatile.
- 13.6** With growing numbers of students at Edge Hill University and increasing numbers of student properties located within or close to the town centre there is still opportunity for growth, particularly in the evening/leisure economy between the traditional day time and night time operational hours i.e. When traditional shops and offices close at 5pm and when pubs and restaurants become busy around 7-8pm. The Association of Town Centre Management (TCM) commissioned a Retail Trading Hours Study which has shown that sales between 5pm and 8pm are typically 50% more than those between 9am and 11am. This represents an opportunity for growth which has not been fully exploited in Ormskirk.

- 13.7** In order to help facilitate this change, a number of actions will need to take place to help boost the evening economy making it more attractive to both retailers and members of the public. In order to do this a series of events could be co-ordinated between relevant partners to ensure that any events/festivals are supported by retailers. One such example could be food and drink festivals. Such festivals could be supported if the Council had facilities such as a pop up entertainment space, outdoor seating etc.
- 13.8** In order to help support the evening and night time economy, one possible solution could be to provide a new permanent lighting system which could help improve public safety whilst also improving the appearance and ambiance of the town of a night. This could be in the form of a suspended lighting above the town centre illuminating buildings and pavements.
- 13.9** Consideration will also need to be given to supporting public transport in the evening to allow both members of the public and workers to be able to get to and from Ormskirk of an evening. This should include links within West Lancashire as well as with neighbouring areas.

KEY ACTIONS

In order to help facilitate and support the change from the traditional day time to night-time economy the Council needs to:

- Work with local retailers to consider temporary periods where shop owners are encouraged to open up later into the early evening anchored by events such as late night entertainment, evening markets, outdoor food and drinks festivals.
- Continue to work with other agencies including the police, street pastors and Edge Hill University to ensure that the town centre is a safe place for all to visit.
- Continue to liaise with Lancashire County Council and public transport providers to ensure that Ormskirk is well served by public transport provision in an evening.
- Investigate the introduction of new permanent lighting within the town centre to provide a safe and effective night time environment.

Conclusion

- 13.10** The night time and evening/leisure economy in Ormskirk is relatively strong, however, it does have the potential for growth. In particular, the evening economy has a lot of potential to fill the void left between the normal shopping hours and the traditional night time economy. By improving the evening/night time economy we have the ability to enrich the offer of Ormskirk town centre for both residents and visitors, attract new visitors and could prevent residents and visitors going to neighbouring centres. However, it will be important to ensure that this growth is balanced and does not come at the expense of local residents.

14.0 Recording/Monitoring Town Centre Information

- 14.1** In order to effectively monitor if the actions within this strategy have had a positive effect upon the town centre, a range of data sets will be required. Before we introduce measures in this strategy to bring about improvement in the town centre it will be important to know what the current situation is.
- 14.2** The Council has recently started conducting surveys of the town centre showing vacancy levels. These surveys are conducted quarterly and will provide a valuable record providing comparative data which can be compared over time.
- 14.3** However, in order to effectively monitor the health of the town centre, a range of different data sets will be required. As well as vacancy rates, we can obtain figures showing how well Council owned car parks are performing and we may be able to obtain some data from some public transport providers, giving an indication of visitor numbers. Additional data may also be available from local estate agents and shops who may provide information about the strength of the market.
- 14.4** Despite the level of information available, there is a gap in this data, with no footfall figures available. Although footfall does not always equate to sales, it can be seen as one of the key indicators of a healthy high street. In addition, through obtaining footfall figures, we can compare the strength of Ormskirk town centre compared to similar sized towns.
- 14.5** In order to effectively manage and monitor how initiatives work within Ormskirk town centre, consideration should be given to the introduction of a footfall monitoring system which comes with an associated cost. These monitoring systems are now used in many town centres providing data which helps with the management of the particular town centre.
- 14.6** A footfall monitoring system could allow the Council to monitor and interpret the amount of visitors using the town centre. This could also help to identify trends which could help direct future initiatives. There may even be possibilities to look at benchmarking where comparisons could be made between the footfall within Ormskirk and other similar towns across the Country, and use such data as a marketing tool.

KEY ACTIONS

Working with partners the Borough Council will:

- Continue to monitor vacancy levels across the town centre.
- Investigate the different footfall monitoring systems available on the market with consideration given to purchasing a suitable system for Ormskirk town centre.
- Subject to available resources, work with local businesses to assess the strength of Ormskirk's property market.
- Work with Healthy High Streets campaign to investigate if major retailers in Ormskirk can provide any footfall data which could be used to help assess the strength of Ormskirk town centre.

Conclusion

- 14.7** As retail habits change it will be important to ensure that the town centre is adaptable and responsive and that we can monitor which interventions are delivering the greatest benefit. This will be important to ensure that we know where best to target available resources. The monitoring of effective data will be crucial in identifying trends which may help highlight issues that can be addressed before they become larger problems. Although this strategy contains a number of possible actions, without effective monitoring we will not be in a position to know if these actions are delivering positive results.

Appendices

A&B



STRENGTH WEAKNESS OPPORTUNITY AND THREATS (SWOT) ANALYSIS



Strengths

- Ormskirk town centre has excellent access with good bus and rail links, as well as good car parking areas with the ability to attract people from the local area as well as further afield.
- Ormskirk is a historic Lancashire market town with a unique character that could appeal beyond the local area.
- Ormskirk has a large number of national retailers and service providers including Morrisons, Tesco, Iceland, Home and Bargain, Boots, Dorothy Perkins, New Look, Clarks, Costa Coffee, Hallmark, RBS, Natwest, HSBC, Wetherspoons, O2, Superdrug, Argos, Aldi, WH Smith, Marks & Spencer, Timpson, Card Factory, Holland & Barrett, Tony & Guy and Specsavers amongst others.
- Ormskirk has an impressive number of independent retailers selling quality produce including independent butchers, fruit and veg shops, cafes and gift shops.
- The town centre hosts two successful markets on a Thursday and Saturday bringing in many repeat shoppers.
- There are a number of retail and leisure facilities within close proximity to the town centre including Park Pool, Coronation Park, Chapel Gallery, Ormskirk Parish Church, Ormskirk Cricket Ground, Ormskirk Civic Hall and a number of recreational sports facilities etc.
- Ormskirk town centre has a large amount of car parking spaces with a number being provided by the Council and a number being provided privately.
- Ormskirk is a well policed town with a number of safety measures including policing, CCTV and street pastors amongst others.
- Ormskirk has a large student population with the successful Edge Hill University located close to the town centre.
- Ormskirk has a safe feel good factor and is an inviting town centre.



Weaknesses

- Although Ormskirk has a number of car parking spaces there is little free car parking especially for short stay car parking. Although longer stay car parks may suit people who wish to spend a number of hours, there is little car park availability for people who wish to visit for a short period of time or even drop off visitors.
- The appearance of Ormskirk town centre appears cluttered with a number of obstacles including illegal advertisements as well as Council proliferation.
- Due to the physical nature of shops within town centres which tend to be smaller, some retailers larger, more flexible out of town units which may also have lower business rates.



Opportunities

- Although Ormskirk has relatively good transport connections with regular rail services to Liverpool and services to Preston, as well as bus services to Wigan, Skelmersdale, Tarleton, Southport and Liverpool; connections between the bus and rail station could be improved along with the design and appearance of the bus station.
- Ormskirk is a historical market town and has some character buildings; however, some of these buildings are in a poor state of repair with many buildings appearing to lack basic maintenance such as having clean gutters and painted buildings.
- Although Ormskirk town centre does host a number of events including Ormskirk Motor Fest the town centre could play host to many more events. The town centre benefits from having Coronation Park located very close to the town centre. The park has the potential to host larger events such as Proms in the Park, sporting and other competitions which could increase the footfall of the town centre.
- The town centre has the potential to offer additional retail and residential space with some development opportunities still being available and significant capacity for residential accommodation above the ground floor of many retail units.
- Significant improvement could be made within Ormskirk to the public realm. The current public realm is in a poor condition and could benefit from refurbishment and greater utilisation.
- Ormskirk has several active representative groups including 'Love Ormskirk' and 'Ormskirk Community Partnership' who can partner with the Council to help deliver initiatives.
- Ormskirk has significant outdoor space which is currently not utilised as well as it could be. Potential ideas to improve this space could include encouraging outdoor eating and drinking space.



Threats

- Although Ormskirk has a small number of vacant properties, the vacant properties tend to be located in prominent positions within the town centre and appear to be in a poor condition in need of investment.
- Competition from neighbouring and out of town shopping centres. Out of town shopping centres offer a convenience for car based shoppers that is difficult for most town centres to compete with.
- The current trend of fewer retailers having a presence on the high street and where there is a presence it tends to be in larger centres.
- A number of national retailers have vacated Ormskirk in recent years.

APPENDIX B: INDICATIVE ACTION PLAN SHOWING POSSIBLE KEY DELIVERY PARTNERS AND ANTICIPATED TIMESCALES

| Key Action Area | Action Point | Key Delivery Partner | Estimated Timescale |
|---|--|--|---------------------|
| Brand, Marketing & Town Centre Management | Develop an Ormskirk Town Centre Management Group with a clear governance structure and set of aims and objectives. This group should set up appropriate sub groups to deliver specific actions contained within the strategy. | Key Partners/Ormskirk Town Centre Management Group | 2015-2016 |
| | Develop a marketing strategy for Ormskirk. This should include establishing and promoting an appropriate brand for Ormskirk, developing an events calendar, delivering marketing campaign(s), establishing a dedicated town centre website, investigating opportunities to utilise social media and a comprehensive free Wi-Fi service across the town centre. | Marketing Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | Monitor the new retail relief scheme to assess how successful it has been and if it should be rolled out beyond 2016. | Marketing Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | The Council will assess how staff resources can be made available to support town centre initiatives. | WLBC | 2015-2020 |
| Building & Place | Monitor the condition of buildings in the town centre. | Building & Public Realm Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | Investigate the role of arts and culture in the animation of the street scene, whether it is on a temporary or permanent basis. Looking at improving the buildings, streets and alleyways', seeking to create a unique sense of place while celebrating local identity. | Building & Public Realm Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | Consider bringing forward options for acquiring land/property if a positive business case can be made. | Building & Public Realm Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | The Council will continue to work with developers and landowners to bring forward appropriate development sites to enhance the appearance of Ormskirk town centre. Where development sites cannot come forward it will be important to ensure that these sites are at least made to look visually more attractive. | Building & Public Realm Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| Ormskirk Market | Work to improve the physical appearance and appeal of Ormskirk's markets by improving the layout, range of stalls, stall covers and introduction of new infrastructure to ensure the market has up to date facilities. | Market & Car Park Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | Investigate opportunities to expand the appeal of the Saturday market considering looking at opportunities to link in with and promote the market to Edge Hill University students/traders and attracting new specialist stall holders to create a niche market. | Market & Car Park Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | Consider bringing forward an events programme of guest markets/vintage markets subject to available resources. | Market & Car Park Sub Group | 2015-2020 |

| Key Action Area | Action Point | Key Delivery Partner | Estimated Timescale |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Car Parks | Conduct a comprehensive car parking review. This should include a review of pricing, new technology and capacity of car parks. | Market & Car Park Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | Improve the overall appearance of all town centre car parks. This should include updating signage, environmental improvements, resurfacing, as well as considering opportunities for new artwork in appropriate locations. | Market & Car Park Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| Transport & Access | Explore opportunities to improve access and movement into, as well as within Ormskirk town centre. This should include the delivery of new transport projects within the town centre. | WLBC/LCC | 2015-2020 |
| | Improve the current service on the Ormskirk to Preston rail line so that it is more regular and therefore more user-friendly. | WLBC/LCC | 2015-2020 |
| | Explore opportunities to improve Ormskirk bus station to provide a modern, fit for purpose facility. This should include improving the existing linkage between the bus and rail station. | WLBC/LCC | 2015-2020 |
| | Development of a much improved pedestrian and cycle network around the town including links to the University. | WLBC/LCC | 2015-2020 |
| | Work with Network Rail to explore opportunities to increase/improve car parking facilities at Ormskirk rail station to provide a better park and ride facility. | WLBC/LCC | 2015-2020 |
| | Seek to ensure that the aspirations of Ormskirk's town centre are supported in the development of LCC's 'Movement Strategy' for Ormskirk. | WLBC/LCC | 2015-2020 |
| Night Time/Evening Economy | Consider opportunities to improve the evening/night time economy within Ormskirk. This should include working with local retailers to consider temporary periods where shop owners are encouraged to open up late anchored by events such as evening entertainment, evening markets and outdoor food and drinks festivals. | Marketing Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| | Investigate the introduction of new permanent lighting within the town centre to provide an attractive, safe night time environment. | Marketing Sub Group | 2015-2020 |
| Recording/Monitoring Town Centre Information | Explore all opportunities to gain appropriate data/information to understand and monitor the health of Ormskirk town centre. | Marketing Sub Group | 2015-2020 |



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