

Wirral Council
STRATEGY FOR TOWN CENTRES, RETAIL AND
COMMERCIAL LEISURE - VOLUME 1: MAIN REPORT



ROBERT TYM & PARTNERS
Planners and Development Economists

Main Report
December 2009

ROGER TYM & PARTNERS

61 Oxford Street
Manchester
M1 6EQ

t 0161 245 8900

f 0161 245 8901

e manchester@tymconsult.com

w www.tymconsult.com

This document is formatted for double-sided printing.

Glossary

Abbreviation	
AMR	Annual Monitoring Report
CLG	Communities and Local Government
COICOP	Classification of Individual Consumption by Purpose
CPO	Compulsory Purchase Order
DPD	Development Plan Document
ELR	Employment Land Review
ELS	Employment Land Study
HMR	Housing Market Renewal
LDF	Local Development Framework
LPA	Local Planning Authority
NGP	New Growth Point
OCA	Overall Catchment Area
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RES	Regional Economic Strategy
RPB	Regional Planning Bodies
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
SFT	Special Forms of Trading
UDP	Unitary Development Plan

CONTENTS

GLOSSARY

1	INSTRUCTIONS AND OUTLINE OF REPORT STRUCTURE	1
	Instructions	1
	Structure of the Report	2
	Base Year and Prices	2
2	THE REQUIREMENTS OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICY	5
	Introduction	5
	PPS6: Planning for Town Centres (March 2005)	5
	PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (February 2005)	9
	Consultation Paper on a New Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Prosperous Communities	11
	Planning Policy Statement 12 (June 2008)	16
	The Requirements of the North West of England Plan - Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021	18
	Mersey Heartlands New Growth Point	19
3	THE CURRENT PERFORMANCE OF WIRRAL'S CENTRES.....	21
	Introduction	21
	Summary of the Main Findings from our Performance Analyses - Key Town Centres.....	22
	Performance Analyses - Traditional Suburban Centres.....	26
	Performance Analyses - Summary	31
	Retail Hierarchy and Classification of Centres	32
4	CURRENT PATTERNS OF RETAIL AND LEISURE SPENDING.....	39
	Household Survey Methodology.....	39
	Population of the Overall Catchment Area	42
	The Two Household Surveys and the Effect of Liverpool One	42
	Comparison Goods Spending Patterns in 2009	44
	Comparison Goods Market Shares	48
	Overlapping Comparison Goods Catchments	51
	Comparison Goods Sub-sectors	52
	Convenience Goods Spending Patterns in 2009	56
	Convenience Goods Market Shares.....	59
	Pattern of Spending on Leisure Services	61
	Conclusions in Relation to Retail & Leisure Spending Patterns	64
5	QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE NEED IN THE RETAIL AND LEISURE SECTORS	67
	Introduction	67
	Methodology for Assessing Quantitative Retail Need.....	67
	Findings in Relation to Quantitative Retail Need	82
	Qualitative Retail Need.....	84
	Need in the Commercial Leisure Sector	86
	Conclusions in Relation to Retail and Leisure Need.....	92
6	STRATEGIES FOR MEETING RETAIL AND LEISURE NEEDS	95
	Introduction	95
	Strategic Growth Options	96
	Evaluation of the Strategic Growth Options	98
	Centre-Specific Strategy and Interventions	105

1 INSTRUCTIONS AND OUTLINE OF REPORT STRUCTURE

Instructions

- 1.1 Wirral Council commissioned Roger Tym & Partners (RTP) to undertake this study by way of its email of 25 March 2008, following a competitive tender process. The brief, which is reproduced as Appendix 1 in Volume 3, explains that the study is to form part of the evidence base for the retail policies and proposals in the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF). The study therefore has to reflect the Government's requirements, as set out in PPS6, the new PPS12, and emerging PPS4 (all of which are discussed in Section 2 of our report). The study has a forward horizon to 2021, but provides indicative assessments of further need from 2021 to 2026.
- 1.2 Section 4.0 of the brief outlines the scope of the study, and requires that we:
 - review developments in national and regional retail planning policy;
 - assess the current patterns of food and non-food shopping and commercial leisure trips and identify deficiencies in provision, supported by a household survey;
 - review and update the health check assessments of the Borough's 9 Key Town Centres and 14 Traditional Suburban Centres that we undertook in 2003/04;
 - review the appropriateness of the retail hierarchy identified in the UDP;
 - assess current and future challenges to Wirral's retail and commercial leisure offer from outside the Borough (for example, Liverpool One);
 - assess the need and occupier demand for new retail and leisure uses;
 - test a range of scenarios reflecting alternative expenditure retention targets, population and housing growth strategies, and possible Growth Point status and regeneration projects such as Wirral Waters; and
 - develop a vision and strategy for the town centres, and a strategy for reducing the leakage of expenditure out of the Borough.
- 1.3 All LDF documents are subject to independent examination and a binding report by an inspector, and the LDF will become a statutory document in its own right. Thus, the evidence on which LDF documents are based needs to be robust and defensible. A mix of quantitative and qualitative research was therefore undertaken in the early stages of the study to enable a substantial body of original data on retail and town centre uses to be assembled. This research included a telephone survey of households, which provided a detailed picture of existing shopping patterns to be built up, as well as a range of local consultations and an analysis of Birkenhead town centre and other town and suburban district centres in relation to key performance indicators.
- 1.4 The study has been informed by a telephone survey of 1,500 households, which was undertaken twice; firstly in April 2008 and again in March 2009. The findings from the surveys have served two useful purposes:

- firstly, we have used the household survey results to highlight changes in shopping patterns that have taken place in Wirral since the last household survey was undertaken in 2003 to inform the Wirral Retail Strategy (which was finalised in March 2004); and
- secondly, because the household survey was undertaken both immediately prior to the opening of Liverpool One, and ten months after the scheme opened, we have been able to use the findings to gauge the effect of this major new development on the shopping habits of Wirral residents. We consider these findings in detail in Section 4 of our report.

Structure of the Report

1.5 The remainder of our report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 summarises the requirements of the national and regional policy context insofar as it relates to town centres and the location of new retail and leisure developments.
- Section 3 provides our qualitative analysis of the current performance of Birkenhead Town Centre, the other 8 Key Town Centres, and the 14 Traditional Suburban Centres in Wirral, as defined in the adopted UDP. We then consider whether the hierarchy identified by the UDP is still appropriate.
- Section 4 provides our analysis of the current patterns of retail and leisure spending, drawing on the two telephone surveys of households.
- Section 5 provides our analysis of quantitative and qualitative needs in the retail and commercial leisure sectors in the period up to 2021 and, more tentatively, up to 2026.
- Section 6 identifies a range of alternative strategies for meeting the retail and leisure needs which we have identified (as required by paragraph 4.38 of PPS12), and sets out our initial evaluation of these potential strategies. We then identify our recommendations for addressing the different issues facing each of the Borough's Key Town Centres.

1.6 Our overall study outputs comprise four volumes as follows:

- Volume 1 - Main Report;
- Volume 2 - Figures and Spreadsheets, which relate to our assessment of quantitative need in the retail and leisure sectors;
- Volume 3 - Appendices; and
- Volume 4 - Report by NEMS Market Research, entitled 'Wirral Retail and Leisure Survey'.

Base Year and Prices

1.7 The base position for our assessment of future retail needs is established by the second survey of households, which was undertaken by NEMS Market Research in March 2009. Thus, March 2009 represents the base date for our assessment of quantitative and qualitative needs. However, all monetary figures in our report are in year 2006 prices, unless otherwise specified. This is because our base data for

per capita retail and leisure expenditure are derived from the MapInfo year 2006 database, and they are expressed in year 2006 prices.

2 THE REQUIREMENTS OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICY

Introduction

- 2.1 In this section of our report, we focus on the requirements of national policy insofar as it relates to: town centres and the location of town centre uses (PPS6 and the consultation paper on proposed changes to PPS6), planning for sustainable economic development (PPS1 and the consultation paper on a new PPS4), and the nature of Core Strategy Development Plan Documents (PPS12).

PPS6: Planning for Town Centres (March 2005)

- 2.2 The current national policy context, insofar as it relates to town centres and the location of new retail, office and leisure developments, is set, in the main, by PPS6, which is structured under four sections that deal with:
- the Government's objectives;
 - the plan-led approach to positive planning for town centres;
 - the assessment of proposed developments; and
 - measuring and monitoring the vitality and viability of town centres.

The Government's Objectives

- 2.3 The first paragraph of PPS6 makes it clear that *'sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning'* and that *'the planning system has a key role in facilitating and promoting sustainable and inclusive patterns of development, including the creation of vital and viable town centres'*. The Government's key objective for town centres, therefore, is to promote their vitality and viability (paragraph 1.3 of PPS6).
- 2.4 The Government's second tier objectives are set out in paragraph 1.4 of PPS6; these can be summarised as:
- enhancing consumer choice;
 - supporting efficient, competitive and innovative retail and leisure sectors and improving their productivity; and
 - improving accessibility to existing and new development by a choice of means of transport.
- 2.5 Paragraph 1.5 then sets out the Government's wider objectives; these can be summarised as:
- the promotion of social inclusion by ensuring access to a range of town centre uses and rectifying deficiencies;
 - the regeneration of deprived areas;
 - the promotion of economic growth;
 - the delivery of more sustainable patterns of development; and
 - the promotion of high quality and inclusive design, enhanced public realm and an accessible and safe environment.

- 2.6 Regional planning bodies (RPBs) and local planning authorities (LPAs) are required to implement these Government objectives by planning positively for the growth and development of town centres, whilst not restricting competition or innovation (paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7). The main town centre uses to which PPS6 applies are: retail; leisure; offices; and arts, cultural and tourism facilities (paragraph 1.8), with housing said to be *'...an important element in most mixed-use, multi-storey developments'* (paragraph 1.9).

Positive Planning for Town Centres - A Plan-led Approach

- 2.7 The introduction to Section 2 of PPS6 states that *'In order to deliver the Government's objective of promoting vital and viable town centres, development should be focused in existing centres in order to strengthen and, where appropriate, regenerate them'*. Thus, RPBs and LPAs are called upon to:
- i) actively promote growth and manage change in town centres;
 - ii) define a network and a hierarchy of centres, each performing their appropriate role to meet the needs of their catchments; and
 - iii) adopt a proactive and plan-led approach to planning for town centres, through regional and local planning.

- 2.8 We consider it appropriate to summarise these requirements in a different and more logical order to that which is set out in PPS6 itself, starting with the role of regional plans.

The role of regional plans

- 2.9 Paragraphs 2.12 to 2.14 of PPS6 set out the requirements placed on RPBs in developing their Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). The over-riding requirement is for RPBs to set out a vision and strategy for the region's growth, particularly for higher level centres, and provide a strategic framework for planning at the local level. In particular, RPBs must:
- i) develop a strategic framework for the development of a network of centres, taking into account the need to avoid an over concentration of growth in the higher level centres;
 - ii) make strategic choices about those centres of regional and sub-regional significance where major growth should be encouraged;
 - iii) identify the need for new centres to be developed in areas of planned major growth;
 - iv) assess the need for additional floorspace in the comparison retail, leisure and office sectors over the lifetime of the RSS (and for five-yearly periods within it) and, having regard to capacity and accessibility considerations, they must identify where the identified needs would best be met;
 - v) monitor and regularly review the implementation of the strategy; and
 - vi) identify the need for major town centre development of regional or sub-regional significance.

- 2.10 However, PPS6 is clear that new or expanded regional or sub-regional shopping centres located in out-of-centre locations are unlikely to meet the requirements of national policy (paragraph 2.14).

Networks and hierarchies

- 2.11 Paragraphs 2.9 to 2.11 of PPS6 provide further advice in relation to the development of the network and hierarchy of centres, but - in this part of the policy statement - the advice is in relation to both the regional and local levels. Thus, authorities must plan carefully how to distribute any identified growth at both regional and local levels. In defining their spatial objectives, RPBs and LPAs:

'...should consider whether there is a need to rebalance the network of centres to ensure that it is not overly dominated by the largest centres, that there is a more even distribution of town centre uses, and that people's everyday needs are met at the local level' (paragraph 2.9).

- 2.12 Thus, in developing the network and hierarchy, RPBs and LPAs are required to consider:
- i) whether there is a need to avoid over concentration of growth in the higher level centres;
 - ii) the need for investment in those centres requiring to be regenerated; and
 - iii) the need to address deficiencies in the network (paragraph 2.9).
- 2.13 Of crucial importance is the PPS6 requirement that *'...any significant change in the role and function of centres, upward or downward, should come through the development plan process, rather than through planning applications'*, with higher-order centres dealt with in the RSS and with lower-order centres dealt with through the development plan documents (paragraph 2.10).

Promoting growth and managing change

- 2.14 Paragraphs 2.3 to 2.8 of PPS6 turn to the role of LPAs in promoting growth and managing change in town centres. Paragraph 2.3 states that LPAs should - within the regional planning context - actively plan for growth and the management of change in town centres over the period of their development plan documents by:
- i) selecting appropriate existing centres to accommodate growth, making the best use of existing land and buildings, but extending the centres where appropriate;
 - ii) managing the role of existing centres through the promotion of specialist activities, or specific types of uses; and
 - iii) planning for new centres of an appropriate scale in areas of significant growth, or where there are deficiencies in the existing network.
- 2.15 Paragraph 2.4 urges that growth should be accommodated, wherever possible, through *'...more efficient use of land and buildings within existing centres'*. Where growth cannot be accommodated within existing centres, paragraph 2.5 advises LPAs to plan for:

- i) the extension of the primary shopping area, if there is a need for additional retail provision; or, where appropriate
- ii) the extension of the town centre, to accommodate other main town centre uses.

2.16 Where existing centres are in decline, PPS6 advises LPAs to *'...assess the scope for consolidating and strengthening these centres by seeking to focus a wider range of uses there, promote the diversification of uses and improve the environment'* (paragraph 2.8). However, where a reversal of decline is not possible, LPAs are advised to consider a reclassification of the centre, so as to reflect its revised status in the hierarchy.

The role of plans at the local level

2.17 Paragraphs 2.15 to 2.18 of PPS6 deal with the role of the forward planning system at the local level. We note, in particular, the provisions of paragraph 2.15 which require LPAs to adopt a positive and proactive approach to planning for the future of all types of centres within their areas. Thus, in line with the RSS and their community strategies, LPAs should prepare a core strategy development plan document (DPD) which sets out *'...a spatial vision and strategy for the network and hierarchy of centres, including local centres, within their area, setting out how the role of different centres will contribute to the overall spatial vision for their area'*.

2.18 Paragraph 2.16 urges LPAs to work with stakeholders and the community so as to:

- i) assess the need for new floorspace for retail, leisure and other town centre uses, taking account of both quantitative and qualitative considerations;
- ii) identify deficiencies in existing provision, assess the capacity of existing centres to accommodate new development and identify centres in decline where change needs to be managed;
- iii) identify the centres where development will be focused, as well as the need for any new centres of local importance;
- iv) define the extent of the primary shopping area and the town centre on their Proposals Map;
- v) identify and allocate sites in accordance with the considerations set out in paragraphs 2.28 to 2.51;
- vi) review existing land use allocations;
- vii) promote investment in deprived areas by identifying opportunities for growth of existing centres and improved access to local facilities;
- viii) set out criteria based policies for assessing proposals on sites not allocated in development plan documents; and
- ix) distinguish between primary and secondary frontages.

2.19 Paragraphs 2.19 to 2.22 of PPS6 then proceed to highlight the need for high quality and inclusive design, the importance of accessibility and safety and the need for efficient use of land through the promotion of higher-density mixed-use development. Paragraphs 2.23 and 2.26 deal with the management of the evening economy and the need for a range of leisure, cultural and tourism activities and paragraph 2.27 seeks to promote the retention and enhancement of existing markets and, where appropriate, the creation of new ones.

Site selection and land assembly

- 2.20 Paragraphs 2.28 to 2.52 of PPS6 deal with site selection and land assembly in the forward planning process. Paragraph 2.28 sets out the five key considerations for local authorities when they are selecting sites for development; these are to:
- i) assess the need for development;
 - ii) identify the appropriate scale of development;
 - iii) apply the sequential approach to site selection;
 - iv) assess the impact of development on existing centres; and
 - v) ensure that locations are accessible and well serviced by a choice of means of transport.
- 2.21 These considerations match the development control tests set out in paragraph 3.4 of PPS6. In applying them in the development plan preparation process, LPAs are required to work closely with retailers, leisure operators, developers, other stakeholders and the wider community and paragraph 2.31 makes it clear that LPAs may need to make choices between competing development pressures in their town centres.

Change of Emphasis in PPS6

- 2.22 The provisions of PPS6 reflect the Government's wider emphasis on the need to plan, monitor and manage at both the regional and local planning levels; the key changes in national policy emphasis that arose as a result of its publication, in March 2005, were:
- i) a requirement for a much more proactive plan-led approach to planning for town centres through regional and local planning;
 - ii) much more emphasis on the need to develop a network and hierarchy of centres, at both the regional and local levels; and
 - iii) a much greater involvement on the part of the public sector in the management and implementation of changes in town centres and in the monitoring of their vitality and viability.
- 2.23 Where growth cannot be accommodated within existing centres, LPAs are to plan for the extension of the primary shopping area, if there is a need for retail provision, and for the extension of the town centre as a whole to accommodate other main town centre uses.
- 2.24 The five key considerations to apply in selecting sites for development - need, scale, the sequential test, impact and accessibility - are similar, whether in forward planning or in development control. However, the publication of PPS6 caused more emphasis to be given to the issue of scale.

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (February 2005)

- 2.25 PPS1 sets out the Government's overarching planning policies on the delivery of sustainable development. There are three aspects of PPS1 that we wish to emphasise in relation to our instructions; each of these relates to the promotion of social inclusion and to the need for high and stable levels of employment.

2.26 First, we note that the very first paragraph of PPS1 states that:

'Good planning ensures that we get the right development, in the right place and at the right time.'

2.27 Secondly, we wish to emphasise that two of the Government's four aims for sustainable development relate to *'social progress'* and to *'the maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment'*. Hence the need to secure outcomes that promote economic and social objectives as well as environmental and natural resource objectives.

2.28 Thus, in promoting social cohesion and inclusion, there is recognition, in paragraphs 14 to 16 of PPS1, that:

- community cohesion *'...means meeting the needs of all people... promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion and creating equal opportunity for all citizens'*;
- regeneration of the built environment alone cannot deal with poverty, inequality and social exclusion; and that
- development plans should seek to ensure:
 - that the impact of development on the social fabric of communities is taken into account;
 - a reduction in social inequalities;
 - good access to jobs and housing;
 - good access to health, education, retail, leisure and community facilities; and
 - support for the promotion of health and well being by making provision for physical activity.

2.29 Paragraph 23 of PPS1 goes on to state that in promoting a strong and productive economy that brings jobs and prosperity to all, planning authorities should, amongst other things:

- recognise that economic development can deliver environmental and social benefits;
- recognise the wider sub-regional, regional or national benefits of economic development, alongside any adverse local impacts;
- ensure that suitable locations are available for industrial, commercial, retail, public sector and leisure developments, so that the economy can prosper;
- provide for improved productivity, choice and competition; and
- identify opportunities for future investment to deliver economic objectives.

2.30 Thirdly, we note the provisions of paragraph 29 of PPS1, which states that:

'In some circumstances, a planning authority may decide in reaching a decision to give different weight to social, environmental, resource or economic considerations. Where this is the case, the reasons for doing so should be explicit and the consequences considered.'

Consultation Paper on a New Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Prosperous Communities

- 2.31 In May 2009, the Government published, for consultation, a new PPS4: Planning for Prosperous Communities. The main purpose of the draft PPS4 is to provide a comprehensive, yet streamlined policy framework for planning for sustainable economic development and to *‘...underline the need for required planning bodies and local planning authorities, within the context of delivering sustainable economic development, to plan positively and proactively for economic development in their areas.’*
- 2.32 The Consultation Paper is divided into two broad parts - plan-making policies and decision-making policies. First, however, the Paper defines the term ‘economic development’ to include development within B Use Classes, town centre uses and other development which achieves at least one of the following purposes:
- i) provides employment opportunities;
 - ii) generates wealth; or
 - iii) produces or generates an economic output or product.
- 2.33 In turn, the Paper confirms that the main uses to which the town centre policies apply are as follows, which are the same town centre uses as set out in paragraph 1.8 of PPS6:
- i) retail;
 - ii) leisure, entertainment facilities and more intensive sport and recreation uses;
 - iii) offices; and
 - iv) arts, culture and tourism facilities.
- 2.34 As a final point of introduction, the Consultation Paper identifies the Government’s objectives for prosperous communities, which are to:
- i) achieve sustainable economic growth;
 - ii) raise the productivity growth rate of the UK economy;
 - iii) build prosperous communities;
 - iv) deliver more sustainable patterns of development, and respond to climate change;
 - v) promote high quality and inclusive design;
 - vi) improve accessibility and reduce the need to travel;
 - vii) promote the vitality and viability of town centres as drivers of regional, sub-regional and local economies; and to
 - viii) provide social inclusion.

Plan-making Policies

- 2.35 The draft PPS4 sets out 11 policies for guiding the plan-making process and 13 policies to underpin decision-making in the development control context. We focus on the former given the role of the study in providing part of the evidence base for the Council’s Core Strategy DPD.

- 2.36 Policy EC1 requires RPBs and LPAs to prepare a robust evidence base so as to underpin its development plan policies for supporting sustainable economic development. At the local level, the evidence base must:
- i) assess the detailed need for employment land;
 - ii) assess the existing and future supply of land available for economic development through land reviews, which should be combined with strategic housing land availability assessments where possible;
 - iii) assess the need for additional floorspace for all main town centre uses;
 - iv) assess the capacity of existing centres to accommodate new development and the scope for extending the primary shopping area or the town centre as a whole, and identify centres in decline where change needs to be managed; and
 - v) identify deficiencies in provision, particularly for convenience shopping and identify the opportunities for remedying such deficiencies.
- 2.37 Policy EC1.4 deals, specifically, with the need for retail and leisure development. The advice is very similar to that contained in PPS6 and is reflected in the methodology that we have used in this study. Thus, LPAs are required to:
- i) assess need over the period of the DPD;
 - ii) inform and be informed by regional need assessment; and
 - iii) take account of both quantitative and qualitative considerations, particularly access to services in deprived areas.
- 2.38 In assessing quantitative need for retail and leisure uses, authorities must have regard to:
- i) existing and forecast population levels;
 - ii) forecasts of expenditure for the broad categories of comparison and convenience goods and for main leisure uses; and
 - iii) forecast improvements in the productivity of floorspace.
- 2.39 In assessing qualitative needs for retail and leisure uses, authorities must assess:
- i) whether there is an appropriate distribution of locations of retail and leisure uses that are accessible for the whole community;
 - ii) whether there is a genuine choice in retail and other services to meet the needs of the whole community; and
 - iii) the extent to which existing shops may be over-trading and the potential benefits of improved competition and retail mix.
- 2.40 Policy EC1.5 deals with new office development, which is outside the terms of the specification for this study. We note, however, that LPAs are required to take account of the regional assessment of office need and to assess the physical capacity of centres to accommodate office development of local importance, taking account of the role of its various centres in the hierarchy.
- 2.41 Policies EC2 and EC3 deal with planning for prosperous communities and planning for town centres at the regional level, whereas Policies EC4 and EC5 provide equivalent policy advice at the local level. Thus, Policy EC4.1 - which deals with wider economic development - requires LDFs to:

- i) positively and proactively encourage sustainable economic growth;
- ii) make full and effective use of the planning tools available to them to simplify the process;
- iii) prioritise the re-use of previously developed land;
- iv) support existing business sectors;
- v) positively plan for the benefits which can accrue when certain types of businesses locate within proximity of each other;
- vi) facilitate new working practices such as live and work premises and home working;
- vii) ensure that existing site allocations are reviewed and not carried forward without evidence of the need and reasonable prospects of their take up during the plan period;
- viii) encourage new uses for vacant or derelict buildings; and
- ix) make the most efficient and effective use of land and buildings.

2.42 Policy EC5 relates, specifically, to the local planning approach to town centres. The first requirement is for authorities to set out in their Core Strategy DPDs a spatial vision and strategy for the management and growth of their centres. In developing the vision in strategy, they should:

- i) define a network and hierarchy of lower order centres;
- ii) make choices about which centres will accommodate growth and address deficiencies in the network by promoting centres to function at a higher level in the hierarchy or designating new centres of an appropriate scale in identified areas of deficiency or significant growth such as in identified growth areas and proposed eco-towns, giving priority to deprived areas where there is a need for better access to services, facilities and employment by socially excluded groups;
- iii) ensure that any significant change in the role and function of town centres is brought forward through the development plan;
- iv) set out how growth and change will be managed across the network of centres, having regard to the need to promote investment and strengthen centres in need of regeneration;
- v) consider the scope for consolidating and strengthening centres in decline and reclassification of centres where a reversal of decline is not possible;
- vi) define the extent of the primary shopping area and the town centre boundary on their Proposals Map;
- vii) consider setting floorspace thresholds for the scale of edge-of-centre and out-of-centre development that should be subject to an impact assessment;
- viii) expand town centres where growth cannot be accommodated, identifying development opportunities to meet the scale and type of need identified and making provision for larger stores in edge-of-centre locations;
- ix) have flexible town centre policies which are able to respond to changing economic circumstances and which recognise that town centre networks and hierarchies will change over time;
- x) encourage residential or office developments above ground floor retail and leisure uses;

- x) ensure that housing in out-of-centre mixed-use developments is not, in itself, used as a reason to justify additional floorspace for main town centre uses in such locations;
 - xii) identify opportunities within existing centres for sites suitable for development, redevelopment or conversion;
 - xiii) use relevant vitality and viability indicators to inform tools such as area action plans, CPOs and so on; and
 - xiv) encourage high density development within existing centres which are accessible by public transport, walking and cycling.
- 2.43 Most of the 14 matters set out in Policy EC5 are not new and reflect the existing provisions of PPS6. As a consequence, proposed Policy EC5 will have only limited implications for the LDF process. The exceptions which are new are: item vii) relating to floorspace thresholds for impact assessments; and item xi) - relating to housing not being used to justify additional floorspace for town centre uses in out-of-centre locations.
- 2.44 Proposed Policy EC6 gives more emphasis to planning for consumer choice and promoting competitive town centre environments. Thus, local authorities are urged to:
- i) support the diversification of uses in the town centre as a whole;
 - ii) plan for a strong retail mix;
 - iii) recognise the role of smaller shops in enhancing vibrancy;
 - iv) retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, to create new ones;
 - v) plan for a range of tourism, leisure and cultural facilities which appeal to a wide range of age and social groups; and
 - vi) conserve and enhance the character and diversity of their town centres.
- 2.45 However, the Consultation Paper gives no guidance as to how these objectives are to be achieved and the proposed policy could be argued to be naïve in relation to the ability of local authorities to influence market forces.
- 2.46 Policy EC7 deals with site selection and land assembly in the development plan process and it applies to all town centre uses. We note, however, that the five key considerations set out in Policy EC7.1 are exactly the same as in paragraph 2.28 of PPS6. Moreover, the other considerations set out in the sixth item of Policy EC7.1 are almost the same as the 'other relevant matters' set out under paragraph 2.51 of PPS6.
- 2.47 The remainder of Policy EC7 provides clarification of the considerations to be taken into account in assessing scale, applying the sequential approach, assessing impact and assessing accessibility. The advice in EC7 in respect of these matters is similar to that contained in PPS6. However, there is an important cross-reference in Policy EC7.4 to the impact considerations set out in decision-making Policy EC20. The latter identifies eight 'key impacts', as follows:

- i) impact on CO₂ emissions and climate change;
 - ii) impact on the spatial planning strategy and the role of the centre in the hierarchy of centres;
 - iii) impact on public and private investment in centres;
 - iv) scale in relation to the size and role of the centre;
 - v) accessibility by a choice of means of transport and impact on demand for car travel;
 - vi) impact on town centre turnover, taking account of current and future expenditure capacity;
 - vii) impact on town centre vitality and viability, including consumer choice; and
 - viii) whether the proposal secures a high quality and inclusive design.
- 2.48 Policy EC20 also identifies four 'wider impacts' - as set out below - which can be taken into account if the 'key impacts' are not significant, but where the wider impacts are significant (see Policy EC21):
- i) impact on allocated sites outside town centres;
 - ii) impact on social inclusion;
 - iii) net employment impact; and
 - iv) economic and physical regeneration.
- 2.49 Policy EC8 relates to the management of the evening and night-time economy in town centres and it encourages local planning authorities to:
- i) encourage a diverse range of complementary uses which appeal to a wide range of social groups and
 - ii) to set out the number and scale of leisure developments they wish to encourage, based on their cumulative impact.
- 2.50 Policy EC9 relates to rural areas and Policy EC10 requires LPAs to set maximum parking standards for non-residential development. The final plan-making policy in the draft PPS4 is Policy EC11 which requires annual monitoring to keep under review the network and hierarchy of centres, the need for further development and the vitality and viability of town centres.

Conclusion in Relation to Draft PPS4

- 2.51 Insofar as the retail and leisure sectors are concerned, we consider that the consultation paper on a new PPS4 of May 2009 brings little change compared to the proposed changes to PPS6, published in July 2008. The draft PPS4 maintains and reinforces the Government's 'town centre first' approach and there is no wholesale re-drawing of policy and no radical change in direction.
- 2.52 Indeed, the draft PPS4 maintains many of the objectives already long established by PPS1 and PPS6 and there is little change in terms of the requirements for the evidence base in the forward planning process. Thus, although draft PPS4 proposed the removal of the needs test in the development control process, and its replacement with a wider impact test, we consider it has limited implications for the purposes of formulating the retail and leisure aspect of the Core Strategy DPDs.

Planning Policy Statement 12 (June 2008)

- 2.53 Given that this study will form part of the evidence base upon which the Council will draw in developing the LDF and, in particular, its Core Strategy DPD, we turn finally to the provisions of PPS12. Section 4 of PPS12 explains the intended nature of core strategies, gives advice on their preparation and introduces a test of soundness. For the purposes of this report, we focus on the nature of core strategies and the test of soundness, rather than on the preparation process.

Nature of Core Strategies

- 2.54 Paragraph 4.1 of PPS12 requires that each core strategy must include:
- i) an overall **vision** which sets out how the area and the places within it should develop;
 - ii) **strategic objectives** for the area, focusing on the key issues to be addressed;
 - iii) a **delivery strategy** for achieving these objectives, which should set out how much development is intended to happen, where, when and by what means it will be delivered and with locations for strategic development indicated on a key diagram; and
 - iv) clear arrangements for **managing and monitoring** the delivery of the strategy.
- 2.55 In turn, the '*vision*' should be in general conformity with the RSS and closely relate to the Sustainable Community Strategy (paragraph 4.2 of PPS12), and the '*strategic objectives*' should form the link between the '*vision*' and the '*delivery strategy*' (paragraph 4.3 of PPS12).
- 2.56 PPS12 then emphasises that it is the delivery strategy which is central to the process. Paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 indicate that the delivery strategy must:
- i) show how the objectives will be delivered, whether through actions taken by the Council as a planning authority, or through actions taken by other parts of the Council, or other bodies;
 - ii) set out, as far as practicable, when, where, and by whom these actions will take place;
 - iii) demonstrate that the agencies/partners necessary for its delivery have been involved in its preparation and that the resources that are required have been given due consideration;
 - iv) have a realistic prospect of being provided in the life of the core strategy; and
 - v) make clear spatial choices about where developments should go in broad terms.

Strategic sites

- 2.57 Paragraph 4.6 of PPS12 states that core strategies may allocate strategic sites for development, provided these sites are '*...considered central to achievement of the strategy*'; the strategy should not be held up by the inclusion of non-strategic sites. Where core strategies do allocate strategic sites, they must include a submission proposals map, but preferably with the sites delineated in outline, rather than in detailed terms (paragraph 4.7 of PPS12).

Infrastructure

2.58 Paragraph 4.8 of PPS12 states that:

'The core strategy should be supported by evidence of what physical, social and green infrastructure is needed to enable the amount of development proposed for the area, taking account of its type and distribution. This evidence should cover who will provide the infrastructure and when it will be provided.'

2.59 Thus, the infrastructure planning process that forms part of the evidence base to the core strategy should identify, as far as possible:

- i) infrastructure needs and costs;
- ii) phasing of development;
- iii) funding sources; and
- iv) responsibilities for delivery.

2.60 Paragraph 4.10 makes it plain that the core strategy should make proper provision for uncertainty and not place reliance on critical elements of infrastructure whose funding is unknown; it states that: *'The test should be whether there is a reasonable prospect of provision. Contingency planning - showing how the objectives will be achieved under different scenarios - may be necessary in circumstances where provision is uncertain.'*

2.61 Paragraphs 4.11 and 4.12 of PPS12 make it clear that there is a need to identify the infrastructure requirements of any strategic sites and that the core strategy should include policies for charging the Community Infrastructure Levy, in anticipation of when such powers come into effect.

Period of operation

2.62 The time horizon of a core strategy should be at least 15 years from the date of its adoption. The strategy should build in flexibility by considering the implications of different levels of development, so as to reduce the risk of unnecessary updates.

Test of Soundness

2.63 The test of 'soundness' for core strategies introduced by PPS12 (paragraph 4.54), is as follows:

'To be "sound" a core strategy should be justified, effective and consistent with national policy.'

'Justified' means that the document must be:

- *founded on a robust and credible evidence base*
- *the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives.*

'Effective' means that the document must be:

- *deliverable*
- *flexible*
- *able to be monitored'*

- 2.64 Thus, the PPS12 places more emphasis on the need for DPDs to:
- i) *'...demonstrate that the plan is the most appropriate, when considered against reasonable alternatives'*. (Paragraph 4.38 of PPS12, our emphasis); and
 - ii) *'...show how the vision, objectives and strategy for the area will be delivered and by whom, and when.'* (Paragraph 4.45 of PPS12, our emphasis).

The Requirements of the North West of England Plan - Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021

The Regional Spatial Framework

- 2.65 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West was approved by the Secretary of State in September 2008, and provides a framework for development and investment in the region in the period up to 2021.
- 2.66 Paragraph 5.1 of the RSS describes Policy RDF1 as *being '...the cornerstone of the RSS...'* and a *'...clear statement of spatial priorities for growth and development, investment and regeneration in the region'*. Thus, the spatial priorities are defined by Policy RDF1, as follows:
- first, the regional centres of Manchester and Liverpool;
 - second, the inner areas surrounding these regional centres (as subsequently defined in Policy LCR2 and specifically including Birkenhead), with particular emphasis given to areas in need of regeneration and to the housing market renewal areas (HMR), such as the New Heartlands HMR Pathfinder which includes parts of Wirral;
 - third, in 23 defined towns and cities located within the three city regions and in the larger suburban centres within the city regions, provided that development is of an appropriate scale and where public transport accessibility is good; and
 - fourth, in the towns and cities outside the three city regions.
- 2.67 Paragraph 5.2 of the RSS explains that Policy RDF1 must be read together with the sub-regional policies in Chapters 10 to 13 of the RSS. Paragraph 5.3 then emphasises that Policy RDF1 has been influenced by the Spatial Principles set out in Policies DP1 to DP9 and that it reflects the vision set out in the Regional Economic Strategy (the RES). Thus, the focus is on the cores of the Manchester and Liverpool city regions, but there is a balanced approach so as to spread development across a large number of towns and cities. Paragraph 5.4 goes on to explain that RDF1 allows for development in accessible suburban/urban centres, particularly in areas with deprivation and regeneration issues.

Liverpool City Region

- 2.68 Paragraph 11.1 of the RSS confirms the position of Wirral within the Liverpool City Region. Policy LCR1 emphasises the need for:

'...a significant improvement in the sub-region's economic performance by encouraging investment in the regional centre, its surrounding inner areas, the towns and cities identified in RDF1 and in other accessible suburban centres which

accord with spatial principles DP1 to DP9, and the criteria in W2 and W3, so as to contribute to the growth opportunities identified in Policy W1'.

- 2.69 Policy LCR2 identifies the Regional Centre as the primary economic driver of the Liverpool City Region; it requires plans and strategies to support and enhance this role by *'...focusing appropriate commercial, retail, leisure, cultural and tourism development within the Regional Centre developing its role as the primary retail centre, main employment location and primary economic driver of the City Region'*.
- 2.70 Policy LCR2 also identifies the 'Inner Areas' of the Liverpool City Region (comprising the New Heartlands HMR area, which incorporates the eastern part of Wirral) as a focus for residential development, so as to secure a significant increase in population and support regeneration activity. Policy LCR2 goes on to explain that this will, *inter alia*, entail maintaining and enhancing the role of Birkenhead to provide community facilities, services and employment; development of the New Heartlands HMR Pathfinder; and providing for employment in accordance with Policies W2, W3 and LCR1.
- 2.71 Policy LCR3 deals with the 'outer part' of the Liverpool City Region, which includes the part of Wirral to the east of the M53 outside the LCR2 area, and seeks to focus economic development in the towns and cities set out in Policy RDF1 and at other locations which accord with the spatial principles (such as Birkenhead).

Policies for Achieving a Sustainable Economy

- 2.72 The RSS seeks to support the economic programme put forward in the RES, to strengthen and regenerate the regional economy and address the problems of worklessness. Thus, Policy W1 seeks to promote opportunities for economic development, which build on the region's strengths and link areas of opportunity to need.
- 2.73 Policy W2 deals with the locations for regionally significant economic development and calls for such development to be located close to sustainable transport nodes within the three city regions.
- 2.74 Policy W5 identifies Birkenhead as a location where *'comparison retailing facilities should be enhanced and encouraged to ensure a sustainable distribution of high quality retail facilities'*. Policy W5 asserts that retail investment should be promoted where it will assist in the regeneration and economic growth of the region's town and city centres; be consistent with the scale and function of the centre; not undermine the vitality and viability of any other centre; and not create unsustainable shopping patterns.

Mersey Heartlands New Growth Point

- 2.75 In July 2008 the CLG announced the Mersey Heartlands as one of 20 second round New Growth Points (NGP). The Liverpool and Wirral NGP - proposed by Liverpool City Council and Wirral Borough Council, in partnership with Peel Holdings - is centred on those parts of inner Liverpool and Wirral that fall within the designated

New Heartlands HMR Pathfinder area (in Wirral the Pathfinder covers Wallasey and Birkenhead), although the NGP also includes the site of the former Bidston Dock.

Liverpool and Wirral Councils submitted a 'Programme of Delivery' in October 2008, seeking funding of approximately £47 million to support the creation of 31,584 new homes in the period 2008 to 2017, and to deliver a range of transport and infrastructure projects. Funding of £6.3 million for the partners was granted by the Government for the years 2009/10 and 2010/11, although the capital grant for 2010/11 has subsequently been reduced.

3 THE CURRENT PERFORMANCE OF WIRRAL'S CENTRES

Introduction

- 3.1 We have undertaken a 'performance analysis' (commonly referred to as a 'health check') of each of the nine Key Town Centres¹ and the 14 Traditional Suburban Centres² in Wirral, as defined in the adopted Wirral UDP, using the indicators of vitality and viability listed in Section 4 of PPS6 (which are defined at the beginning of Appendix 3 of our Volume 3). Our appraisal of each centre has involved:
- i) on-foot surveys;
 - ii) desk research, so as to benchmark the study centres against a range of comparator centres³; and
 - iii) telephone and face-to-face consultations with key stakeholders, including developers, landowners, property market agents and retail/leisure operators.
- 3.2 As well as providing the base position for future monitoring of town centre vitality and viability, the exercise informs our recommended centre hierarchy, which we present at the end of this section, and the assessment of 'need' in the retail and commercial leisure sectors, as detailed in Section 5 of our report.
- 3.3 In the remainder of this section, we first summarise the key findings from our analysis of each of the nine UDP-defined Key Town Centres. Published data are generally not as readily available for smaller centres and so for the 14 Traditional Suburban Centres, we provide a succinct overview of performance on our on-foot surveys and using any available data, including RTP's 'Local Provision Audit', as detailed in Appendix 3 of Volume 3.
- 3.4 Volume 3 contains our full write-ups for each of the Key Town Centres and Traditional Suburban Centres (Appendix 3), and the associated data (Appendix 4), as well as plans showing our suggested revisions to centre boundaries, where we consider this to be appropriate (Appendix 5).

¹ Birkenhead Core Area, Bromborough Village, Heswall, Hoylake, Liscard, Moreton, New Ferry, Prenton, and West Kirby.

² Birkenhead Grange Road West, Birkenhead Oxton Road, Claughton Village, Dacre Hill, Irby Village, Laird Street, Lower Bebington, New Brighton Seabank Road, New Brighton Victoria Road, Prenton Borough Road, Seacombe, Tranmere, Upton Village, and Wallasey Village.

³ The comparator centres that we chose were Liverpool and the following eight town centres, all of which are listed in Policy W5 of the recently approved RSS (and which are therefore similar in status to Birkenhead): Blackburn, Bolton, Bury, Chester, Southport, Stockport, Warrington and Wigan.

Summary of the Main Findings from our Performance Analyses - Key Town Centres

Birkenhead Town Centre

- 3.5 Most of the performance analysis indicators suggest a decline in Birkenhead Town Centre's overall vitality and viability since the last retail study in 2004, and in our assessment Birkenhead was under-performing even then. We note, in particular, the following:
- Birkenhead Town Centre's **fall** of 26 places in MHE's Shopping Index since 2003/04, which contrasts with Wigan Town Centre's **rise** of 51 places over the same period, starkly illustrating the positive effect of a high-quality town centre development scheme (or, in Birkenhead's case, the negative effect of not delivering one);
 - the relatively low Zone A rents, compared to other strategic centres in the North West region;
 - a steady reduction in footfall across the town centre over the past 5 years, as reported by local stakeholders;
 - the predominance of fashion multiples that operate towards the lower end of the retail market;
 - a high vacancy rate (caused, mainly, by the very large proportion of units at the Grange Centre which are unoccupied, some having remained vacant since our last study);
 - the presence of only one department store (Beatties);
 - the sub-standard quality of the physical environment on the approaches to, and within, the town centre; and
 - the very disappointing food and drink offer.
- 3.6 We understand that Primark has recently submitted a planning application, which indicates that it will be extending its store into the former Woolworths unit on Grange Road. The Asda CPO has also now been confirmed by the Secretary of State. We are concerned, however, by the apparent lack of operator interest in Birkenhead Town Centre which would help to address these qualitative gaps. To an extent this is not surprising, given that (i) most high-profile operators have been attracted to the Liverpool One scheme; (ii) the substantial Chester Northgate scheme has been in the pipeline until very recently⁴; and (iii) because no major comparison retail development scheme is currently proposed in Birkenhead Town Centre.
- 3.7 Of more fundamental concern, however, is the fact that little or no progress appears to have been made since we completed the last retail study in 2004 in terms of developing plans for the eastern part of the town centre, which seems the only realistic direction for growth. We consider that there would be merit in seeking to improve Birkenhead's retail offer to address the clear deficiencies that we have identified, although we accept that

⁴ Cheshire West and Chester Council announced at the end of October 2009 that it had been advised by the developer ING that the scheme in its existing form was "no longer viable", because of the current economic climate. In the same statement the Council indicated that ING would be reviewing the scheme and producing alternative proposals in due course.

apart from the planned Asda store, there are no firm plans for substantial development schemes in the town centre. If the retail offer is not improved, then it is likely that Birkenhead's comparison market share and its position in the sub-regional hierarchy will continue to deteriorate further.

Bromborough Village Town Centre

- 3.8 Bromborough Village is a small-scale, but relatively stable centre. It has a low vacancy rate, appears generally busy, and has a clean, pleasant environment. The retail offer itself, however, is quite limited in both its scale and diversity, with few comparison shops and an offer that is generally focused on the discount-end of the market.
- 3.9 Overall, we consider there to be little scope for significant retail development within Bromborough Village, given the close proximity of the CRLP which means that the town centre is unlikely to attract high-profile comparison multiple operators. Our analysis of retailer requirements confirmed that whilst there is strong operator demand for the purpose-built retail space at CRLP, interest in the town centre itself is much weaker.

Heswall Town Centre

- 3.10 Our overall conclusion is that Heswall is a generally pleasant, vibrant and stable town centre. This is evidenced by: the centre's healthy convenience retail offer; the array of high quality independent retailers (including clothing retailers); the good range of eating and drinking places (including sit-down restaurants); improving yields; a low vacancy rate; and recent investment in the town centre (including a Marks & Spencer Simply Food store, and residential development at Heswall Point); and the generally pleasant town centre environment.
- 3.11 The interest expressed in Heswall from the high-quality retailers Country Casuals and Fat Face Ltd is encouraging, and would bolster the centre's healthy fashion retail offer. Furthermore, Heswall benefits from a couple of small, but potential, development sites (such as the vacant Kwik Save supermarket), which, if redeveloped, would also help to further enhance the physical environment of the centre.

Hoylake Town Centre

- 3.12 Hoylake is Wirral's lowest-ranking Key Town Centre in the UK retail rankings, and we have identified evidence of ongoing decline. Hoylake has a limited and contracting comparison retail sector, with particularly poor representation from clothing retailers. The centre is also characterised by a very high vacancy rate, low footfall, limited operator demand, and a poor physical environment in parts. Although the centre has a more thriving service sector (based around pubs and wine bars), local stakeholders raised concerns about the anti-social behaviour that is currently associated with this activity.
- 3.13 In summary, Hoylake is a long, linear centre interspersed with vacant units, which no longer performs a true 'town centre' role, and we consider that it would benefit from consolidation and intensification across a more appropriate physical area, although we acknowledge that in practice achieving this will be challenging. We also suggest that the centre would benefit from access to better local bus connections, further measures to reduce anti-social behaviour (particularly at night), and continued investment in the physical environment (particularly towards the northern end of Market Street).

Liscard Town Centre

- 3.14 Liscard Town Centre remains relatively busy and we have identified a potential interest in the centre from Peacocks. However, most of the key indicators of vitality and viability suggest that Liscard's long-term decline has continued since the last retail study in 2004. For instance:
- Asda is now the only main supermarket in Liscard, although it is not within the town centre core;
 - the town centre's comparison retail offer remains firmly at the lower end of the spectrum;
 - Liscard has experienced a significant slippage in the national retail rankings, from 1,545th position in 2003/04, to 1,950th position in 2008;
 - the vacancy rate is above the UK average;
 - retail rents have generally been static;
 - anti-social behaviour and vandalism apparently remains a problem in the town centre, the physical appearance of which generally remains lack-lustre, despite recent environmental improvements; and
 - there have been no published retail operator requirements for Liscard since 2000.
- 3.15 Tesco has announced that it will be opening a store in part of the former Roseby's premises, and the adjacent former Capitol Bingo site represents a potential development opportunity in a prominent location (the owner has undertaken some demolition to the rear, but current intentions beyond this are not known). There have been long-standing aspirations to extend the Cherry Tree Centre, but the various planning permissions obtained have not been implemented to date, and efforts have been concentrated instead on reoccupying vacant units such as the former Littlewoods and Somerfield stores.
- 3.16 However, we do not consider that there is likely to be any realistic scope for a substantial town centre development scheme in Liscard - over and above the commitment for an additional seven retail units through an extension to the Cherry Tree Centre - which could help to reverse the fortunes of the town centre.

Moreton Town Centre

- 3.17 Moreton is a relatively busy and stable centre, which is generally clean and tidy and has a low vacancy rate. Although the centre does not possess a major supermarket, and the comparison offer is somewhat limited, Moreton does adequately meet the day-to-day retail needs of local residents. Moreton also benefits from a thriving service sector, and has a bingo club, a Wetherspoons pub, and 19 '*restaurants, cafés, coffee bars, fast food and take-aways*'.
- 3.18 There is little physical scope for additional retail floorspace in Moreton, and limited operator demand. Moreton would benefit from the provision of additional car parking spaces, although there are few sites available in the centre to address this shortfall.

New Ferry Town Centre

- 3.19 New Ferry is Wirral's second lowest ranking 'Key Town Centre' in the national retail rankings and, in our assessment, the centre has been in long-term decline. New Ferry has a limited comparison retail offer with very few national multiple operators (further

compounded by the closure of Woolworths earlier this year), a convenience sector offer which also caters for a localised catchment, and limited representation from service operators. The retail and service sector offer in New Ferry is firmly oriented towards the discount end of the market.

- 3.20 New Ferry is also characterised by its very high vacancy rate. Indeed, the proliferation of derelict property and vacant units with heavy shutters dominates both the town centre environment and the gateways into New Ferry. We consider that the centre would benefit from consolidation and intensification around a central core. The vacant property could be redeveloped for alternative, more viable uses, and the centre should be contracted to a size which better reflects its current role.
- 3.21 Despite the deficiencies outlined above, New Ferry does benefit from a key asset - the Wirral Farmers' Market, and there may be scope to capitalise upon this asset in the future. Nevertheless, New Ferry no longer justifies 'town centre' status and, in our assessment, it is not even capable of functioning as a 'district centre'.

Prenton (Woodchurch Road) Town Centre

- 3.22 Prenton (Woodchurch Road) is a relatively small centre, with a reasonable convenience sector provision, but a more limited non-food offer. Indeed, Prenton is increasingly becoming more of a service centre, as it is dominated by service uses, particularly take-away shops and estate agencies. However, the recent redevelopment of the former Kwik Save site has brought Aldi, Home Bargains and Vets to the centre.
- 3.23 The centre is generally attractive, well-lit, accessible and adequately meets the convenience and day-to-day service requirements of local residents. However, there are indications that the centre is declining as a comparison retail destination. In particular, Prenton has experienced significant recent slippage in the national retail rankings, and the vacancy rate is rising. There appears to be little opportunity to attract further comparison retailers to the centre, as we identified no operator demand for representation in Prenton at present. There is, however, a need to address the long-term derelict site located to the east of Prenton (adjacent to Kwik-Fit), which is a significant eyesore at a key gateway to the centre.
- 3.24 In summary, Prenton should be reclassified as a 'district centre' in the hierarchy because it no longer justifies 'town centre' status.

West Kirby Town Centre

- 3.25 West Kirby is an attractive, vibrant and stable town centre. This is evidenced by: the centre's healthy convenience retail offer; the good range of specialist shops and independent retailers; the very low vacancy rate; the continued high level of footfall; the low incidence of crime and anti-social behaviour; and the generally pleasant town centre environment.
- 3.26 Several major development proposals are in the pipeline for West Kirby, which will further improve the vitality and viability of the centre. The Concourse redevelopment scheme is expected to deliver improved car parking facilities, a high quality public square and new retail units, and proposals are also progressing for a new sailing school, environmental and streetscape improvements, and a hotel on Dee Lane car park.

- 3.27 The cumulative effect of the aforementioned schemes might be to further gravitate the focus of the town centre northwards, towards the top of Banks Road and along The Crescent. Stakeholders expressed concern that footfall is already lower towards the south of the town centre, as this area is separated from the north by a 'barrier' of residential development. We suggest, therefore, that consideration should be given to improving pedestrian linkages throughout the town centre, to ensure that further development towards the north of the centre is not detrimental to traders located along the south of Banks Road.

Performance Analyses - Traditional Suburban Centres

Birkenhead (Oxton Road and Grange Road West)

- 3.28 Oxton Road and Grange Road West, which are defined as separate Traditional Suburban Centres in the adopted Wirral UDP, was once a thriving shopping area, but it has been on a downward trend of decline over the last 25 years.
- 3.29 The convenience offer at Oxton Road and Grange Road West is limited to a Freshway store on Grange Road West, although there are now several specialist food shops in the centre. The comparison offer is similarly deficient, and most non-food sub-categories are either under-represented, or non-existent. The comparison offer is mainly focused on the sale of 'bulky' household items (such as electrical equipment and DIY/hardware products), although the household survey findings described later in our report suggest that Oxton Road and Grange Road West attract a relatively high amount of expenditure on specialist comparison items. Motor vehicle accessories and charity shops also account for a large proportion of total floorspace.
- 3.30 A significant proportion of units in both Oxton Road and Grange Road West are occupied by businesses in the '*restaurants, cafés, coffee bars, fast food and take-aways*' sub-category. Detailed analysis shows, however, that this offer consists mainly of low-grade take-aways. Other service sub-sectors fare better, with several banks and estate agencies represented, as well as a number of hairdressers/beauty parlours.
- 3.31 The vacancy rate is high along both Oxton Road and Grange Road West, at 23 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively. In addition, the general condition of the buildings in both streets is very poor, and the area has a run-down and unappealing appearance.

Claughton Village

- 3.32 Claughton Village contains around 26 retail and service units. The centre primarily contains convenience retailers (including a Spar and a Co-Op) and service providers (especially take-aways/cafés and hair and beauty practitioners). Since our survey of the centre, the convenience sector in Claughton has been boosted by the opening of a Tesco Express store. There is, however, a very limited comparison retail offer in Claughton.
- 3.33 Claughton Village thus primarily caters for the 'top-up' food shopping and day-to-day service needs of local residents, and is healthy in this respect. Indeed, there are no vacant units in the centre, and Claughton Village is generally clean, well-maintained and has a pleasant environment. The centre is on a bus route, is close to Birkenhead Park railway station, and has adequate car parking provision.

Dacre Hill (Bebington Road/Old Chester Road)

- 3.34 Dacre Hill contains around 25 retail and service units. The centre is anchored by a Tesco Metro, and is therefore able to cater for most day-to-day 'top-up' shopping needs.
- 3.35 The centre's 13 comparison outlets include a couple of high quality independent stores offering specialist products (a bridal shop and a musical instrument store) although the bulk of the comparison offer focuses mainly on the sale of household items, electrical products and car accessories. Service provision in Dacre Hill is also fairly limited, consisting mainly of take-aways and hair/beauty salons, and the centre lacks a Post Office and other professional services.
- 3.36 The physical environment of Dacre Hill is generally pleasant and the centre, for the most part, is clean and tidy. On the whole, the vitality and viability of Dacre Hill appears to have improved since the 2004 study, and the centre now contains no vacant shop units (compared to six in 2004), although there is a vacant car showroom at the southern end of the centre.

Irby Village

- 3.37 Irby Village contains around 26 units, of which over half are occupied by service operators; mainly restaurants, take-aways and hair and beauty salons.
- 3.38 The retail offer in Irby Village (both convenience and comparison) is more limited. Indeed, the centre has only three convenience outlets (a butchers, off-licence and newsagents), which represents a significant decline over time, as there were ten convenience outlets in the centre in 1997. The comparison retail offer in Irby Village is also limited, and largely comprises specialist outlets (a pet shop, a craft shop and a party store), rather than units selling more frequently purchased items.
- 3.39 Overall, we consider that Irby Village is a pleasant and attractive centre, which benefits from adequate car parking and has units which are in a reasonably good condition, although the centre now serves a service-based, rather than a primarily retail function.

Laird Street

- 3.40 Laird Street has around 48 retail and service units, over 40 per cent of which are currently vacant. Vacancy is a long-standing problem in Laird Street which has worsened since the 2004 study, and even then some 30 per cent of units were vacant. The concentration of vacancies is an eyesore in the centre, and the closed security shutters are unsightly. The centre is generally in a very poor physical condition and most buildings appear dated, dilapidated and poorly maintained. The environment feels unsafe and run-down, and we understand that anti-social behaviour is a problem in the centre.
- 3.41 Notwithstanding this, Laird Street has a reasonable convenience offer which is capable of meeting local day-to-day 'top-up' needs. Indeed, the centre benefits from an Aldi supermarket, as well as Costcutter and Co-op grocery stores. Laird Street's comparison offer is more limited, however, and is characterised by hardware stores. There are also eight take-aways and five hair/beauty salons in the centre, although there is no bank or any other service providers.
- 3.42 In sum, we consider that Laird Street is showing signs of acute distress. Although the centre offers a reasonable 'top-up' convenience sector, the remaining retail and service

offer is limited. The centre is dominated by vacant and run-down units, and the physical environment of Laird Street is generally unpleasant and unwelcoming. We understand that Laird Street is being considered for HMR intervention, which may help to address some of these problems. Ideally, the centre ought to be contracted to a more appropriate size.

Lower Bebington

- 3.43 Lower Bebington comprises a small, linear parade of around 28 retail and service units. The centre contains only two convenience stores - a butchers and a Somerfield - which represents a decline from the six convenience stores that we observed in 2004. However, the Somerfield store provides most staple food and grocery products.
- 3.44 Lower Bebington has a very limited comparison retail offer, and the centre is largely dominated by service providers, particularly take-away operators, hair and beauty practitioners and estate agents. Lower Bebington also benefits from a dentist and a medical centre.
- 3.45 In sum, even though the number of convenience outlets in Lower Bebington has recently declined, the centre still performs a reasonable 'top-up' role for local residents. The centre is healthy in this respect, and benefits from a low vacancy rate, a clean and well-maintained physical environment, and the provision of adequate free car parking.

New Brighton (Seabank Road)

- 3.46 New Brighton (Seabank Road) contains a total of 33 retail and service units. The convenience offer in the centre is very limited, and comprises only an off-licence, a newsagent, a confectioners, and the former Co-op which has now re-opened as a general convenience store. The commitment for a Morrisons superstore close to the centre will, however, substantially improve the convenience sector offer in the area.
- 3.47 The comparison retail offer at Seabank Road is mostly focused on the sale of household goods which are not generally purchased on a regular basis. The range of services on offer is also limited, consisting mainly of low grade takeaways and hairdressers/beauty salons. The centre has a Post Office, but no banks, estate agencies, travel agencies, and so on.
- 3.48 Vacant property is a major issue in Seabank Road. Indeed, with 11 vacant units at present, one third of the retail/service units in the centre are vacant. The high level of vacancy is a long-standing problem, and we recorded a similar vacancy rate in 2004. Although the centre as a whole is mainly clean and tidy, the presence of a significant number of vacant units does give Seabank Road a run-down appearance.
- 3.49 Overall, we consider that Seabank Road is experiencing significant decline, and now functions only as a local service centre, with a limited retail offer. Addressing the blight created by prolific vacant property may be necessary to prevent further decline of the centre.

New Brighton (Victoria Road)

- 3.50 New Brighton (Victoria Road) currently contains 22 retail and service units. The centre has contracted historically, as in its heyday years, shops at Victoria Road stretched right down to the promenade and totalled around 100 units.
- 3.51 The centre now has only three convenience outlets - Somerfield, Bargain Booze and a greengrocer - although the Somerfield supermarket provides most staple food and grocery items and, as noted above, there is a commitment for a Morrisons superstore close to the centre. The comparison offer is also limited at Victoria Road, and consists of a pharmacy, card shop, optician, florist, and two charity shops. Although there are a number of service outlets in the centre, including a bank, most of the services are either low-grade takeaways or hair/beauty salons. McDonalds has a confirmed requirement for representation in the centre.
- 3.52 There are currently five vacant units in the centre, which represents a high vacancy rate of over 20 per cent (and an increase from the vacancy rate we identified in 2004). Notwithstanding this, the majority of the units in the centre are in a good condition, and are generally attractive. Victoria Road is also mainly clean, tidy and well maintained, and there is adequate parking in the centre.
- 3.53 In summary, New Brighton was once a thriving seaside resort but it has declined substantially over recent years, with Victoria Road and Seabank Road both contracting as a result. However, the regeneration of New Brighton - namely the mixed-use scheme providing new residential, leisure, and retail facilities, in addition to significant public realm enhancements - is now underway and this might have beneficial spin-off benefits for both centres.

Prenton (Borough Road)

- 3.54 Prenton (Borough Road) is a long, linear centre containing around 38 retail and service units. The retail offer is generally low-order, and is anchored by a Co-op. The centre has a limited convenience and comparison retail offer, with only five convenience outlets and 12 comparison stores, which are focused largely on the sale of general household items and discount products. Borough Road benefits from a slightly larger service sector offer (mainly take-aways and hairdressers), although the centre lacks a Post Office and a bank.
- 3.55 Overall, Borough Road performs a very localised role, meeting some of the day-to-day convenience and service needs of local residents. Whilst the number of vacant units has fallen since 2004 (from 9 to 3), there is still scope for significant improvement to the physical environment of the centre.

Seacombe (Borough Road/Poulton Road)

- 3.56 Seacombe contains around 67 retail and service units along Borough Road/Poulton Road. The centre's convenience offer is limited to a relatively new Tesco Express and a few newsagents. There is also a very limited comparison retail offer, which consists mainly of low-grade household goods outlets and discount stores. The comparison offer appears to have deteriorated since 2004, and is now deficient in nearly every sub-category. At the time of our on-foot survey of Seacombe in May 2008, there were 12

service outlets in the centre, although these predominantly consisted of hairdressers/beauty salons, low-grade takeaways and a tattoo parlour. The centre lacks a bank, although Seacombe does have a Post Office.

- 3.57 There are currently around 34 vacant units in Seacombe, which represents half of the total number of units, and the high vacancy rate is a long-standing issue. The physical environment in Seacombe is also a cause for concern; with the exception of the new Tesco store, most units in the centre are poorly maintained, and many buildings are in a state of disrepair.
- 3.58 Overall, whilst the new Tesco Express has improved the quality of the convenience offer, Seacombe appears to be experiencing significant decline, and is now a very run-down and generally unattractive centre. Seacombe has declined to such an extent that it has become fragmented and is no longer a viable centre in its present form. As with some of the Borough's other centres, we suggest that Seacombe would benefit from being contracted to a more appropriate size, perhaps focused around the new Tesco store on Poulton Road.

Tranmere (Old Chester Road)

- 3.59 Tranmere (Old Chester Road) has experienced significant redevelopment and consolidation over the last few years as part of the Tranmere Urban Village initiative. The centre had been in long-term decline, and the scheme aimed to reverse this trend through demolition of unoccupied property, and construction of new retail units and a community centre focused around a public square.
- 3.60 The completed scheme contains 17 retail and service units, with no current vacancies. Convenience retail is the primary use, and the centre contains Lidl and Co-op stores. There are a few comparison outlets including low-order clothing stores, a florist and a pet shop. The centre also contains a Post Office, library and medical centre.
- 3.61 Tranmere's retail and service offer is, therefore, limited but is adequate to cater for the 'top-up' and day-to-day service needs of local residents. The consolidated centre is significantly more attractive and healthy than it was previously. Parking provision is also adequate, primarily on the Lidl site. The existing UDP centre boundary includes a significant area of land to the north that no longer contains any town centre uses, and we recommend that the boundary should be revised to reflect these changes.

Upton Village

- 3.62 Upton Village, which is located on Arrowse Park Road, Ford Road and Rake Lane, contains around 54 retail/service units. The units are small but are well-kept, and the physical environment of the centre is generally clean and pleasant.
- 3.63 Whilst the centre does not benefit from a medium-sized grocery store or a supermarket, it does contain a bakers, butchers and One Stop shop, and so the convenience offer is sufficient to meet local 'top-up' shopping needs. An out-of-centre Sainsbury's superstore is located close to the southern boundary of the centre.
- 3.64 Upton Village also has a limited comparison offer, including two pharmacies, two opticians, two antique shops, two clothes stores (including Ethel Austin), and three charity shops. The majority of the units in Upton Village are occupied by service providers, such

as hairdressers and take-away operators, and the centre has two banks and a Post Office.

- 3.65 Overall, Upton Village is a relatively healthy centre, which adequately caters for the 'top-up' needs of local residents.

Wallasey Village

- 3.66 Wallasey Village comprises two distinct parades of units, which are separated by residential development. In total, the centre contains around 75 retail and service units, which are primarily focused on the sale of 'top-up' convenience items and local service provision, with a predominance of take-away and hairdressing outlets. The non-food offer is limited to a pharmacy, a florist and a handful of shops selling general household goods.
- 3.67 In our 2004 report, we noted that the centre was declining, as evidenced by a high vacancy rate as well as more general physical and aesthetic deficiencies, and this situation has not improved significantly in the intervening period. The physical environment of the centre is still generally low-grade, and there is scope for improvement around the Grove Road area. Furthermore, whilst the vacancy rate has improved slightly since 2004, there are still 10 vacant units in the centre. The vacant property and derelict sites are an eyesore in Wallasey Village, and there is a need to consider whether any of this land/property can be beneficially redeveloped for alternative uses.

Performance Analyses - Summary

- 3.68 Our assessment of the various centres' overall levels of health is summarised in Table 3.1. This indicates that five centres can be described as 'very healthy' or 'healthy'. In our assessment the healthiest centres in the Borough are Heswall and West Kirby, closely followed by Moreton.
- 3.69 Nine of the Borough's centres - including Birkenhead and Liscard Town Centres - are exhibiting some signs of weakness. A further four centres, including Hoylake Town Centre, are showing more significant signs of weakness or decline. The remaining five centres - including New Ferry - score 5 or less in the Table; these centres are in need of major intervention if they are to remain viable.

Table 3.1 Analysis of Vitality and Viability - Summary

	Centre	Diversity of Uses (retail and non-retail)	Retailer Requirements	Overall Quality of Retail Offer	Vacancy Rate	Footfall	Accessibility	Public Realm	OVERALL SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE
Key Town Centres	Birkenhead	3	0	2	2	3	3	0	13
	Heswall	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	20
	Liscard	3	0	2	2	3	3	0	13
	West Kirby	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	20
	Moreton	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	19
	Bromborough Village	2	0	2	3	2	3	3	15
	Hoyle	2	0	2	0	2	2	2	10
	Prenton Woodchurch Road	2	0	2	2	2	3	2	13
	New Ferry	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Traditional Suburban Centres	Upton Village	3	0	3	3	2	3	3	17
	Wallasey Village	2	0	2	2	2	3	0	11
	Tranmere Old Chester Road	3	0	2	3	2	3	3	16
	Prenton Borough Road	0	0	0	3	2	3	2	10
	Cloughton Village	2	0	2	3	2	3	3	15
	Lower Bebington	2	0	2	3	2	3	3	15
	Seacombe Poulton Road	2	0	0	0	2	2	0	6
	New Brighton Seabank Road	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4
	New Brighton Victoria Road	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	8
	Birkenhead Oxton Road	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	5
	Birkenhead Grange Road West	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	5
	Laird Street	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	4
	Dacre Hill	2	0	2	3	2	3	3	15
	Irby Village	2	0	2	3	2	3	3	15

Key to Health Check Indicators

3	Good and/or improving
2	Moderate and/or static
0	Poor and/or declining

Key to Overall Summary of Performance

- >19 Very healthy
- 16-18 Healthy
- 11-15 Showing some signs of weakness
- 6-10 Showing significant signs of weakness; performs poorly in relation to key indicators
- <5 Very weak; performs poorly against most of the key indicators.

Retail Hierarchy and Classification of Centres

Introduction

- 3.70 PPS6 requires LPAs to define a network and a hierarchy of centres, and to take a proactive approach to planning for their future by identifying appropriate levels of investment/intervention in accordance with each centre's specific needs. In defining the network and hierarchy, it is necessary to take account of the retail, commercial leisure

and employment functions of the Borough's various centres and their roles in providing for a range of private and public services.

- 3.71 Where existing centres are in decline, paragraph 2.8 of PPS6 advises LPAs to '*...assess the scope for consolidating and strengthening these centres by seeking to focus a wider range of uses there, promote the diversification of uses and improve the environment*'. However, where a reversal of decline is not possible, LPAs are advised to consider a reclassification of the centre, so as to reflect its revised status in the hierarchy.
- 3.72 Table 1 in Annex A to PPS6 defines four 'Typologies' of centre and describes their main characteristics. The three types of centre relevant to this study are described in Table 1 as follows:
- *'Town centres will usually be the second level of centres after city centres and, in many cases, they will be the principal centre or centres in a local authority's area. In rural areas they are likely to be market towns and other centres of similar size and role which function as important service centres, providing a range of facilities and services for extensive rural catchment areas. In planning the future of town centres, local planning authorities should consider the function of different parts of the centre and how these contribute to its overall vitality and viability.*
 - *'District centres will usually comprise groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library.*
 - *'Local centres include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaway and launderette. In rural areas, large villages may perform the role of a local centre.'*
- 3.73 The first footnote beneath Table 1 in Annex A to PPS6 also states: '*Small parades of purely neighbourhood significance are not regarded as centres for purposes of this policy statement.*'

The Existing Retail Hierarchy

- 3.74 The adopted Wirral UDP (February 2000) defines nine Key Town Centres and 14 Traditional Suburban Centres, as follows⁵:
- **Key Town Centres (Policy SH1):** Birkenhead Core Area, Bromborough Village, Heswall, Hoylake, Liscard, Moreton, New Ferry, Prenton, and West Kirby.
 - **Traditional Suburban Centres (Policy SH2):** Birkenhead Grange Road West, Birkenhead Oxton Road, Claughton Village, Dacre Hill, Irby Village, Laird Street, Lower Bebington, New Brighton Seabank Road, New Brighton Victoria Road, Prenton

⁵ The UDP also refers to over 100 smaller parades and groups of shops serving more local catchment areas throughout the Borough, mostly within Primarily Residential Areas, although these small-scale facilities are not specifically identified in the UDP.

Borough Road, Seacombe, Tranmere Old Chester Road, Upton Village, and Wallasey Village.

- 3.75 The performance analyses above demonstrate that there are significant variations with regard to the performances of the Borough's defined centres, with some performing well in relation to the PPS6 indicators of vitality and viability, and others significantly underperforming and in need of varying degrees of intervention. This evidence can be used to inform the decision-making process with regard to the allocation of funding and the preparation of strategies for the improvement of those centres which are most in need.

Our Updated Centre Classification

- 3.76 Below, we consider how the categorisation of the Borough's nine Key Town Centres and 14 Traditional Suburban Centres could be amended to better reflect their current role and performance. Our analysis is based on the following indicators:
- i) composite comparison goods market share;
 - ii) the quality of the convenience sector offer;
 - iii) RTP's local provision index (for the 14 Traditional Suburban Centres);
 - iv) ranking in MHE's 2008 UK Shopping Index; and
 - v) the performance analyses and our visits to the centres, which has enabled us to assess the diversity, scale and quality of each centre's overall retail provision, accessibility, public realm, and the range of non-retail uses including food & drink, other services, leisure and commercial uses, and public facilities such as libraries.
- 3.77 Reflecting the advice in Annex A to PPS6, in order to justify 'district centre' status a centre would usually have to contain at least one supermarket or superstore and a range of non-retail and public services.

Evaluation Findings - The Retail Hierarchy

- 3.78 The first five columns of Table 3.2 below provide a summary of the main indicators that we used to inform our classification of the centres. The penultimate column of the table then specifies the current UDP designation for each of the 23 study centres, and in the final column we provide our recommendations for reclassifying the hierarchy.
- 3.79 We propose four categories of centre: Sub-regional Centre, Town Centre, District Centre and Local Centre. We considered sub-dividing the District Centre category into 'Major District', 'District' and 'Minor District', but on reflection we have decided that this is overly complex and that there should be a single category of District Centre.
- 3.80 In arriving at our recommended hierarchy, we have taken account of the advice in PPS6, referred to at the beginning of this section. For instance, we did not automatically place declining centres into a lower category; instead, we assessed whether there is any realistic scope for reversing the decline, taking account of physical opportunities for development and levels of demand (both from consumers and developers/operators). For instance, we consider that Hoylake and New Ferry no longer justify 'town centre' status, and taking account of the various evidence collated through this study we do not see any prospect of these centres expanding their roles in the future. It is therefore more appropriate to reclassify them in the hierarchy and ensure that the level of development

that takes place in those centres (if any), and any other interventions, is commensurate with their current and future role.

Table 3.2 Our Recommended Centre Classification

Centre	Composite Comp. Goods Market Share (%)	Local Provision Audit (Count 1) ^A	Local Provision Audit (Count 1) ^B	MHE 2008 Ranking	Qualitative Analysis of Vitality & Viability ^C	Current UDP Designation	Recommended LDF Designation
Birkenhead	23.3	N/A	N/A	124	13	Key Town Centre	Sub-Regional Centre
Heswall	1.6	N/A	N/A	731	20	Key Town Centre	Town Centre
Liscard	5.3	N/A	N/A	641	13	Key Town Centre	Town Centre
West Kirby	1.6	N/A	N/A	1,364	20	Key Town Centre	Town Centre
Moreton	1.0	N/A	N/A	1,139	19	Key Town Centre	Town Centre
Bromborough Village	2.0*	N/A	N/A	1,290	15	Key Town Centre	District Centre
Hoylake	0.4	N/A	N/A	2,467	10	Key Town Centre	District Centre
Prenton Woodchurch Road	0.1	N/A	N/A	1,535	13	Key Town Centre	District Centre
New Ferry	0.4	N/A	N/A	2,046	3	Key Town Centre	Local Centre
Upton Village	0.7	56	26	3,575	17	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Wallasey Village	0.7**	52	25	1,950	11	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Tranmere Old Chester Road	0.1	30	21	3,870	16	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Prenton Borough Road	<0.1	21	9	1,535	10	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Cloughton Village	<0.1	35	24	3,120	15	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Lower Bebington	<0.1	32	21	1,866	15	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Seacombe Poulton Road	<0.1	32	22	5,257	6	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
New Brighton Seabank Road	<0.1	17	10	3,575	4	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
New Brighton Victoria Road	<0.1	34	16	3,575	8	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Birkenhead Oxtan Road	0.5	22	9	4,666	5	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Birkenhead Grange Road West	2.3***	38	14	4,666	5	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Laird Street	<0.1	25	12	N/A	4	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Dacre Hill	<0.1	26	20	N/A	15	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre
Irby Village	<0.1	24	13	N/A	15	Traditional Suburban Centre	Local Centre

^A Table 1a of Volume 3, Appendix 3 records the absolute number of occurrences of outlets within each category.

^B Table 1b of Volume 3, Appendix 3 records outlets within each category only once, regardless of how often they occur.

^C Based on the centre's performance in relation to key PPS6 indicators as discussed in more detail in Section 3 of our report

* We suspect that the household survey-derived comparison market share for Bromborough Village (2 per cent) has been exaggerated by some of respondents who really meant to cite nearby Croft Retail & Leisure Park.

** Similarly, we suspect that some of the respondents who cited Wallasey Village really meant Liscard Town Centre, and that in reality the comparison market share of Wallasey Village is lower than 0.7 per cent.

*** We also suspect that some of the respondents who cited Grange Road West really meant Birkenhead Town Centre - the core area of which is called 'Grange Road' - and that the comparison market share of Grange Road West is actually lower than 2.3 per cent

Sub-Regional Centre

- 3.81 Table 3.2 clearly confirms Birkenhead Town Centre's position at the top of the retail hierarchy in Wirral. Whilst most of the performance analysis indicators suggest a decline in Birkenhead Town Centre's overall vitality and viability since the last retail study in 2004, Birkenhead secures a composite comparison goods market share which is far in excess of the Borough's next largest defined centre, Liscard. Birkenhead's ranking of 124th in MHE's 2008 Shopping Index is also more than 500 places better than Liscard's.

Town Centres

- 3.82 We consider that only four of the other eight centres defined as 'Town Centres' in the adopted UDP warrant a continuation of that designation. Whilst Liscard performs quite poorly in relation to key indicators of vitality and viability, it achieves the second-highest composite comparison market share of the Borough's defined centres and it still has a good critical mass of town centre uses. Heswall, West Kirby and Moreton perform very well in the performance analyses, and they are the only defined centres in the Borough which achieve a composite comparison market share of 1 per cent or above⁶.

District Centres

- 3.83 We consider that three of the remaining four UDP-defined Key Town Centres should be re-classified as District Centres.
- 3.84 In our assessment, Bromborough Village, Hoylake and Prenton Woodchurch Road - all of which attract only a relatively modest proportion of the Borough's comparison retail expenditure - no longer justify 'town centre status'. Furthermore, these centres achieve lower comparison market shares than Moreton, which we consider to be a generally healthier centre. Nevertheless, Bromborough Village, Hoylake and Prenton Woodchurch Road do meet the criteria for 'district centres' as specified in Table 1 of Annex A to PPS6, and in our assessment they are significantly higher-order than New Ferry and Upton Village, even though those centres achieve a similar comparison turnover according to the household survey.
- 3.85 The remaining UDP-defined Town Centre, New Ferry, performs poorly against almost all of the PPS6 vitality and viability indicators, and has evidently been in long-term decline. The centre contains very few national multiple comparison retailers, its convenience offer also caters for a localised catchment and there is limited representation from service operators. Furthermore, the vacancy rate in New Ferry is very high and the centre is clearly too large for its current role. Although, the Wirral Farmers' Market continues to operate from New Ferry, which

⁶ The household survey identified a composite comparison market share of 2 per cent for Bromborough Village, giving it an estimated comparison turnover of approximately £19.5m. We strongly suspect, however, that the comparison turnover for Bromborough Village Town Centre has been inflated by expenditure which should have been attributed to the nearby Croft Retail & Leisure Park, and we therefore consider that the market share of Bromborough Village is likely to be lower than 1 per cent in reality.

also has a Somerfield supermarket, we advocate the re-classification of New Ferry to Local Centre. There is a need for substantial intervention and physical recognition of the centre in order to ensure its long-term viability.

- 3.86 As noted above, Upton Village achieves a composite comparison market share that is higher than Hoylake, Prenton Woodchurch Road and New Ferry, all of which are currently defined as Town Centres. However, Upton Village does not contain a main supermarket, and in our assessment it should be placed within the 'Local Centres' category, because of the centre's relatively small size.
- 3.87 We consider that the remaining 13 centres should also be re-classified as Local Centres. Although the household survey derived comparison market share for Wallasey Village is 0.7 per cent, we suspect that this has been exaggerated by some respondents who actually meant Liscard (which is often referred to locally as Wallasey). For the reasons that we have already provided, we have similar reservations in relation to the apparently high market share for Birkenhead Grange Road West and Oxton Road.
- 3.88 All of the other centres in this tier of our recommended retail hierarchy achieve a low comparison market share, confirming that they serve a local catchment area. The environmental deficiencies and high vacancy rate that affect some of the centres - for instance, Seacombe Poulton Road and Birkenhead Grange Road West - will have to be addressed through substantial intervention and investment if they are to remain viable centres in the long-term.

4 CURRENT PATTERNS OF RETAIL AND LEISURE SPENDING

Household Survey Methodology

- 4.1 Our assessment of current patterns of retail and leisure spending is based on a telephone survey of 1,500 households undertaken by NEMS Market Research. The same telephone household survey was undertaken twice; firstly in April 2008 and again in March 2009. The findings from the telephone household surveys serve two main purposes:
- firstly, the results highlight changes in shopping patterns that have taken place in Wirral since the last household survey was undertaken in 2003 to inform Wirral Retail Strategy; and
 - secondly, because NEMS undertook a household survey both immediately prior to the opening of Liverpool One, and ten months after the scheme opened, the findings can be used to gauge the effect of this major new development on shopping habits of Wirral residents. Liverpool One is a major retail-led, mixed-use development scheme, which consists of 148,640 sq.m (1.6 million sq.ft) of additional retail floorspace, a 14-screen cinema, and 21,367 sq.m (230,000 sq.ft) of restaurants, cafés and bars. The scheme opened in two phases; in May 2008 and September 2008.
- 4.2 The overall catchment area (OCA) for the surveys - Figure 4.1 in Volume 2 - is the same as the OCA that was defined for the telephone survey undertaken in September 2003 by NEMS to inform the Wirral Retail Strategy. Thus, the OCA covers the administrative area of Wirral.
- 4.3 For the 2003 survey, we divided the OCA into six 'zones'. Some of the populations of the six main zones, which are based on postcodes, are quite large. In order to improve the survey results, we therefore decided, in consultation with Council officers, to split the six main zones into a total of 11 zones for the 2008 and 2009 surveys. The overall zone boundaries were preserved in order to be consistent with the 2003 study.
- 4.4 We ensured that there was a minimum of 100 successful respondents in each zone and the results were weighted according to the actual population in each zone, as set out in paragraph 2.2 of NEMS' report. As with any sample-based data collection, there is potentially a difference between the response from the sample and the true situation in the population as a whole - known as the 'standard error' - although we did take various steps to minimise this difference (for example, through random sample selection and careful construction of the questionnaire). As might be expected, larger errors occur from a 50 per cent response, than say a 10 per cent response, simply because of the magnitude of the number of responses involved. A full explanation of the statistical reliability of the survey sample is provided in paragraph 2.3 of NEMS' report.

- 4.5 Table 4.1 below specifies the year 2006 population of each zone (which is now more evenly distributed across the survey zones than in the 2003 survey) and the number of surveys that were undertaken in each zone.

Table 4.1 Composition of Survey Zones and Number of Interviews Undertaken

Zone Ref 2003	Zone Ref 2008/9	Postcode Sector	Population 2006	% of Total Population in OCA	Actual No. of Surveys Undertaken (2009 Survey)
1	1	CH47	25,784	8.3%	136
		CH48			
2	2a	CH46	26,003	8.4%	136
	2b	CH49	28,244	9.1%	136
3	3a	CH44	29,942	9.6%	141
	3b	CH45	28,964	9.3%	136
4	4a	CH41	18,647	6.0%	107
	4b	CH42	30,750	9.9%	141
	4c	CH43	35,164	11.3%	147
5	5a	CH62	28,049	9.0%	136
	5b	CH63	29,178	9.3%	142
6	6	CH60	30,491	9.8%	142
		CH61			
TOTALS			311,216	100%	1500

- 4.6 The survey questionnaire, which is reproduced in the penultimate section of NEMS' report, sought to establish:

- i) patterns of convenience goods spending, based on the location of:
 - the shop where the household spends most money on food and groceries, the amount spent per week and the mode of travel to that shop (questions 1 to 3);
 - the shop where the household undertakes most 'top-up' food and groceries purchases, the amount spent per week and the mode of travel to that shop (questions 4 to 6);
 - spending on food and groceries in small shops for those who named supermarkets in i) and ii) above (questions 7 to 10).
- ii) patterns of comparison goods spending, based on the locations of the last two purchases of:
 - clothes and shoes (questions 12 and 13);
 - furniture, carpets or soft household furnishings (questions 15 and 16);
 - DIY and decorating goods (questions 18 and 19);
 - domestic appliances such as washing machines, fridges, cookers, TVs, DVD players or computers (questions 21 and 22); and
 - specialist and other items such as jewellery, photographic goods, musical instruments or sports equipment (questions 24 and 25).
- iii) the proportion of the household's total spending on non-food goods that is accounted for by:
 - the internet (question 27);
 - paper catalogues (question 28); and

- TV interactive shopping (question 29).
 - iv) patterns of spending on leisure services based on the locations where the household spends most money on:
 - restaurants;
 - pubs/bars/nightclubs;
 - cinema;
 - museums and art galleries;
 - family entertainment centres, such as ten pin bowling, skating and so on;
 - health and fitness;
 - gambling - casino/bingo/bookmaker; and
 - theatre/concerts.

4.7 For the 2003 survey, respondents were asked to name the centre or store where they had spent '*most money*', the '*second most money*' and the '*third most money*' for each comparison goods category (clothes & shoes, DIY and decorating goods, and so on). For the 2008 and 2009 surveys, we refined the questionnaire so that respondents were asked to specify the **locations** of the last **two purchases** of each category of comparison goods. The purpose of this change was to provide a better representation of actual consumer behaviour, and minimise the potential for responses to be biased towards large centres, which tends to happen when people are asked to think in terms of money.

4.8 The survey findings in relation to comparison shopping patterns confirm that a greater dispersal of response has been achieved by basing the questions on trips, rather than on the amount of money spent. Thus, the smaller centres within the OCA feature more prominently in the 2008 and 2009 survey findings than they did in the 2003 survey. Conversely, the 2008/9 comparison market shares for larger centres outside of the OCA are generally lower than the corresponding market shares indicated by the 2003 survey.

4.9 The composite pattern of spending for convenience goods was achieved on the basis of the mean weekly household spend findings, as follows:

	Mean Weekly Household Spend, 2009	Percentage Weighting
Main food & groceries	£60.55	74.5%
Top-up food & groceries	£15.56	19.2%
Small local shops	£5.16	6.4%
All Convenience Goods	£81.27	100%

4.10 The composite pattern of spending for comparison goods was achieved on the basis of MapInfo expenditure data in relation to five categories of spend, as follows:

	Percentage Weighting
Clothes and shoes	25.3%
Furniture, carpets and soft household furnishings	14.0%
DIY and decorating goods	10.7%
Domestic appliances	16.3%
Specialist/other goods	33.7%
All Comparison Goods	100.0%

Population of the Overall Catchment Area

- 4.11 Each of the 11 survey zones is located entirely within the administrative area of Wirral. The population of the OCA in 2009, disaggregated by zone, is shown in the second row of figures in Spreadsheet 1.2 of Volume 2⁷. The overall population in the 2009 base year amounts to approximately 311,000 persons, which is derived by applying the ONS 2006-based Population Projections (published in June 2008) to the mid-year 2006 zonal estimates provided by MapInfo/Oxford Economics.
- 4.12 Thus, having explained the methodology employed in the survey of households, we turn to the findings.

The Two Household Surveys and the Effect of Liverpool One

- 4.13 As we explain above, the telephone household survey was undertaken twice; firstly in April 2008 and again in March 2009 (i.e. both immediately prior to the opening of Liverpool One, and ten months after the first phase of the scheme opened). The findings from the two household surveys can therefore be compared to assess to what extent this major retail development has changed local shopping patterns, and adversely affected the market share achieved by the main centres in Wirral.
- 4.14 Table 4.2 shows that, between April 2008 and March 2009, overall comparison shopping patterns in Wirral have not altered significantly, according to the household survey. Indeed, the comparison market shares achieved by some centres in Wirral have remained static, and in other cases have marginally improved over this time period (which is the case for West Kirby, Moreton, and Heswall).

⁷ All subsequent mentions of 'Spreadsheets' in this section of our report relate to the Spreadsheets that are contained in Volume 2.

Table 4.2 Change in Comparison Market Shares Achieved by the Main Centres, between April 2008 and March 2009

Destination	Overall Market Share for Comparison Retail		
	April 2008	March 2009	Change
Hoylake TC	0.4%	0.4%	-
New Ferry TC	0.4%	0.4%	-
West Kirby TC	1.4%	1.6%	+0.2%
Moreton TC	0.8%	1.0%	+0.2%
Liscard TC	5.3%	5.3%	-
Heswall TC	1.3%	1.6%	+0.3%
Prenton (Woodchurch Rd) TC	0.2%	0.1%	-0.1%
Croft Retail & Leisure Park / Bromborough Village	13.6%	14.4%	+0.8%
Birkenhead TC	28.4%	23.3%	- 5.1%
Birkenhead TC (+ Grange Road West + Oxton Rd)	29.7%	26.0%	-3.7%
Wirral OCA (overall retention rate)	65.9%	64.7%	-1.2%
Liverpool CC	12.8%	13.3%	+0.5%
Chester CC	5.4%	5.1%	-0.3%

- 4.15 The only main centres in Wirral which appear to have suffered a decline in their comparison market share between April 2008 and March 2009, according to the household survey, are Birkenhead Town Centre and Prenton (Woodchurch Road) Town Centre. Whilst the comparison market share achieved by Prenton (Woodchurch Road) has declined by just 0.1 per cent, Birkenhead Town Centre's comparison market share appears to have fallen more substantially, by 5.1 percentage points.
- 4.16 However, we suspect that some respondents who cited 'Grange Road West' or 'Oxton Road' in the 2009 survey might really have meant Birkenhead Town Centre, which would explain why the market share achieved by these two Traditional Suburban Centres apparently increased between 2008 and 2009, despite not benefitting from any retail development or other improvements. If the comparison market shares achieved by Birkenhead Town Centre and Grange Road West and Oxton Road Traditional Suburban Centres are considered together, Birkenhead as a whole has experienced a decline of 3.7 percentage points between 2008 and 2009 according to the survey; whilst still significant, it is lower than the 5.1 percentage point drop referred to above. Over the same time period, the overall comparison market share achieved by Liverpool city centre has risen by only 0.5 percentage points according to the survey. Thus, whilst the opening of Liverpool One may in part be responsible for the apparent recent decline in Birkenhead's comparison market share, it cannot fully account for the drop of 3.7 percentage points.
- 4.17 Indeed, it is important to note that some of the difference between the 2008 and 2009 results will be due to the 'standard error' that is inherent in sample-based

surveys, and which will particularly affect strategic centres such as Birkenhead which achieve high survey response rates (as we explain in paragraph 4.4 above).

- 4.18 Overall, the composite comparison market share (or retention rate) achieved by all centres in Wirral has fallen by 1.2 percentage points since the opening of Liverpool One (from 65.9 per cent to 64.7 per cent), which - although not welcome - does not represent a substantial decline. The household surveys, therefore, indicate that the opening of Liverpool One has so-far resulted in relatively minor changes in local shopping patterns in Wirral, although it does seem that a shift in shopping behaviour is beginning to occur (particularly in relation to Birkenhead), and this will need to be monitored carefully over forthcoming years. As Liverpool One becomes more established, we expect that the shifts in shopping patterns already observed may become more entrenched, unless the retail offer in Birkenhead, and Wirral as a whole, is enhanced to offset the competition.
- 4.19 In the remainder of this Section, we analyse in more detail the findings from the latest household survey, which was undertaken in March 2009, and consider how shopping patterns in Wirral have changed over the longer-term (since September 2003).

Comparison Goods Spending Patterns in 2009

- 4.20 The per capita spend on comparison goods in 2009 (Spreadsheet 1.3) varies from £2,626 in Zone 4a (Birkenhead Town Centre) to £3,462 in Zone 1 (Hoyle and West Kirby). The average UK spending on comparison goods in 2009 is £3,313 per capita and Spreadsheet 1.3 reveals that all but 3 of the 11 zones in Wirral's OCA have per capita comparison goods spending levels below the UK average, these being zones 1, 5b and 6 in the south and western part of the Borough.
- 4.21 The total amount of comparison goods spending for residents of the whole of the catchment area in 2009 is £976.6m (Spreadsheet 1.4), of which £100.6m, or 10.3 per cent, is spent on Special Forms of Trading (catalogue, TV and internet shopping, which we subsequently abbreviate as SFT).
- 4.22 The pattern of expenditure flows for the comparison goods sector as a whole, as revealed by the survey of households, is set out in Spreadsheets 1.5 and 1.6.
- 4.23 Table 4.3 - which is derived from the final column of Spreadsheet 1.6 - reveals that Birkenhead Town Centre retains £227.1m, or 23.3 per cent, of the overall comparison goods expenditure of residents of the OCA. Croft Retail & Leisure Park in Bromborough retains £121.0m, or 12.4 per cent, and Junction One Retail Park in Bidston (which includes a substantial B&Q Warehouse store) accounts for £74.2m, giving it a comparison market share of 7.6 per cent. The only other destination in Wirral with a comparison turnover in excess of £30m is Liscard Town Centre, which retains £51.7m (5.3 per cent market share).
- 4.24 Other town centres, retail parks and freestanding stores located within the OCA account for a further £158.1m of the comparison goods expenditure available to residents of the OCA. Thus, overall, some 64.7 per cent of the expenditure on comparison goods of the OCA's residents is spent in town, district and local centres,

or in retail parks and freestanding stores, which are located within the OCA. This is known as the aggregate retention rate.

4.25 In contrast, the aggregate comparison retention rate achieved by the centres and stores within the OCA at the time of the 2003 survey was about 55 per cent. Thus, the aggregate retention rate appears to have improved by 10 percentage points since 2003. Some possible explanations for this significant improvement are as follows:

- Much of Liverpool city centre has been a building site for the past few years, during the construction phase of the substantial Liverpool One development. This could help to explain why Liverpool city centre accounted for 13.3 per cent of the comparison expenditure available to residents of the Wirral OCA in March 2009, compared with 18.9 per cent in September 2003. It is important to note that the second phase of Liverpool One only opened in September 2008 and it will take time for its market share to stabilise; thus the full effect of Liverpool One will only become clear through monitoring and subsequent updates of this study.
- Chester city centre has been affected by increasing levels of vehicular congestion in recent years. This might be a principal factor behind the decline in Chester's composite comparison market share from 9.0 per cent in 2003 to 5.1 per cent in 2009.
- There have been significant qualitative improvements at the Croft Retail & Leisure Park in Bromborough, where the retail offer has recently been enhanced by new Tesco Home Plus, Next, Argos, Sports Direct, Boots, Halfords and JJB stores. Indeed, the Tesco Home Plus store - which has a mezzanine - is effectively a mini department store.
- Less than 5 per cent of DIY and decorating goods expenditure available to the OCA's residents now leaks out of the OCA, compared to more than 25 per cent in 2003.
- As we explained earlier in this section, the questions in relation to comparison shopping were based on trips in the 2008/9 surveys, rather than on the amount of money spent, as in the 2003 survey. The effect of this change is that the smaller centres within the OCA feature more prominently in the 2008 and 2009 survey findings than they did in the 2003 survey, whereas the market shares for larger centres - including Liverpool and Chester - are generally lower.

4.26 Table 4.3 also shows that some 22.6 per cent of comparison goods expenditure flows to town and city centres and retail parks in the buffer areas (shown in Figure 4.2 of Volume 2) located just outside the OCA (mainly to Liverpool and Chester city centres); some 10.4 per cent is spent on SFT; and the balance of 2.4 per cent is spent in more distant locations, such as the Trafford Centre and IKEA in Warrington.

Table 4.3 Broad Destination for Comparison Goods Expenditure

Broad Destination for Comparison Goods Expenditure	£m	%
Birkenhead Town Centre	227.1	23.3
Croft Retail & Leisure Park, Bromborough	121.0	12.4
Junction One Retail Park, Bidston	74.2	7.6
Liscard Town Centre	51.7	5.3
Other centres/retail parks/freestanding stores within the OCA	158.1	16.2
Total Retained Expenditure	632.1	64.7
Buffer zones just outside the OCA	220.4	22.6
SFT - leakage	100.6	10.4
Other more distant leakage	23.4	2.4
Total Leakage	344.5	35.3
TOTAL	976.6	100.0

- 4.27 The estimated comparison goods turnovers of the nine Town Centres and some of the 14 Suburban Centres in Wirral (as defined in the adopted Wirral UDP), prior to making any allowance for any expenditure inflow from those who are resident beyond the OCA, are set out in the penultimate column of Spreadsheet 1.6 and are summarised in Table 4.4⁸.
- 4.28 Table 4.4 confirms Birkenhead's status as a strategic centre, with a comparison goods turnover of approximately £227.1m, which fully justifies its inclusion in Policy W5 of the RSS. Table 4.4 also shows the popularity of Croft Retail & Leisure Park in Bromborough as a location for comparison goods spending; it attracts £121.0m from residents of the OCA and it is the clear second destination for comparison goods purchases within Wirral's administrative area.

⁸ Birkenhead Grange Road West Suburban Centre and Birkenhead Oxtan Road Suburban Centre are recorded as one centre in Spreadsheet 1.6 and, hence, in Table 4.4. We suspect that some respondents who cited 'Grange Road West' or 'Oxtan Road' in the survey might have really meant Birkenhead Town Centre - which would explain why the combined turnover for these declining centres is suspiciously high at £26m - although we have no way of confirming this.

Table 4.4 Comparison Goods Expenditure Retained within the OCA

Towns/Suburban Centres Within the OCA	Comparison Goods Turnover Drawn from OCA Residents (£m)
Birkenhead Town Centre	227.1
Liscard Town Centre	51.7
Birkenhead (Grange Road West and Oxtan Road) Suburban Centre	26.0
Bromborough Village Town Centre	19.5
West Kirby Town Centre	15.3
Heswall Town Centre	15.2
Moreton Town Centre	9.4
Wallasey Village Suburban Centre	6.7
Upton Village Suburban Centre	6.6
Hoylake Town Centre	3.8
New Ferry Town Centre	3.5
Prenton (Woodchurch Road) Town Centre	1.4
Retail Parks and Freestanding Stores within the Catchment Area	Comparison Goods Turnover Drawn from Catchment Area Residents (£m)
Croft Retail & Leisure Park, Bromborough	121.0
Junction One Retail Park, Bidston Link Road, Bidston	74.2
The Rock Retail Park, Birkenhead	8.6

- 4.29 Liscard Town Centre has a comparison turnover of £51.7m, whereas the remaining UDP-defined Town Centres all achieve a significantly lower comparison turnover. In particular, Hoylake, New Ferry and Prenton (Woodchurch Road) Town Centres each achieve a comparison goods turnover that is lower than the comparison turnover achieved by Upton Village Suburban Centre.
- 4.30 The main destinations for leakage, again as shown in the penultimate column of Spreadsheet 1.6, are summarised in Table 4.5. There are five principal destinations for comparison goods expenditure leakage which, in order of importance, are Liverpool city centre, e-tail/TV interactive sales, Chester city centre, catalogue shopping and Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet Centre.

Table 4.5 Main Destinations for Comparison Goods Expenditure Leakage

Towns Outside the OCA	Comparison Goods Expenditure Leakage (£m)
Liverpool City Centre	129.82
Chester City Centre	50.2
Retail Parks and Freestanding Stores Outside the OCA, and Other Destinations of Leakage	Comparison Goods Expenditure Leakage (£m)
Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet Centre	20.4
E-tailing	67.3
Catalogue Shopping	25.0
TV/Interactive Shopping	8.3

- 4.31 The OCA's retention level by zone (see Spreadsheet 1.5, '*Total for Study Area*' row) varies from lows of 55.4 per cent in Zone 6 (Heswall) and 58.4 per cent in Zone 1 (Hoylake/West Kirby), to a high of 74.9 per cent in Zone 4b (Birkenhead). Thus, in all 11 zones, more than half of the comparison expenditure available to residents is retained within the OCA.
- 4.32 The localised retention rate - which is the proportion of expenditure on comparison goods available to residents in a specific zone that is spent in town centres and stores located within that zone - is highest for Zone 4a (Birkenhead), at 48.0 per cent (see Spreadsheet 1.5, '*Zone 4a*' column and '*Total Zone 4a*' row). The next highest localised retention rates for comparison goods are for Zone 5a (Croft Retail and Leisure Park), which has a localised retention rate of 39.3 per cent, and Zone 3b (Liscard) which has a localised retention rate of 24.4 per cent. All of the remaining localised retention rates are below 15 per cent, indicating that there is a relatively broad dispersal of comparison shopping patterns around the OCA.

Comparison Goods Market Shares

- 4.33 Below, we provide an analysis of the comparison goods market shares achieved by each of the nine Town Centres in Wirral, as defined in the adopted Wirral UDP, as well as for the out-of-centre Croft Retail & Leisure Park in Bromborough and Junction 1 Retail Park at Bidston Moss, both of which are also important destinations for comparison goods spending in Wirral.

Birkenhead Town Centre

- 4.34 Figure 4.3 in Volume 2 presents a zonal analysis of Birkenhead Town Centre's comparison goods market shares, based on the findings set out in Spreadsheet 1.5. The town centre secures a comparison goods market share in excess of 30 per cent in 3 of the 11 survey zones. The confluence of these three zones is the approximate location of Birkenhead Town Centre and the three zones can be considered to represent Birkenhead Town Centre's primary catchment area.
- 4.35 Birkenhead Town Centre also achieves a market share of between 20 per cent and 30 per cent in a further 3 zones, which represent its secondary catchment area; these zones cover the area immediately to the north and west of Birkenhead. Thus,

Birkenhead Town Centre has a comparison goods market share of at least 20 per cent in 6 of the 11 survey zones.

- 4.36 Birkenhead Town Centre achieves a market share of 10 to 20 per cent in the remaining zones; these form the tertiary catchment area shown in yellow in Figure 4.3 in Volume 2. Birkenhead Town Centre's comparison goods market share is above 14 per cent in each of the 11 survey zones.
- 4.37 It is notable, however, that the extent of Birkenhead Town Centre's catchment area appears to have reduced slightly since the opening of Liverpool One in May 2008⁹. Our April 2008 household survey found that Birkenhead achieved a market share of over 20 per cent in Zones 3b and 5b, and these zones formed part of Birkenhead's secondary catchment area (see Figure 4.4 in Volume 2). However, Birkenhead's market share in these two zones has now decreased, and the two zones now form part of Birkenhead's tertiary catchment area. Birkenhead's primary and secondary catchment areas have, therefore, become more tightly focused around the Birkenhead urban area between April 2008 and March 2009.

Liscard Town Centre

- 4.38 Liscard Town Centre's comparison goods market share reaches a maximum of 25.8 per cent in its neighbouring Zone 3a (Spreadsheet 1.5). The only other zone from which Liscard Town Centre derives any material level of comparison goods expenditure is its local Zone 3b, for which Liscard secures a market share of 22.0 per cent. This is somewhat disappointing given that Liscard is the second-largest town centre in Wirral in terms of retail floorspace. Whilst the low market shares achieved by Liscard can in part be explained by its location in the extreme north-east of the Borough, the generally low-order retail offer is probably the main reason why Liscard does not achieve a higher market share.

Heswall Town Centre

- 4.39 Spreadsheet 1.6 reveals that Heswall Town Centre draws 77 per cent of its comparison goods turnover from residents of its local Zone 6, for which Spreadsheet 1.5 identifies a market share of 11.3 per cent. Heswall does not achieve a comparison market share in excess of 2 per cent in any other zone.

West Kirby Town Centre

- 4.40 Spreadsheet 1.6 shows that West Kirby Town Centre achieves an overall comparison goods market share of 1.6 per cent, almost two-thirds of which is derived from residents of its local Zone 1. The only other zones in which West Kirby achieves a market share over 2 per cent are Zones 2a and 2b.

⁹ However, if Birkenhead Town Centre is considered together with Oxton Road and Grange Road West, the contraction of the combined Birkenhead catchment area is less apparent, for the reasons explained in paragraph 4.16.

Moreton Town Centre

- 4.41 Spreadsheet 1.6 reveals that Moreton Town Centre attracts a comparison turnover of approximately £9.4m, over half of which is secured from residents of its local Zone 2a, for which Spreadsheet 1.5 reveals a market share of 6.7 per cent.

Bromborough Village Town Centre

- 4.42 Bromborough Village Town Centre secures an estimated comparison turnover of approximately £19.5m, according to the household survey. We suspect, however, that the comparison goods turnover for Bromborough Village Town Centre has been inflated by expenditure which should have been attributed to Croft Retail & Leisure Park¹⁰ over 60 per cent of which is derived from residents of its local Zone 5a, and neighbouring Zone 5b. Bromborough Village does not achieve a comparison market share in excess of 2 per cent in any other zone.

Hoylake Town Centre

- 4.43 Spreadsheet 1.6 shows that Hoylake Town Centre achieves an overall comparison goods market share of just 0.4 per cent, over 80 per cent of which is secured from residents of its local Zone 1 where Spreadsheet 1.5 reveals a market share of 3.6 per cent. Hoylake does not achieve a market share over 0.5 per cent in any other zone; these low market shares are perhaps not surprising given Hoylake's location in the extreme north-west of the Borough, meaning that most people would have to by-pass other larger centres before reaching Hoylake.

New Ferry Town Centre

- 4.44 New Ferry Town Centre achieves the same overall comparison market share as Hoylake (0.4 per cent), with over 70 per cent of the centre's turnover deriving from residents in its local Zone 5a and neighbouring Zone 5b. Spreadsheet 1.5 confirms that New Ferry achieves a market share in excess of 1 per cent in only two zones (5a and 5b).

Prenton (Woodchurch Road) Town Centre

- 4.45 Spreadsheet 1.6 shows that Prenton (Woodchurch Road) Town Centre achieves an overall comparison goods market share of just 0.1 per cent - the lowest of the nine UDP-defined Town Centres - giving it a comparison turnover of under £2m. Indeed, Spreadsheet 1.5 reveals that Woodchurch Road does not achieve a market share of 1 per cent or greater in any survey zone.

Croft Retail & Leisure Park

- 4.46 Croft Retail and Leisure Park secures a maximum comparison goods market share of 30.1 per cent in its local Zone 5a, followed by market shares of 18.6 per cent, in Zone 5b and 14.5 per cent in Zone 4b. Croft's comparison goods market share in the other 8 zones is between 6 and 13 per cent.

¹⁰ We did instruct NEMS to check whether respondents who cited 'Bromborough' actually meant 'Bromborough Village' or 'Croft Retail & leisure Park' (please see the survey questionnaire).

Junction One Retail Park

- 4.47 Junction One Retail Park (which includes the B&Q store at Bidston Link Road) secures an overall comparison market share of 7.6 per cent, and achieves a comparison turnover of £74.2m. The Retail Park secures a market share of at least 3.5 per cent in each of the 11 survey zones, and achieves its highest market shares (of over 10 per cent) in Zones 2a and 4a.

Overlapping Comparison Goods Catchments

- 4.48 Table 4.6 presents an analysis of dominant centres - defined for this exercise as instances where the comparison goods market share exceeds 25 per cent - and centres of subsidiary influence, which are defined on the basis of having comparison goods market shares of between 10 per cent and 25 per cent.
- 4.49 Table 4.6 reveals that Birkenhead Town Centre is the dominant centre in four of the 11 zones, and is a centre of subsidiary influence in the remaining 6 zones. However, our April 2008 household survey found that Birkenhead was the dominant centre in seven of the 11 survey zones. The dominant influence of Birkenhead thus appears to have reduced during the course of the ten months in which Liverpool One has been trading. Nevertheless, Birkenhead still attains a comparison goods market share of at least 10 per cent in each of the zones within the OCA.
- 4.50 Apart from Birkenhead, the only centres that are dominant in any zone are Liscard (Zone 3a) and Croft Retail & Leisure Park (Zone 5a). Liverpool is not the dominant centre in any of the 11 survey zones, although it has a subsidiary influence in nine of the zones. The influence of Liverpool city centre is likely to grow, however, as a result of the substantial Liverpool One development which is now fully established. The influence of Chester city centre may also grow if/when the Northgate development is ever realised, albeit as we explained in Section 3 of our report the Northgate scheme now represents a medium to long term prospect¹¹.
- 4.51 Three zones have no dominant centre, namely Zones 1, 5b and 6. It is these zones for which the competition for market share is most intense.

¹¹ Detailed planning permission was granted in 2003 for the Northgate scheme - which would have provided some 440,000 sq.ft of retail floorspace, including a 150,000 sq.ft department store and 60 unit shops - and the necessary CPOs were confirmed in 2006. However, it was announced at the end of October 2009 that the developer, ING, has decided not to proceed with the scheme in its existing form, because of the current economic climate. The developer plans to review the scheme with a view to producing alternative proposals in due course.

Table 4.6 Dominant Comparison Goods Centres and Centres of Subsidiary Influence

Zone	Dominant Centre (Market Share 25%+)	Centres of Subsidiary Influence (Market Share 10% to 25%)
1	-	West Kirby/Birkenhead/Liverpool
2a	Birkenhead	Junction One Retail Park/Liverpool
2b	-	Birkenhead/Liverpool
3a	Liscard	Birkenhead/Liverpool
3b	-	Liscard/Birkenhead/Liverpool
4a	Birkenhead	Liverpool
4b	Birkenhead	Croft
4c	Birkenhead	Junction One Retail Park/Croft/Liverpool
5a	Croft	Birkenhead
5b	-	Birkenhead/Croft/Liverpool
6	-	Birkenhead/Croft/Heswall/Liverpool/Chester

Comparison Goods Sub-sectors

4.52 We now turn to the pattern of shopping for various comparison goods sub-sectors, these are:

- clothes and shoes, which account for £251m of the comparison goods spending of the OCA's residents, of which 32.4 per cent is spent in Birkenhead Town Centre;
- furniture, carpets, and soft household furnishings, which account for £137m of the comparison goods spending of the OCA's residents, of which 21.9 per cent is spent in Birkenhead Town Centre;
- DIY and decorating goods, which account for £101m of the comparison goods spending of residents of the catchment, of which 52.9 per cent is spent at Junction One Retail Park in Bidston (which includes the B&Q Warehouse store);
- domestic appliances, which account for £155m of the comparison goods spending of the OCA's residents, of which 35.9 per cent is spent at Croft Retail & Leisure Park, with 11.4 per cent spent in Birkenhead Town Centre; and
- specialist/other comparison items (such as jewellery, photographic items, sports equipment and musical instruments), which account for £332m of OCA residents' comparison goods spending, of which 27.6 per cent is spent in Birkenhead Town Centre.

Clothes and Shoes

4.53 Overall, 57.8 per cent of the expenditure on clothes and shoes of the OCA's residents is spent in Town Centres, retail parks and in freestanding stores which are located within the catchment area (see final column of Spreadsheet 1.8b). Birkenhead Town Centre accounts for £81.3m of the £145.0m expenditure on clothes and shoes which is retained in the OCA, followed by Croft Retail & Leisure Park (£16.2m), and then Liscard Town Centre (£16.1m).

- 4.54 It is notable, however, that overall the retention of clothes and shoes expenditure has decreased since our April 2008 household survey, when 60.2 per cent of expenditure was retained within the OCA. The decline in the retention of clothes and shoes expenditure can be explained by the opening of the substantial Liverpool One development, providing 160 new high street stores, fashion shops and independent boutiques in Liverpool city centre. Indeed, leakage of this type of comparison retail expenditure to Liverpool city centre has increased from 16.4 per cent in April 2008, to 19.9 per cent by March 2009.
- 4.55 Liverpool and the other main leakage destinations for clothes and shoes are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Leakage Destinations for Clothes and Shoes

Towns Outside the OCA & Other Leakage Destinations	Clothes & Shoes Expenditure (£m)
Liverpool City Centre	50.0
Chester City Centre	17.8
SFT	14.8
Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet Centre	12.2
Other Stores, Outside Buffer Area	7.7
Ellesmere Port Town Centre	1.8

Furniture, Carpets and Soft Furnishings

- 4.56 Overall, 61.2 per cent of the expenditure on furniture, carpets and soft furnishings of the OCA's residents is spent in town centres, retail parks and freestanding stores which are located within the catchment area (see final column of Spreadsheet 1.8d). This is a reasonable level of retention for this comparison goods sub-sector.
- 4.57 Birkenhead Town Centre accounts for £30.0 m of the £83.8m expenditure on furniture and soft household furnishings which is retained in the OCA, followed by Croft Retail & Leisure Park (£13.8m), Junction One Retail Park (£11.2m), and then Liscard Town Centre (£6.2m). No other town centre, retail park or freestanding store within the OCA achieves a spending level on this category of goods which is in excess of £3m.
- 4.58 The main leakage destinations for furniture, carpets and soft furnishings are shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Leakage Destinations for Furniture, Carpets and Soft Furnishings

Towns Outside the OCA & Other Leakage Destinations	Furniture, Carpets & Soft Furnishings Expenditure (£m)
Liverpool City Centre	18.0
Chester City Centre	10.5
SFT	9.5
Other Stores, Outside Buffer Area	6.9
Greyhound Retail Park, Chester	2.9

DIY and Decorating Goods

- 4.59 Overall, 95.6 per cent of the expenditure on DIY and decorating goods available to residents of the OCA is spent in town centres, retail parks and freestanding stores which are located within the catchment area (see final column of Spreadsheet 1.8f); this is a very high level of retention.
- 4.60 The Junction One Retail Park at Bidston, which contains the B&Q Warehouse store, accounts for £53.4m of the DIY and decorating expenditure within the OCA, making it the most important destination for this category of goods, by a considerable margin. Apart from the Homebase in Upton (£9.4m) and Birkenhead Town Centre (£7.6m), no other town centre, retail park or freestanding store accounts for more than £5m of expenditure on this type of goods.
- 4.61 The main leakage destinations for DIY and decorating goods are shown in Table 4.9. As the Table shows, however, the influence of these destinations on the DIY and decorating spending patterns of the OCA's residents is insignificant compared with the Junction One Retail Park in Bidston.

Table 4.9 Leakage Destinations for DIY and Decorating Goods

Towns Outside the OCA & Other Leakage Destinations	DIY and Decorating Goods Expenditure (£m)
Liverpool City Centre	1.2
B&Q, Ellesmere Port	1.0
Ellesmere Port Town Centre	0.4
SFT	0.28

Domestic Appliances

- 4.62 Overall, 69.2 per cent of the expenditure on domestic appliances of the OCA's residents is spent in town centres, retail parks and freestanding stores which are located within the catchment area (see final column of Spreadsheet 1.8h); this is a reasonably high level of retention.
- 4.63 The main destinations for expenditure on domestic appliances within the study area are Croft Retail & Leisure Park (£55.8m) and then Birkenhead Town Centre (£17.8m). Liscard Town Centre (£5.6m) is a distant third.
- 4.64 The main leakage destinations for expenditure on domestic appliances are shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 Leakage Destinations for Domestic Appliances

Towns Outside the OCA & Other Leakage Destinations	Expenditure on Domestic Appliances (£m)
SFT	23.8
Liverpool City Centre	17.2
Chester City Centre	1.3
Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet Centre	1.3

Specialist/Other Comparison Items

- 4.65 Overall, 59.5 per cent of the expenditure on specialist/other comparison goods items available to residents of the OCA is spent in town centres, retail parks and freestanding stores which are located within the catchment area (see final column of Spreadsheet 1.8j). This level of retention might initially appear to be quite modest; however, Chester and Liverpool city centres are within easy reach of Wirral residents and in this context we consider that retaining around 60 per cent of expenditure on this category of goods is relatively good.
- 4.66 The main destinations for expenditure on specialist comparison items within the catchment area are Birkenhead Town Centre (£91.9m), Croft Retail & Leisure Park (£30.3m), Liscard Town Centre (£20.6m), Grange Road West and Oxton Road Suburban Centres (£11.1m), West Kirby Town Centre (£8.9m) and Heswall Town Centre (£6.7m). No other destination within the OCA accounts for more than £5m of expenditure on this category of goods.
- 4.67 The main leakage destinations for expenditure on specialist comparison goods are shown in Table 4.11, which shows that SFT accounts for the highest leakage of expenditure on specialist/other comparison goods items.

Table 4.11 Leakage Destinations for Specialist/Other Comparison Items

Towns Outside the OCA & Other Leakage Destinations	Expenditure on Specialist Comparison Goods (£m)
SFT	52.4
Liverpool City Centre	44.2
Chester City Centre	20.3
Other Stores, Outside Buffer Area	7.4
Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet Centre	5.8

Summary of Retention and Leakage for Each of the Comparison Goods Sub-sectors

- 4.68 Table 4.12 presents a summary of retention and leakage for each of the five comparison goods sub-sectors. Birkenhead Town Centre's sub-sector market shares (first row of percentages) are highest for clothes and shoes, at 32 per cent, followed by the specialist and other comparison goods sector, at 28 per cent.
- 4.69 The Junction One Retail Park at Bidston is, by far, the main destination for DIY and decorating goods, with Croft Retail & Leisure Park achieving the highest market share in the electrical goods sector. With the exception of Birkenhead, none of the Key Town Centres within the OCA achieves a market share of more than 7 per cent in any of the five comparison goods sub-sectors.
- 4.70 The leakage of expenditure to SFT is highest in the domestic appliance and other/specialist goods sub-sectors (representing 15 per cent and 16 per cent of expenditure, respectively).

- 4.71 It is disappointing that the overall retention rate (sixth row of percentages in Table 4.12) is lowest for the important clothes and shoes sub-sector (at a relatively modest 58 per cent), followed by the specialist and other comparison goods sub-sector (at 60 per cent). This is an important piece of evidence which suggests the need to promote quality developments within and around Birkenhead Town Centre, which are targeted at higher value middle and up-market comparison retailers.

Table 4.12 Summary of Retention and Leakage by Comparison Goods Sub-Sectors

	Clothes & Shoes	Furniture etc	DIY	Electrical	Specialist/ Other	All Comparison
Birkenhead Town Centre	32%	22%	8%	11%	28%	23%
Liscard Town Centre	6%	5%	4%	4%	6%	5%
Croft Retail & Leisure Park	6%	10%	4%	36%	9%	12%
Junction One Retail Park, Bidston	1%	8%	53%	2%	1%	8%
Other Centres/Retail Parks/Stores within the OCA	13%	16%	27%	16%	16%	17%
Total Retained Expenditure	58%	61%	96%	69%	60%	65%
Buffer Zones						
Just Outside the OCA	33%	27%	4%	15%	22%	23%
SFT leakage	6%	7%	0%	15%	16%	10%
Other more distant leakage	3%	5%	0%	1%	2%	2%
Total Leakage	42%	39%	4%	31%	40%	35%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Convenience Goods Spending Patterns in 2009

- 4.72 The per capita spend on convenience goods in 2009 (Spreadsheet 5.3) varies from a low of £1,486 in Zone 4a (Birkenhead) to highs of £1,757 in Zone 6 (Heswall) and £1,758 in Zone 1 (Hoylake/West Kirby). In comparison, the average UK spending on convenience goods in 2009 is £1,701 per capita and Spreadsheet 5.3 reveals that all but five of the 11 survey zones in Wirral's OCA have convenience goods spending levels below the UK average.
- 4.73 The total amount of convenience goods spending for residents of the whole study area in 2009 is £517.3m (Spreadsheet 5.4), of which £8.9m, or 1.7 per cent, is spent on SFT (which primarily takes the form of internet shopping in the convenience sector). The pattern of expenditure flows for the convenience goods sector as a whole, as revealed by the survey of households, is set out in Spreadsheets 5.5 and 5.6.
- 4.74 Table 4.13 - which is derived from the final column of Spreadsheet 5.6 - reveals that, overall, some £497.9m, or 96.2 per cent, of the expenditure on convenience goods available to residents of the OCA is spent in town, district and local centres and in freestanding stores which are located within the catchment area; this is known as the aggregate retention rate (see Spreadsheet 5.6, final column, 'Total for Study Area' row). A further 2 per cent of convenience expenditure flows to stores in

the nearby buffer zones shown in Figure 4.2 of Volume 2, SFT accounts for a further 2 per cent, and there is no longer-distance leakage.

Table 4.13 Broad Destination for Convenience Goods Expenditure

Broad Destination for Convenience Goods Expenditure	£m	%
Expenditure Retained by Centres and Freestanding Stores within the OCA	498	96
Buffer Zones Just Outside the OCA	10	2
SFT	9	2
Other More Distant Locations	0	0
Total Leakage	19	4
TOTAL	517	100%

- 4.75 The estimated convenience goods turnovers of the foodstores located within the study area, prior to making any allowance for any expenditure inflow from those who are resident beyond the study area, are set out in the penultimate column of Spreadsheet 5.6, and are summarised in Table 4.14.
- 4.76 The nine largest foodstores located within the OCA, as listed in Table 4.14, collectively account for 64 per cent of the aggregate convenience goods expenditure available to the Borough's residents. The same nine stores had a combined convenience market share of 61 per cent in 2003. This recent improvement reflects the polarisation trend experienced in the convenience goods sector, whereby there has been continued growth in the aggregate market share of the top four operators - Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons - at the expense of smaller supermarket operators and independent retailers. Some of the improvement in the market share of the nine main foodstores is probably attributable to the closure of the Kwik Save stores across the Borough as a consequence of the operator's demise in July 2007.

Table 4.14 Convenience Goods Expenditure Retained within the OCA

Foodstores Within the OCA	Convenience Goods Turnover Drawn from Catchment Area Residents (£m)
Asda, Seaview Road, Liscard	58.6
Asda, Welton Road, Croft Business Park	58.3
Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston	44.2
Sainsbury's, Upton Bypass, Upton	41.3
Asda, Woodchurch Road, Arrowe Park	37.5
Tesco, Telegraph Road, Heswall	28.8
Morrisons, Dee Lane, West Kirby*	25.7
Sainsbury's, Woodchurch Road, Prenton	22.5
Tesco Metro, Bebington Road, Rock Ferry	14.0

*Morrisons operates from the same unit that was occupied by Safeway in 2003.

- 4.77 The main leakage destinations for convenience goods expenditure, again as shown in the penultimate column of Spreadsheet 5.6, are set out in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15 Main Destinations for Convenience Goods Expenditure Leakage

Stores Outside the OCA	Convenience Goods Expenditure Leakage (£m)
SFT (i.e. shopping via the Internet)	8.9
Stores in Ellesmere Port Town Centre	4.3
Stores in Buffer 2 of Fig 4.2	1.7
Stores in Neston Town Centre	1.5
Stores in Buffer 1 of Fig 4.2	1.3
Stores in Liverpool City Centre	1.3

- 4.78 The OCA's retention level by zone (see Spreadsheet 5.5, '*Total for Study Area*' row) varies from a low of 92.6 per cent in Zone 5b (Lower Bebington), to a high of 98.8 per cent in Zone 4a (Birkenhead). Thus, there are very high retention levels of over 90 per cent in all 11 survey zones.
- 4.79 The localised convenience goods retention rate - that is, the proportion of expenditure on convenience goods available to residents in a specific zone which is spent in town centres and stores located within that zone - is highest for Zone 5a (Bromborough), which has a localised retention rate of 87.0 per cent (see Spreadsheet 5.5, '*Zone 5a*' column and '*Total Zone 5a*' row, and Table 4.16). The next highest localised retention rates for convenience goods are for Zone 3b (Liscard), which has a localised retention rate of 77.9 per cent, and Zone 2b (Upton/Woodchurch) which has a localised retention rate of 74.2 per cent.

Table 4.16 Localised Convenience Goods Retention Rates

Zones	% Zonal Retention Rates
1	62.0
2a	38.2
2b	74.2
3a	4.6
3b	77.9
4a	36.2
4b	40.5
4c	18.7
5a	87.0
5b	19.5
6	69.6

- 4.80 The survey findings (summarised in Table 4.16) indicate that there are three zones where the localised retention rate is particularly low. In Zone 3a (Seacombe), the localised retention rate is just 4.6 per cent. However, most residents of Zone 3a travel to the nearby Asda store at Liscard (Zone 3b), and local convenience provision will be bolstered when the Morrisons commitment at New Brighton (also within Zone 3b) is implemented. The convenience offer in Seacombe has improved with the opening of Tesco Express, and we anticipate that the apparent deficiency will be further addressed by the reoccupation of the former Kwik Save unit on

Brighton Street by Netto, and the proposed supermarket in the pipeline at Wirral Waters Northbank. Zone 5b (Lower Bebington) retains just 19.5 per cent of convenience expenditure. However, around half of the expenditure available to residents in Zone 5b is spent in the Asda store at Croft Business Park and at the Tesco Metro store in Rock Ferry. Both of these stores are located in directly adjoining zones and so residents of Zone 5b do not have to travel an unreasonable distance for their convenience shopping. The other zone where the localised retention rate is very low is Zone 4c (Birkenhead); however, this deficiency will be addressed by implementation of the extant commitment for a new Asda superstore in Birkenhead Town Centre.

- 4.81 Overall, therefore, the survey findings do not indicate a pressing need for an improved convenience offer in any part of the OCA, over and above outstanding permissions. This is, however, based on current circumstances; a qualitative need may arise in the future in areas of substantial population growth (such as Wirral Waters, for instance).

Convenience Goods Market Shares

- 4.82 As stated earlier, we have found that the main nine supermarkets located within the OCA account for 64 per cent of the aggregate convenience goods expenditure of catchment area residents. In Table 4.17, we present an analysis of convenience goods market shares, which shows dominant stores with a zonal market share of over 30 per cent, and stores with shares between 10 and 30 per cent, which have subsidiary influence.

Table 4.17 Dominant Convenience Goods Stores, and Stores with Subsidiary Influence

Zone	Dominant Stores (Market Share of 30%+)	Subsidiary Stores (Market Share 10 to 30%)
1	Morrisons, Dee Lane, West Kirby	Sainsbury's, Upton Bypass, Upton
2a	-	Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston Somerfield, Hoylake Road, Moreton
2b	Sainsbury's, Upton Bypass, Upton	Asda, Woodchurch Road, Arrowe Park
3a	Asda, Seaview Road, Liscard	Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston Iceland, Liscard Way, Wallasey
3b	Asda, Seaview Road, Liscard	Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston
4a	-	Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston Aldi, Laird Street, Birkenhead
4b	-	Tesco Metro, Bebington Road, Rock Ferry Asda, Woodchurch Road, Arrowe Park Asda, Welton Road, Croft Business Park
4c	-	Sainsbury's, Woodchurch Road, Prenton Asda, Woodchurch Road, Arrowe Park Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston
5a	Asda, Welton Road, Croft Business Park	-
5b	Asda, Welton Road, Croft Business Park	-
6	Tesco, Telegraph Road, Heswall	-

4.83 The analysis in Table 4.17 shows that:

- i) Four of the 11 survey zones lack a dominant store with a market share of over 30 per cent; these are Zone 2a (Moreton), and Zones 4a, 4b and 4c (the Birkenhead area).
- ii) No zone has two dominant stores.
- iii) Residents of Zone 4c (Birkenhead/Bidston) have a choice of three different superstore operators - Tesco, Asda and Sainsbury's.
- iv) The highest individual zonal market shares are enjoyed by:
 - Asda at Liscard, which accounts for 58.6 per cent of the convenience goods expenditure of the residents of Zone 3b, and 44.5 per cent of the convenience goods expenditure of the residents of adjoining Zone 3a;
 - Asda at Croft Business Park, which accounts for 56.1 per cent of the convenience goods expenditure of the residents of Zone 5a, and 40.6 per cent of the convenience goods expenditure of the residents of adjoining Zone 5b;
 - Tesco at Heswall, which accounts for 49.2 per cent of the expenditure of residents of Zone 6;
 - Morrisons at West Kirby, which accounts for 43.6 per cent of the expenditure available to residents of Zone 1; and
 - Sainsbury's at Upton, which accounts for 40.9 per cent of the convenience expenditure available to residents of its local Zone 2b.

4.84 The survey findings confirm that most convenience shopping is undertaken on a highly localised basis. Indeed, Spreadsheet 5.5 reveals that only three stores within the OCA have market shares of over 10 per cent in three or more zones; these are: the Asda stores at Arrowe Park and Croft Business Park, and the Tesco Extra store at Bidston.

4.85 Table 4.18, which is derived from Spreadsheet 5.6, sets out the zones from which each of the nine superstores draws most of its convenience goods trade and the proportion of turnover accounted for by these main sources.

Table 4.18 Catchment Area Supermarkets - Main Sources of Convenience Trade

Superstore	Main Sources of Trade (Zones)	Proportion of Turnover Drawn from Main Sources of Trade
Asda, Seaview Road, Liscard	3a & 3b	85%
Asda, Welton Road, Croft Business Park	5a & 5b	81%
Asda, Woodchurch Road, Arrowe Park	2b, 4b & 4c	76%
Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston	2a, 3a, 3b, 4a & 4c	80%
Sainsbury's, Upton By-pass, Upton	1, 2b, 4c & 6	81%
Tesco, Telegraph Road, Heswall	6	91%
Morrisons, Dee Lane, West Kirby	1	77%
Sainsbury's, Woodchurch Road, Prenton	4b & 4c	84%
Tesco Metro, Bebington Road, Rock Ferry	4b & 5b	90%

Source: Spreadsheet 5.6, Volume 2

- 4.86 Thus, the store with the widest pattern of convenience trade draw is the Tesco Extra store in Bidston.

Pattern of Spending on Leisure Services

- 4.87 The telephone survey of households also included a number of questions that asked residents of the OCA where they spent most money in relation to various types of leisure services, as follows:

- i) restaurants;
- ii) pubs, bars and nightclubs;
- iii) cinemas;
- iv) museums and art galleries;
- v) family entertainment centres (i.e. ten pin bowling, skating and so on)
- vi) health and fitness centres;
- vii) bingo/casinos/bookmakers; and
- viii) theatres/concerts.

- 4.88 The most popular destinations for these different activities for residents of each survey zone are set out in Table 4.19.

Restaurants

- 4.89 Around 75 per cent of households across the OCA undertake visits to restaurants. The most popular destination is Liverpool city centre (10 per cent), followed by Heswall Town Centre (8 per cent), and then West Kirby Town Centre (6 per cent). Birkenhead Town Centre is the fourth most popular destination for restaurant trips, and achieves a low market share (6 per cent) considering its status as a strategic centre (Policy W5 of RSS).

- 4.90 Birkenhead Town Centre is only the most popular destination for visits to restaurants for residents of its local Zones 4a and 4b. The most popular destination for residents of Zones 3b, 4c and 5b is Liverpool. For residents of Zone 1, West

Kirby is the most popular restaurant destination, whereas for residents of Zone 2a, Moreton is the most popular destination. For residents of Zone 3a, Liscard is the most popular destination, for residents of Zone 5a it is Bromborough Village, and for residents of Zone 6, it is Heswall. With the exception of the trips to Liverpool, these patterns reflect the fairly localised nature of visits to restaurants.

Pubs, Bars and Nightclubs

- 4.91 Only 51 per cent of households claim to visit pubs, bars or nightclubs. As was the case with restaurants, it is Liverpool (8 per cent) that is the most popular destination for pub, bar and nightclub visits. Birkenhead (4 per cent) is the second most popular destination, followed by Wallasey Village (also 4 per cent), West Kirby (again 4 per cent), and Heswall (3 per cent). No other destination accounts for more than 3 per cent of respondents.
- 4.92 Liverpool is the most popular destination for visits to pubs and bars for residents of Zone 4a (Birkenhead Town Centre) and Zone 5b, with Birkenhead only being the most popular destination for residents of Zone 4b. The most popular destinations for the remaining zones, which are set out in Table 4.19, reflect the localised nature of spending in pubs and bars.

Cinemas

- 4.93 The most important cinema destinations are the 11-screen Odeon at Croft Retail & Leisure Park (21 per cent) and the 7-screen Vue Cinema at Europa Boulevard, Birkenhead (15 per cent). As might be expected, the Odeon is the most popular destination for residents of most zones in the western and southern parts of the OCA, whereas the Vue Cinema is the principal destination for residents in the remaining part of Wirral, closer to Birkenhead.

Museums & Art Galleries

- 4.94 Around 40 per cent of respondents do not visit museums and art galleries, but for those that do, the only material destination is Liverpool city centre, which accounts for 47 per cent of all OCA residents' trips for this leisure activity; no other destination accounts for more than 4 per cent of trips.

Table 4.19 Most Popular Destinations for Expenditure on Leisure Services

Survey Zone	Main Destination by Category of Leisure Pursuit							
	Restaurants	Bars/Clubs & Pubs	Cinema	Museums & Art Galleries	Family Entertainment	Health & Fitness	Bingo, Casino & Bookmaker	Theatre & Concerts
1	West Kirby	West Kirby	Croft R&LP	L'pool	New Brighton	West Kirby	B'head	L'pool
2a	Moreton	Moreton	B'head	L'pool	New Brighton	West Kirby	B'head/Moreton/West Kirby	L'pool
2b	Greasby	Greasby	Croft R&LP	L'pool	Croft R&LP	West Kirby /Total Fitness (Prenton)	B'head/Greasby/Upton Village	L'pool
3a	Liscard	Liscard	B'head	L'pool	New Brighton	B'head /S'combe /Wallasey Village	Wallasey Village	L'pool
3b	L'pool	Wallasey Village	B'head	L'pool	New Brighton	Liscard	B'head/Liscard	L'pool
4a	B'head	L'pool	B'head	L'pool	New Brighton	B'head	B'head	L'pool
4b	B'head	B'head	Croft R&LP	L'pool	Croft R&LP	B'head	B'head	L'pool
4c	L'pool	Oxton Village	Croft R&LP	L'pool	New Brighton	Total Fitness (Prenton)	B'head	L'pool
5a	B'borough Village	B'borough Village	Croft R&LP	L'pool	Croft R&LP	Croft R&LP	Croft R&LP	L'pool
5b	L'pool	L'pool	Croft R&LP	L'pool	Croft R&LP	Croft R&LP	Croft R&LP	L'pool
6	Heswall	Heswall	Croft R&LP	L'pool	Croft R&LP	West Kirby	B'head	L'pool
Main Spend across all zones	L'pool	L'pool	Croft R&LP	L'pool	New Brighton	West Kirby	B'head	L'pool

Family Entertainment Centres (i.e. Ten Pin Bowling, Skating and so on)

- 4.95 Some 70 per cent of respondents claim not to visit family entertainment centres such as ten pin bowling alleys and skating rinks. However, for those that do use such facilities, New Brighton is the main destination for residents of 6 of the 11 survey zones, with residents attracted to facilities such as the New Palace Family Entertainment Centre and the Riverside Bowl and Laser Quest. Croft Retail & Leisure Park is the most popular destination for residents of the remaining five survey zones.

Health and Fitness Centres

- 4.96 Approximately 70 per cent of respondents claim not to undertake health and fitness activities; for the minority who do participate, there is a wide dispersal of usage at

facilities across Wirral, with no single destination being dominant. Although we have no national data on the proportion of households undertaking health and fitness activities, it is perhaps noteworthy that non-participation in the Wirral OCA is very similar to the Knowsley and Bolton catchment areas, where similar surveys undertaken by RTP last year found non-participation rates of 68 per cent and 67 per cent, respectively.

Bingo/Casinos/Bookmakers

- 4.97 The overwhelming majority of respondents (89 per cent) claim not to undertake activities which involve gambling, such as visits to bingo halls, casinos and bookmakers. Of those that do participate, Birkenhead is the most important location.

Theatres/Concerts

- 4.98 Some 36 per cent of respondents claim not to undertake visits to theatres or concert halls. Of those that do participate, Liverpool city centre is by far the most important location, for residents of all zones in the OCA.

Conclusions in Relation to Retail & Leisure Spending Patterns

Comparison Goods Spending

- 4.99 Overall, some 65 per cent of the comparison goods expenditure of the residents of the OCA is retained by town centres, retail parks, and freestanding stores located in Wirral. The main destinations within the OCA are Birkenhead Town Centre, which secures £227m of the residents' comparison goods expenditure, and Croft Retail & Leisure Park, which accounts for £121m.
- 4.100 Short-distance leakage to places like Liverpool city centre, Chester city centre and Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet Centre accounts for 23 per cent of the residents' comparison goods expenditure; SFT leakage accounts for 10 per cent; and the remaining 2 per cent of comparison goods expenditure is accounted for by longer distance leakage to places like IKEA in Warrington and the Trafford Centre.
- 4.101 Whilst Birkenhead Town Centre accounts for 23 per cent of the comparison expenditure available to the OCA's residents, none of the remaining eight Town Centres as defined in the adopted Wirral UDP achieve an overall comparison market share in excess of 6 per cent. Indeed, Hoylake, Moreton, Prenton (Woodchurch Road) and New Ferry each achieve an overall market share of one per cent or less. This finding indicates that these are essentially district centres, rather than fulfilling a more wide-ranging Town Centre role.
- 4.102 The telephone household survey was undertaken twice; firstly in April 2008 and again in March 2009. We have compared the findings from the two household surveys in order to assess whether the substantial Liverpool One development has had any effect on shopping patterns in Wirral. The household survey evidence suggests that Birkenhead Town Centre has already been affected by the opening of Liverpool One. In particular, we note that between April 2008 and March 2009:

- the overall comparison market share achieved by Birkenhead (including Birkenhead Town Centre, Oxton Road and Grange Road West) has experienced a decline of 3.7 percentage points.
- Birkenhead's primary and secondary catchment areas have contracted and become more tightly focused around the Birkenhead urban area.
- Birkenhead was the dominant centre (attaining a comparison goods market share of at least 30 per cent) in seven of the 11 survey zones in 2008. Birkenhead's influence has since reduced and Birkenhead is now the dominant centre in only four of the survey zones.
- Birkenhead's retention of expenditure in the important clothes and shoes sector has decreased from 60 to 58 per cent.

4.103 It is clear, therefore, that a shift in shopping behaviour relating to Birkenhead Town Centre is beginning to occur, and this will need to be monitored carefully over forthcoming years. Indeed, as Liverpool One becomes more established, we expect that the shifts in shopping patterns already observed may become more entrenched, unless the retail offer in Birkenhead is enhanced to offset the competition. This is an important piece of evidence which suggests the need to promote quality developments within and around Birkenhead Town Centre, which are targeted at higher value middle and up-market comparison retailers.

Convenience Goods Spending

- 4.104 Overall, 96 per cent of the convenience goods expenditure available to residents of the OCA is retained by town, district and local centres and freestanding stores located in Wirral. Thus, as might be expected in the convenience sector, there is a minimal level of strategic leakage.
- 4.105 The household survey suggests that there has been a continuing polarisation trend in the convenience goods sector, in that the nine superstores located within the OCA now account for 64 per cent of the aggregate convenience goods expenditure of the OCA's residents. Indeed, only 4 of the 11 zones lack a 'dominant' superstore, which is defined as having a convenience goods market share in excess of 30 per cent.
- 4.106 The highest individual market shares are achieved by Asda in Liscard, Asda at Croft, Tesco Extra in Bidston, Sainsbury's at Upton, and Asda at Arrowe Park.
- 4.107 There are no parts of the OCA where there is a particular localised deficiency in convenience goods provision. Whilst the localised retention rates in Zones 3a (Seacombe), 4c (Birkenhead) and 5b (Lower Bebington) are low, residents in these zones are either adequately served by food superstores in adjoining zones, or will benefit from new supermarkets which are committed within these zones.

Leisure Services Spending

- 4.108 Liverpool city centre is the most important location for spending at restaurants, but this type of spending tends to be quite localised and West Kirby, Moreton, Liscard, Bromborough Village and Heswall Town Centres are all popular in their local zones.

- 4.109 Liverpool and Birkenhead are the top locations for spending in pubs and bars, but again, the pattern of spending is localised and West Kirby, Liscard and Heswall Town Centres all perform well in their local zones.
- 4.110 So far as cinemas are concerned, there is a divide between the Odeon at the Croft Retail & Leisure Park which mainly serves residents in the western and southern parts of the OCA, and the Vue Cinema facility which serves the areas nearest to Birkenhead.
- 4.111 Liverpool city centre is by far the most important destination for visits to museums and art galleries.
- 4.112 New Brighton and Croft Retail & Leisure Park reign supreme when it comes to expenditure at family entertainment centres, being dominant in 6 and 5 of the 11 survey zones, respectively.
- 4.113 Over two-thirds of the respondents do not participate in health and fitness activities and West Kirby Town Centre is the most important destination for those that do. Similarly, almost 90 per cent of respondents do not participate in gambling in bingo halls, casinos, bookmakers and so on, but for those that do, Birkenhead Town Centre is the most important location.
- 4.114 Liverpool city centre is by far the most important location for visits to theatres and concert halls for residents of all 11 zones.

5 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE NEED IN THE RETAIL AND LEISURE SECTORS

Introduction

- 5.1 We turn now to our assessment of the quantitative and qualitative needs likely to arise in the retail and leisure sectors in the period up to 2021 and, more indicatively, for the further period from 2021 to 2026. The official duration of the Core Strategy remains 15 years, to 2026, although we understand that the Council has been receiving advice that consideration needs to be given to looking beyond this period. However, we would certainly not recommend that, at this stage, the assessment of capacity should be extended beyond 2026 to cover the further five years to 2031. To do so would result in very substantial (and potentially misleading) floorspace figures because of the exponential shape of the expenditure growth graph. Furthermore, PPS6 enshrines the need to plan, monitor and manage and this is the approach that we would advise the Council to take.
- 5.2 In undertaking the assessment of retail need, we have followed the guidance set out in paragraphs 2.32 to 2.37 of PPS6. We deal first with quantitative retail need, taking the class of goods approach to the assessment, as required by paragraph 2.34 of PPS6 (and consistent with Policy EC1.4 of the draft PPS4), before considering issued of qualitative retail need, and then need in the commercial leisure sector.

Methodology for Assessing Quantitative Retail Need

- 5.3 The essential steps in the assessment of quantitative retail need are as follows:
- i) establish the appropriate catchment area for the highest order centre being considered, in this case Birkenhead;
 - ii) assess the existing level of population and existing volume of retail expenditure of those resident within the defined catchment area;
 - iii) establish where the expenditure of the residents of the catchment area is currently spent, through use of an empirical survey of households resident in the catchment area (as discussed in Section 3), and thereby establish the proportion of expenditure which is currently retained by town centres and freestanding stores located within the catchment - that is, the current retention rate;
 - iv) apply forecasts of population change and per capita expenditure growth, so as to establish the overall level of projected growth in expenditure for residents of the catchment area and an assessment of growth in retained expenditure, using, initially, a constant retention assumption;
 - v) make allowance for 'claims' on the growth in retained expenditure as a result of:
 - floorspace efficiency change (that is, the growth in turnover for existing retailers within existing floorspace);
 - growth over time in Special Forms of Trading (SFT), mainly e-tail growth, but taking account, also, of the projected decline in catalogue sales; and
 - planning commitments.

- vi) calculate the initial residual expenditure pot which is potentially available for new retail floorspace, based on steps iv) and v) above;
- vii) make an allowance for under-trading or over-trading in the base year, if this is justified on the basis of circumstances identified by the Court of Appeal in its Kidlington judgment¹²; and
- viii) develop alternative scenarios for calculating growth in residual expenditure, based on:
 - increases or decreases in the projected retention level;
 - increases or decreases in the geographical size of the catchment area, if this is justified as part of a strategy to raise the role and function of the centre as part of the development plan process; and
 - sensitivity testing of key assumptions.

Definition of the Overall Catchment Area

- 5.4 The overall catchment area (OCA) was defined on the basis of the approach described at the beginning of Section 4 of our report, and is split into 11 zones based on postcode boundaries, as shown in Figure 4.1 and Spreadsheet 1.1¹³ (in Volume 2)¹⁴.

Existing Level of Population and Expenditure

- 5.5 The population by zone in the 2009 base year is set out in the second row of Spreadsheet 1.2; those data are based on year 2006 zonal population figures supplied by Pitney Bowes MapInfo and rolled forward to 2009, using the ONS's 2006 based sub-national population projections (which were published in June 2008).
- 5.6 The zonal per capita expenditure data were supplied by Pitney Bowes MapInfo for the year 2006, as set out in the top row of Spreadsheet 1.3 for comparison goods and in the top row of Spreadsheet 5.3 for convenience goods. These data are then rolled forward to 2009 using: the actual comparison and convenience growth rates of 4.91 per cent per annum and 2.2 per cent per annum respectively from 2006 to 2008, as provided by Pitney Bowes MapInfo¹⁵; and from 2008 to 2009, the forecast growth rates of 1.805 per cent per annum for comparison goods and 0.23 per cent

¹² The First Secretary of State and Another and Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd, 6 May 2005, Case No C3/2004/1658.

¹³ There are six sets of Spreadsheets in Volume 2 (four sets of comparison spreadsheets and two sets of convenience Spreadsheets), as explained later in this section. All six sets contain the same base data in relation to population; all four sets of comparison spreadsheets contain the same per capita expenditure data; and the two sets of convenience spreadsheets contain the same per capita expenditure data. For the sake of brevity, throughout this section of our report we refer simply to the first set of Spreadsheets, rather than the full list of Spreadsheets which contain the same data (such as '*Spreadsheets 1.1, 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1...*').

¹⁴ All subsequent mentions of 'Spreadsheets' in this section of our report relate to the Spreadsheets that are contained in the separately bound Volume 2.

¹⁵ Retail Spending Outlook, Oxford Economics Retail Briefings Update, p4, Pitney Bowes MapInfo, Revised Version March 2009

per annum for convenience goods, based on forecast comparison and convenience goods growth rates from both Pitney Bowes MapInfo¹⁶ and Experian¹⁷.

- 5.7 The total pot of expenditure in 2009 is derived from the product of Spreadsheets 1.2 and 1.3 for comparison goods and from the product of Spreadsheets 5.2 and 5.3 for convenience goods. Thus, the total expenditure pot (which includes expenditure on SFT) for 2009 and each of the forecast years is set out in Spreadsheet 1.4 for comparison goods, and Spreadsheet 5.4 for convenience goods.

Existing Retention Rate

- 5.8 The next step is to use the household survey findings to establish current patterns of expenditure and the current retention rate, as described in Section 4 of our report. Thus, the current pattern of expenditure and current retention rate for comparison goods is as set out in Spreadsheet 1.6, with the overall retention rate for comparison goods being 64.7 per cent (as set out in the final column, '*Total for Study Area*' row). For convenience goods, the pattern of expenditure and the current retention rate is as set out in Spreadsheet 5.6, which reveals a convenience goods retention rate of 96.2 per cent (see the final column of Spreadsheet 5.6, in the '*Total for Study Area*' row).

Growth in Expenditure and Growth in Retained Expenditure

- 5.9 The next steps are to apply forecasts of population change and per capita expenditure growth, so as to establish the overall level of projected growth in expenditure for all residents of the catchment area and then an assessment of growth in retained expenditure, using, initially, a constant retention assumption.
- 5.10 Population change is based on the ONS 2006-based sub-national projections, as set out in Spreadsheets 1.2 and 5.2. Using this method, the resident population across the entire study area is forecast to increase from 310,816 in the 2009 base year to 314,516 in 2026. This equates to a total population increase of 1.2 per cent over the entire study period.
- 5.11 The data on growth in per capita expenditure are as set out in Spreadsheet 1.3 for comparison goods and in Spreadsheet 5.3 for convenience goods, which utilise the growth rates as shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 and detailed in paragraphs 5.15 to 5.51 below.
- 5.12 Spreadsheet 1.4 is the product of Spreadsheets 1.2 and 1.3 and it sets out the total growth in comparison goods expenditure for all residents in the OCA. Spreadsheet 5.4 sets out the corresponding data for growth in convenience goods expenditure.
- 5.13 Thus, Row A of Spreadsheet 1.9a sets out the total growth in comparison goods expenditure up to 2026 and it reflects the final column of figures in Spreadsheet 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1, Note Re. Important Changes to the Projections, Table 3, Experian, February 2009

Similarly, Row A of Spreadsheet 5.7 sets out the total growth in convenience goods expenditure up to 2026 and it reflects the final column of figures in Spreadsheet 5.4.

- 5.14 Having calculated the growth in total expenditure for all residents of the OCA (Row A of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7), the next step is to assess the growth in retained expenditure (Row C of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7), initially on the basis of a constant aggregate retention level (Row B of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7).

Comparison and convenience goods expenditure growth per capita

- 5.15 The per capita comparison and convenience goods expenditure growth rates utilised for the two year period from 2006 to 2008 are as provided by Pitney Bowes MapInfo in March 2009; 4.91 and 2.2 per cent per capita per annum, respectively. For the eight year period from 2008 to 2016, the midpoints of the recent forecasts as provided by Experian in February 2009 and by Pitney Bowes MapInfo in March 2009 are adopted; 1.805 per cent per capita per annum for comparison goods and 0.23 per cent per capita per annum for convenience goods (as shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 below).
- 5.16 The forecasters anticipate muted medium-term growth prospects for the period to 2016, as the recent collapse in investment and the need to restore government finances significantly constrain economic growth and consumer spending. Recent rises in unemployment are expected to impact upon consumption growth in the short and medium term periods. Along with tighter lending conditions, higher unemployment is forecast to be a legacy of the current recession. The forecasters therefore expect that the boom conditions of the past decade are unlikely to be repeated in the period to 2016 or so as consumers tighten their purses as a result of the global recession and correction in the housing market. This explains why the forecasters' published growth rates for the next 6 or 7 years are relatively low.
- 5.17 In making judgments of the likely comparison goods growth rates in the five year period from 2016 to 2021, and from 2021 to 2026, we have looked back at previous trends, as set out in Table 1 of MapInfo Brief 08/02 and reproduced in Figure 5.1 below.
- 5.18 Table 1 of MapInfo Brief 08/02 sets out the comparison goods per capita expenditure growth rate for every year going back to 1981 and so includes the two previous recessions of the early 1980s and the early 1990s. MapInfo's Table 1 shows that there have only been two years out of the past 27 where the comparison goods per capita expenditure change figure has been negative, these being 1981 and 1991. Furthermore, in only two further years has the comparison goods per capita growth rate dropped below 2 per cent, these being 1982 and 1990. Thus, both of the past two recessions have been followed by fairly rapid recovery in comparison goods retail spending, with the early 1980s recession followed by comparison goods growth rates which reached 7.9 per cent in 1986 and 8.3 per cent in 1988. Similarly, the early 1990s recession was followed by comparison goods growth rates which reached 6.8 per cent in 1994 and 7.3 per cent in 1999. Thus, the pattern of the two previous recessions in the comparison goods sector

has been for two years of low growth (one of which is negative), followed in succeeding years by a return to short, medium and long term past trends.

- 5.19 In the convenience goods sector, however, there have been nine years with negative growth rates, three of which were in the early 1980s recession, between 1981 and 1984, and three of which were in the early 1990s recession, between 1990 and 1992. Thus, it would seem that negative growth in the convenience goods sector is more likely to last for more than one year in the current recession than is the case with the comparison goods sector.

Table 5.1 Comparison Expenditure Growth Per Capita, 2006-2026 (the expenditure growth rates applied in this study are highlighted in red)

Year	No of Years	Rate Per Annum	Source
2006-2008	2	4.910%	Oxford Economics Retail Briefings Update Revised March 2009
2008-2016	8	1.300%	Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1 February 2009 Changes, Table 3 Midpoint of MapInfo/Experian MapInfo, Retail Spending Outlook Revised Version March 2009
		1.805%	
		2.310%	
2016-2021	5	5.600%	MapInfo Brief 08/02, medium term past trend, Table 3 Midpoint of MapInfo/Experian Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1, medium term past trend, Table 3.2
		5.850%	
		6.100%	
2021-2026	5	3.900%	MapInfo Brief 08/02, ultra long term past trend, Table 3 Midpoint of MapInfo/Experian Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1, ultra long term past trend, Table 3.2
		4.250%	
		4.600%	

Table 5.2 Convenience Expenditure Growth Per Capita, 2006-2026 (the expenditure growth rates applied in this study are highlighted in red)

Year	No of Years	Rate Per Annum	Source
2006-2008	2	2.200%	Oxford Economics Retail Briefings Update Revised March 2009
2008-2016	8	0.200%	Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1 February 2009 Changes, Table 3 Midpoint of MapInfo/Experian MapInfo, Retail Spending Outlook Revised Version March 2009
		0.230%	
		0.260%	
2016-2021	5	0.600%	MapInfo Brief 08/02, medium term past trend, Table 3 Midpoint of MapInfo/Experian Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1, medium term past trend, Table 3.2
		0.850%	
		1.100%	
2021-2026	5	0.200%	MapInfo Brief 08/02, ultra long term past trend, Table 3 Midpoint of MapInfo/Experian Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1, ultra long term past trend, Table 3.2
		0.450%	
		0.700%	

- 5.20 On the basis of this evidence, we consider that the latest projections from Pitney Bowes MapInfo and Experian for the eight year period 2008 to 2016 are cautious, even allowing for the apparent severity of the current recession. We consider it reasonable to assume that comparison goods expenditure growth will be strong, and that convenience goods expenditure growth will be moderate, in the period 2016 to 2021. We have therefore chosen to adopt the midpoint of the medium term past trends based estimates provided by MapInfo in Table 3 of its Information Brief 08/02 and by Experian, as provided in Table 3.2 of its Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1; 5.85 per cent per capita per annum for comparison goods and 0.85 per cent per capita per annum for convenience goods.
- 5.21 However, for the period 2021 to 2026 we feel it more appropriate to be cautious and we have therefore used the ultra-long term past trends which go back to 1964. Adopting the midpoints of ultra-long term past trends from Table 3 of MapInfo Information Brief 08/02 and Table 3.2 of Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1,

provides a comparison goods expenditure growth rate of 4.25 per cent, per capita, per annum, and 0.45 per cent, per capita, per annum for convenience goods.

Figure 5.1 Table 1 of MapInfo Information Brief 08/02

Table 1: UK annual average consumer retail expenditure by goods type (2003 prices)						
	Expenditure per capita (£) (percentage change from the previous year)			Price Indices (2003=100)		
	Convenience Goods	Comparison Goods	All Goods	Convenience Goods	Comparison Goods	All Goods
1981	1,422 -2.2%	886 -1.0%	2,308 -1.7%	43.3	62.3	50.6
1982	1,389 -2.3%	902 1.8%	2,291 -0.7%	47.2	66.1	54.7
1983	1,397 0.6%	945 4.8%	2,343 2.3%	49.8	70.0	58.0
1984	1,380 -1.3%	986 4.3%	2,365 1.0%	53.2	72.9	61.4
1985	1,385 0.4%	1,035 5.0%	2,420 2.3%	55.9	77.1	64.9
1986	1,409 1.8%	1,117 7.9%	2,526 4.4%	58.3	79.9	67.9
1987	1,433 1.7%	1,200 7.4%	2,633 4.2%	60.4	82.5	70.5
1988	1,452 1.3%	1,300 8.3%	2,752 4.5%	62.8	85.4	73.5
1989	1,470 1.2%	1,340 3.1%	2,810 2.1%	66.2	89.0	77.1
1990	1,466 -0.3%	1,359 1.4%	2,825 0.5%	71.4	93.3	81.9
1991	1,445 -1.4%	1,351 -0.6%	2,796 -1.0%	76.6	98.4	87.2
1992	1,435 -0.7%	1,392 3.1%	2,827 1.1%	79.4	100.6	89.8
1993	1,443 0.5%	1,451 4.2%	2,894 2.4%	81.5	101.6	91.6
1994	1,448 0.4%	1,550 6.8%	2,999 3.6%	82.7	101.4	92.3
1995	1,433 -1.1%	1,604 3.5%	3,037 1.3%	85.9	104.0	95.5
1996	1,468 2.5%	1,687 5.2%	3,156 3.9%	89.1	106.3	98.3
1997	1,480 0.8%	1,779 5.4%	3,259 3.3%	90.1	108.3	100.0
1998	1,477 -0.2%	1,877 5.5%	3,354 2.9%	92.1	109.3	101.7
1999	1,508 2.1%	2,013 7.3%	3,521 5.0%	93.7	107.9	101.8
2000	1,525 1.1%	2,175 8.1%	3,700 5.1%	94.4	105.4	100.8
2001	1,500 -1.6%	2,327 7.0%	3,827 3.4%	97.0	104.0	101.0
2002	1,527 1.8%	2,549 9.6%	4,076 6.5%	98.0	102.0	100.0
2003	1,548 1.3%	2,751 7.9%	4,299 5.5%	100.0	100.0	100.0
2004	1,581 2.1%	2,957 7.5%	4,538 5.6%	100.5	97.9	98.8
2005	1,593 0.8%	3,049 3.1%	4,642 2.3%	101.9	95.2	97.5
2006	1,609 1.0%	3,213 5.4%	4,822 3.9%	104.6	93.2	97.0
2007	1,648 2.4%	3,407 6.0%	5,055 4.8%	108.2	91.6	97.0

Average annual growth rates (calculated by fitting a log-linear regression line by the method of least squares to give a compound growth rate)						
	Convenience Goods	Comparison Goods	All Goods	Convenience Goods	Comparison Goods	All Goods
1964-07	0.2%	3.9%	1.9%	7.3%	5.8%	7.0%
1973-07	0.3%	4.5%	2.4%	5.8%	4.2%	5.4%
1978-07	0.4%	5.0%	2.8%	4.3%	2.7%	3.8%
1983-07	0.6%	5.4%	3.2%	3.5%	1.6%	2.8%
1988-07	0.6%	5.6%	3.5%	2.8%	0.6%	1.9%
1993-07	0.9%	6.6%	4.2%	2.0%	-0.6%	0.7%
1998-07	1.1%	7.0%	4.7%	1.6%	-2.2%	-0.6%

'Claims' on Growth in Retained Expenditure

- 5.22 The next step is to make an allowance for 'claims' on the growth in retained expenditure, which are:
- i) growth in floorspace efficiency, which is growth in the turnover of existing retailers within their existing floorspace;
 - ii) growth over time in SFT; and
 - iii) an allowance for the turnover absorbed by planning commitments.
- 5.23 We cover growth in floorspace efficiency later in this section under the heading 'Sensitivity Testing of Key Assumptions'. Below, we therefore describe the allowances that we have made for SFT and commitments, which we have not sensitivity tested.

Growth in special forms of trading

- 5.24 With regards to SFT, we have used the survey findings for the 2009 base year in both the comparison and convenience sectors, but we have made an allowance (in Row F of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7) for SFT to grow over time at the rates shown in Table 5.3 below. These rates reflect the advice given in Table 5.1 of Experian's Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1. However, in the convenience sector, we have halved the proportions of expenditure accounted for by SFT so as to reflect the fact that a proportion of the convenience goods bought over the internet are still supplied from shelves in local supermarkets, rather than from distribution warehouses, as is more often the case in the comparison goods sector.
- 5.25 Experian does not provide any advice on the expected level of SFT beyond 2016; we have therefore assumed that expenditure on SFT will remain at 2016 levels in subsequent years.

Table 5.3 Projected Growth in Special Forms of Trading (SFT)

Year	Comparison Goods		Convenience Goods	
	%	Source	%	Source
2009	10.30	NEMS Survey	1.72	NEMS Survey
2011	11.74	RTP Estimate	2.61	RTP Estimate
2014	13.90	Experian	3.95	Experian x 0.5
2016	13.90	Experian	4.05	Experian x 0.5
2021	13.90	RTP Estimate	4.05	RTP Estimate
2026	13.90	RTP Estimate	4.05	RTP Estimate

Allowance for planning commitments

- 5.26 The next step is to allow for the future turnover requirements of planning commitments, having made an assessment of how much of the commitments' turnovers will be derived from residents of the OCA. The comparison goods

commitments are scheduled in Table 5.4¹⁸ and the convenience goods commitments are scheduled in Table 5.5; the total turnover of the commitments derived from residents of the OCA also appears in Row G of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7, respectively.

- 5.27 The commitment with the highest anticipated turnover for comparison goods is the mixed-use scheme at Hind Street, Birkenhead, whilst the commitment with the highest turnover for convenience goods is the Asda superstore at Claughton Road/Oliver Street, also in Birkenhead. We assume that both of these schemes will be trading by 2011.

Residual Expenditure Potentially Available for New Floorspace

- 5.28 Row H of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7 sets out the residual expenditure potentially available for new floorspace, having allowed for all of the claims on the growth in retained expenditure - that is, growth over time in SFT, growth in floorspace efficiency and commitments.
- 5.29 Row J of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7 converts the residual expenditure to a floorspace requirement expressed as a net sales area, having divided the residual expenditure by an average sales density for comparison goods of £5,000 per sq.m sales area in 2009 and an average sales density for convenience goods of £10,000 per sq.m sales area in 2009. Finally, we convert the sales area requirement to a gross floorspace requirement, as set out in Row K of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7, using a gross to net ratio of 70 per cent for comparison goods and 65 per cent for convenience goods.

¹⁸ Please note the distinction in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 between gross floorspace and net sales area; it is the latter that is used in calculating the turnover requirements of the commitments.

Table 5.4 Comparison Retail Commitments in the Wirral OCA (as of 18 August 2009)

Application Ref	Details of Proposal	Address	Gross Floorspace (sq.m)	Net Comp. Floorspace (sq.m)	Date Approved	Comp Turnover from OCA at 2009 (£m)
APP/2006/7052	Three retail warehouses	Croft Retail & Leisure Park, Bromborough	2,480	1,984	09/03/2007	8.7
OUT/2007/6508	Morrisons superstore	Kings Parade, New Brighton	5,946	743	14/11/2007	6.2
APP/2007/5951	Asda superstore	Claughton Rd/Oliver St, Birkenhead	8,800	1,719	31/02/2008	11.6
APP/2008/5912	Nine unit development for mixed uses	Fmr. Kwik Save, 139-141 Telegraph Road, Heswall	1,120	448	01/08/2008	0.9
APP/2008/5555	Mezzanine floor for bulky goods	27,29 & 31 Welton Road, Croft Retail & Leisure Park, Bromborough	2,159	1,835	19/09/2008	1.8
APP/2008/6556	Four retail units for Netto, Iceland and bulky non-food goods	Fmr. Kwik Save, Stanley Road, Birkenhead	2,478	747	12/12/2008	1.9
OUT/2005/7764	Mixed-use development	Land adjacent to Gas Holders, Hind Street, Birkenhead	8,500	6,800	12/01/2009	17.0
APP/2008/5084	Mezzanine floor	Asda, Welton Rd, Bromborough	1,766	1,571	02/02/2009	6.1
APP/2009/5182	Retail unit	Fmr. garden centre adj. to Tesco, Croft Retail & Leisure Park, Bromborough	862	690	17/04/2009	1.8
APP/2008/6821	Aldi foodstore and one retail unit	Bridge Road, West Kirby	1,856	662	App. Sub to S.106	2.1
APP/2009/5518	Seven mixed use units in neighbourhood centre	Church Road, Tranmere	1,000	153	23/06/2009	0.3
TOTAL			36,967	17,352		58.4

Table 5.5 Convenience Retail Commitments in the Wirral OCA (as of 18 August 2009)

Application Ref	Details of Proposal	Address	Gross Floorspace (sq.m)	Net Conv Floorspace (sq.m)	Date Approved	Conv Turnover from OCA at 2008 (£m)
OUT/2007/6508	Morrisons superstore	Kings Parade, New Brighton	5,946	2,246	14/11/2007	27.5
APP/2007/5951	Asda superstore	Claughton Rd/Oliver St, Birkenhead	8,800	2,555	31/02/2008	38.1
APP/2008/6821	Aldi foodstore and one retail unit	Bridge Road, West Kirby	1,856	692	App. Sub to S.106	3.0
TOTAL			16,602	5,494		68.7

Adjustments for Under-trading/Over-trading in the Base Year

Comparison goods sector

- 5.30 Spreadsheet 1.6 reveals an estimated comparison goods turnover for Birkenhead Town Centre of approximately £227m¹⁹, excluding any expenditure inflow from residents beyond the OCA. This turnover estimate implies a comparison goods sales density for Birkenhead Town Centre of approximately £6,500 per sq.m sales area, which is close to the sales density level that we have identified for centres of a similar position in the retail hierarchy from other retail studies in the North West and elsewhere around the country.
- 5.31 Spreadsheet 1.6 reveals that the Croft Retail & Leisure Park draws £121m of comparison goods expenditure from residents of the catchment area. This suggests a trading density similar to that at Birkenhead Town Centre. Such a sales density is high for a retail park, but is in line with expectations given that Croft contains a lot of 'high street' retailers, some of which are not represented elsewhere in the Borough.
- 5.32 Thus, given that the two principal destinations for comparison goods in the Borough are trading at levels in line with expectations, there is no case for an adjustment for under-trading or over-trading in the comparison goods sector in the Wirral OCA.

Convenience goods sector

- 5.33 The convenience goods expenditure retained by centres and foodstores within the OCA is set out in Spreadsheet 5.6. For the nine largest foodstores, which collectively account for 64 per cent of the aggregate convenience goods expenditure of the OCA's residents, the convenience expenditure drawn from the OCA is summarised in Table 4.14 in Section 4 of this report.
- 5.34 For the nine main foodstores within the administrative area of Wirral, which derive most of their convenience goods turnover from residents of the OCA, we have made a comparison of survey-based turnover estimates with so-called benchmark turnovers which assume that the stores are trading at company average levels. The analysis, which is set out in Table 5.6, reveals two superstores to be trading substantially above the company average (the Asda stores at Liscard and at Croft Business Park). Three other superstores - namely the Morrisons store in West Kirby, and the Sainsbury's stores at Upton and at Prenton - are also over-trading, but to a far lesser degree. The Tesco Extra store at Bidston is trading substantially below its company average²⁰, and the Tesco at Heswall is under-trading slightly. The remaining two stores - Asda at Arrowse Park and the Tesco Metro store at Rock Ferry - are trading more or less in line with expectations.

¹⁹ For the avoidance of doubt, this figure does not include the comparison turnover attributed to Grange Road West and Oxtan Road. See paragraph 4.16 of our report for further commentary on this issue.

²⁰ The Tesco Extra at Bidston is an old and poorly configured store, which is likely to detract some people from using the store. We suspect that the outdated layout is the reason why the supermarket is currently under-trading.

Table 5.6 Comparison of Survey-based Turnover Estimates with Benchmark Turnover Estimates for Food Superstores in Wirral Borough

Main Foodstores Within Wirral Borough	Location of Store (in, edge or out-of-centre)	Net Floorspace - Convenience Goods Only (sq.m)	Benchmark Sales Density (£/sq.m)	Benchmark Turnover (£m)	Actual Convenience Goods Turnover 2009 (£m)	Quantum of Under/ Over Trading (£m)
Morrisons, Dee Lane, West Kirby	In	1,672	12,261	20.5	25.7	5.15
Sainsbury's, Upton Bypass, Upton	Out	3,366	10,205	34.3	41.2	6.90
Asda, Woodchurch Road, Arrowe Park	Out	2,817	14,929	42.1	37.5	-4.53
Asda, Seaview Road, Liscard	In	2,716	14,929	40.5	58.6	18.07
Sainsbury's, Woodchurch Road, Prenton	In	1,472	10,205	15.0	22.5	7.51
Tesco Metro, 212a Bebington Road, Rock Ferry	In	788	13,243	10.4	14.0	3.55
Tesco Extra, Bidston Link Road, Bidston	Out	5,829	13,243	77.2	44.2	-32.98
Asda, Welton Road, Croft Business Park	Out	2,544	14,929	38.0	58.3	20.29
Tesco, Telegraph Road, Heswall	In	2,580	13,243	34.2	28.8	-5.33
TOTAL		23,784		312.3	330.9	18.6

*The proportion of each store's total net sales area floorspace that is devoted to the sale of convenience goods was derived using knowledge from Wirral Council Officers, supplemented by RTP's visits to the stores.

- 5.35 However, four of the stores which are over-trading are located in town centres, where over-trading is, in principle, to be welcomed, unless it causes customer discomfort. Furthermore, the over-trading at Asda in Liscard will be substantially alleviated by the Morrisons commitment in New Brighton. Thus, although the aggregate position for the nine stores is one of over-trading - to a level of approximately £18.6m - this does not necessarily represent a quantitative retail need across Wirral as a whole. Indeed, if we exclude the stores located in town centres, the aggregate position is one of under-trading, of about £10.3m. Thus, as with the comparison sector, we consider that there is no strong evidence to make an adjustment for under- or over-trading in the convenience goods sector.

Increase or Decrease in the Geographical Size of the Catchment Area

Comparison goods sector

- 5.36 A town centre's performance in the comparison goods sector is the prime determinant of its place in the retail hierarchy. It is important to recognise, therefore, that our analysis of comparison goods spending patterns and market shares - as described in Section 4 of our report and shown in Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 in Volume 2 - suggests that there has been no shrinkage in the geographical size of Wirral's OCA, albeit there has been a modest reduction in Birkenhead Town Centre's sphere of influence since publication of the Wirral Retail Strategy in 2004. As we explained in Section 4, this is because the first phase of the Liverpool One scheme only opened in 2008, and progress with the Northgate scheme in Chester

has been slower than expected (indeed, the developer announced at the end of October 2009 that it no longer intends to progress the scheme in its current format).

- 5.37 It is possible that if Peel's Wirral Waters scheme progresses, Wirral's OCA may widen. From discussions that we have had with the planning consultancy acting for Peel (Turley Associates), it is evident that the details of the retail component of Wirral Waters have not yet been fully defined, particularly in relation to the precise nature and quantum of proposed floorspace. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Peel will seek to attract people to the retail facilities at Wirral Waters from a catchment area extending beyond the Borough, with East Float likely to include high quality and specialist cafés, restaurants, boutiques and specialist food as part of a major mixed use scheme that will also include employment opportunities and new housing. Bidston Dock, meanwhile, has been identified by Peel as a location for a major, nationally important retail and leisure destination.
- 5.38 However, until the proposals for Wirral Waters - and Bidston Dock in particular - are further clarified, it would not be robust or defensible to define a wider catchment area for Wirral's existing centres extending beyond the Borough boundary. For the purposes of our need assessment we therefore consider that the catchment area shown in Figure 4.1 in Volume 2 - which corresponds to the administrative area of Wirral - is appropriate.

Convenience goods sector

- 5.39 PPS6 seeks to ensure that people's every day needs, such as convenience shopping, are met on as localised basis as possible. As a consequence, Wirral's OCA is defined, primarily, on the basis of comparison goods spending patterns, where the very existence of the retail hierarchy demands that people travel to higher order centres for their higher order goods and services.

Changes to the Retention Level

Comparison goods sector

- 5.40 In the comparison goods sector, we have concluded that there is no justification for making any adjustment for under-trading or over-trading and that, although there are proposals for substantial retail development at Wirral Waters, it is not our role to amend the geographical size of Wirral's OCA for the purpose of assessing need in the LDF process.
- 5.41 We have undertaken sensitivity testing of changes to the comparison goods retention level. Task T5 in the study brief requires us to: '*...advise on the level of expenditure retention which would normally be expected in Wirral (by benchmarking against other areas in the UK with similar population and expenditure profiles)...*'. However, there is no 'benchmark' retention rate as such; expenditure retention depends on many variables including the quality/size of competing centres, geography, the offer available locally, and so on. Accordingly, it would be very difficult to identify with a catchment and geographical profile similar to Wirral (i.e. a peninsula close to two large city centres). The best that is really possible is to make a professional judgement as to whether the current retention rate achieved in the

Wirral catchment is acceptable - taking account of the sort of factors referred to above - and then assess the extent to which it could be improved.

5.42 We have therefore run four sensitivity tests, as listed below:

- **'Moderately Decreasing Retention'** - in our first sensitivity test, the overall retention level drops by about 5 percentage points, from 64.7 per cent in 2009, to 60.0 per cent by 2026. Such a scenario would reflect a contraction in the market share of the centres located within the OCA, whereby developments outwith the catchment area are so competitive as to more than offset the beneficial impacts of development undertaken within the OCA.
- **'Static Retention'** - under this scenario, the overall retention level is kept constant at 64.7 per cent throughout the entire study period, 2009 to 2026.
- **'Moderately Increasing Retention'** - in this sensitivity test, the overall retention level increases moderately by 5 percentage points from 64.7 per cent in the year 2009, to 70.0 per cent by 2026.
- **'Significantly Increasing Retention'** - under the fourth scenario, the overall retention level rises significantly by 10 percentage points from 64.7 per cent in 2009, to 75.0 per cent by 2026.

5.43 In order to achieve an improvement of 5 or 10 percentage points, a substantial enhancement of the quantity and quality of the Borough's comparison retail offer would be required, particularly given the strength of competition from centres outside of Wirral. In Section 6, we consider six potential strategies for delivering substantive improvements to the retail offer in Wirral.

Convenience goods sector

5.44 In the convenience sector we adopt a different approach. The aggregate level of retention shown in Spreadsheet 6.6 - at 96.2 per cent - is already very high and there is no case either for an increase or decrease. Our convenience sector forecasts are therefore based on a continuation of the healthy retention rate.

Sensitivity Testing of Key Assumptions

5.45 In order to sensitivity test our key assumptions, we have undertaken the assessment of quantitative capacity - for each of the four retention rate scenarios outlined above for the comparison sector, and the static retention rate scenario for the convenience sector - using different data inputs, as described below.

Population growth

5.46 We have undertaken our retail forecasting work using two population bases. For our first sensitivity test, we used the ONS's 2006-based Population Projections, which were published in June 2008. In our second scenario, we have also used the ONS's 2006-based Population Projections but we have factored in the additional population growth likely to occur if Wirral Waters is implemented as currently planned (using data supplied by Turleys).

Growth in floorspace efficiency

- 5.47 Experian²¹ puts forward a ‘central case’ for a change in floorspace efficiency (change in retail sales per unit sales area) of 2.2 per cent, per annum in the comparison goods sector and 0.6 per cent, per annum in the convenience goods sector. However, this was based on a past trends change in comparison goods sales turnover of 5.8 per cent per annum in the period 1987 to 1999. In our assessment, the significantly lower expenditure growth rates now projected for the period 2008 to 2016 and from 2021 to 2026 are not sufficient to support this 2.2 per cent rate of floorspace efficiency change in the future. Pitney Bowes MapInfo provides no information on anticipated change in floorspace efficiency.
- 5.48 Thus, in making an allowance for growth in floorspace efficiency (Rows D and E of Spreadsheets 1.9a and 5.7), we adopted the floorspace efficiency changes set out in Table 5.7, which utilise Experian’s ‘central case’ recommendations for the period 2016 to 2026 and ties the rate of floorspace efficiency change to the expenditure projections for the remaining forecast periods used.

Table 5.7 Improvements in Floorspace Efficiency from 2009 Level

Year	No of Years	Rate Per Annum	
		Comparison Goods	Convenience Goods
2009-2016	7	0.68%	0.16%
2016-2021	5	2.20%	0.60%
2021-2026	5	1.60%	0.32%

- 5.49 We have also tested an alternative floorspace efficiency scenario for the comparison sector, whereby we have halved the annual rates specified in Table 5.7. We have not undertaken a parallel sensitivity test for the convenience sector because the turnover efficiency rates for the convenience sector that we have used - as specified in Table 5.7 - are already low to begin with.
- 5.50 The effect of the gain in floorspace efficiency of existing retailers amounts to the following ‘claims’:
- Comparison goods sector: £167.8m by 2026 using the rates specified in Table 5.7 (see Row E of Spreadsheet 1.9a), or £154.1m using the lower rates that we applied for our sensitivity test (Row E of Spreadsheet 2.9a).
 - Convenience goods sector: the corresponding effect in the convenience goods sector amounts to £29.3m (Row E of Spreadsheet 5.7).
- 5.51 We thus tested 16 different comparison scenarios in total, as summarised in Table 5.8, and we tested two different convenience scenarios. As explained above, the only sensitivity test that we undertook in the convenience sector related to the use of two sets of population projections (‘ONS-based’ and ‘ONS+Wirral Waters’), and so there is no need to summarise the two scenarios in a table.

²¹ Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1, Table 3.2, p29, Experian, January 2009

Table 5.8 Comparison Retail Need - The 16 Scenarios

	Scenario	Retention Rate	Floorspace Efficiency Change % p.a.				Population Projections					
			2006-08	2008-16	2016-21	2021-26	2009	2011	2014	2016	2021	2026
ONS-based Population Scenarios	1A	Moderate Decrease	1.85%	0.68%	2.20%	1.60%	310,816	310,816	311,216	311,616	313,216	314,516
	1B	Static										
	1C	Moderate Increase										
	1D	Significant Increase										
	2A	Moderate Decrease	0.92%	0.34%	1.10%	0.80%	310,816	310,816	311,216	311,616	313,216	314,516
	2B	Static										
	2C	Moderate Increase										
	2D	Significant Increase										
ONS + Wirral Waters Population Scenarios	3A	Moderate Decrease	1.85%	0.68%	2.20%	1.60%	310,816	311,121	314,117	316,674	322,555	327,194
	3B	Static										
	3C	Moderate Increase										
	3D	Significant Increase										
	4A	Moderate Decrease	0.92%	0.34%	1.10%	0.80%	310,816	311,121	314,117	316,674	322,555	327,194
	4B	Static										
	4C	Moderate Increase										
	4D	Significant Increase										

5.52 Our quantitative capacity assessment²² set out below assesses the floorspace requirements resulting from all of the scenarios.

Findings in Relation to Quantitative Retail Need

Comparison Goods Sector

- 5.53 Spreadsheets 1.9a to 1.9d, 2.9a to 2.9d, 3.9a to 3.9d and 4.9a to 4.9d set out the quantitative comparison goods retail need for the declining retention, static retention, moderately increased retention and significantly increased retention scenarios, respectively. These quantitative needs, as set out in Row J of the spreadsheets in terms of net sales area, are summarised in Table 5.9 below.
- 5.54 Table 5.9 shows that there is a negative residual requirement in the comparison sector in the period up to 2016, under all 16 scenarios. This means that the growth in retained expenditure up to 2016 is not sufficient to support prior 'claims' on that growth, namely an improvement in sales densities of existing centres and stores, and the turnover requirements of existing commitments. The large negative residual comparison floorspace requirement is reflective of the low growth in expenditure anticipated in the period up to 2016; relatively modest population growth by 2016, even under Wirral Waters; and the substantial turnover requirements of extant permissions, in particular the planned Asda superstores in Birkenhead and Bromborough, the handful of new units at Croft Retail and Leisure Park in Bromborough, and the scheme at Hind Street in Birkenhead.

²² Our full quantitative retail capacity assessment is presented in six sets of spreadsheets in the separately bound Volume 2.

- 5.55 Over the longer-term, however, there is a positive residual for additional comparison retail floorspace under most of the retention rate scenarios in the period up to 2021, and under all scenarios in the period up to 2026. This corresponds with the period of higher expenditure growth that we anticipate to follow the current downturn in the economy.

Table 5.9 Quantitative Need in the Comparison Goods Sector (Sq.m Net)

	Scenario	Retention Rate	Quantitative Need in Comparison Retail (sq.m net)				
			2009-11	2009-14	2009-16	2009-21	2009-26
ONS-based Population Scenarios	1A	Moderate Decrease	-13,551	-16,447	-15,452	-479	11,306
	1B	Static	-12,440	-13,571	-11,330	7,984	25,001
	1C	Moderate Increase	-11,202	-10,366	-6,736	17,419	40,268
	1D	Significant Increase	-10,027	-7,325	-2,378	26,369	54,750
	2A	Moderate Decrease	-12,687	-14,355	-12,498	10,668	29,910
	2B	Static	-11,569	-11,431	-8,278	19,816	45,309
	2C	Moderate Increase	-10,322	-8,171	-3,574	30,013	62,475
	2D	Significant Increase	-9,139	-5,079	889	39,686	78,757
ONS + Wirral Waters Population Scenarios	3A	Moderate Decrease	-13,460	-15,650	-14,063	2,448	15,676
	3B	Static	-12,348	-12,752	-9,886	11,117	29,820
	3C	Moderate Increase	-11,109	-9,522	-5,230	20,781	45,587
	3D	Significant Increase	-9,933	-6,458	-814	29,948	60,542
	4A	Moderate Decrease	-12,595	-13,545	-11,076	13,831	34,824
	4B	Static	-11,476	-10,598	-6,799	23,201	50,726
	4C	Moderate Increase	-10,228	-7,312	-2,032	33,647	68,454
	4D	Significant Increase	-9,044	-4,196	2,491	43,555	85,270

- 5.56 Table 5.9 shows that the 'overall' range of comparison sales area floorspace requirements in the 2009-26 study period is from 11,306 sq.m under Scenario 1A (decreasing retention rate with ONS population, to 85,270 sq.m under Scenario 4D (significantly increasing retention with ONS+Wirral Waters population)²³.
- 5.57 However, this 'overall' range is very wide. Moreover, we do not consider that it is sensible to plan for a downturn in the retention rate, and have included it in this study purely for illustrative purposes, so as to demonstrate what might happen if material levels of development do not occur. Similarly, we do not advocate planning on the basis of a static retention rate. Instead, we consider that the Council's policy aspiration should be to achieve an improvement to the current expenditure rate, which could be achievable if high-quality, large-scale comparison retail developments were to be delivered in Wirral, of sufficient scale and critical mass to make them competitive, vis-à-vis the competing centres outside of (but close to) Wirral Borough.

²³ Please refer to the spreadsheets to ascertain the capacity for the interim time periods 2011-14, 2014-16, 2016-21 and 2021-26.

- 5.58 This is a challenging brief given that the retail offer on the other side of the River Mersey has already been improved considerably through the substantial Liverpool One development. In our assessment, achieving the 5 or 10 percentage point improvements to the Borough's comparison market would require a Wirral Waters-type development. We thus suggest that a range of 46,300 sq.m to 85,300 sq.m net should be incorporated into the LDF for the period 2009 to 2026, this being the range generated by Wirral Waters Scenarios 3C, 3D, 4C and 4D. Our suggested strategy and recommendations in Section 6 point towards 4D as the scenario that should be incorporated into the LDF.

Convenience Goods Sector

- 5.59 Spreadsheets 5.7 and 6.7 set out the quantitative convenience goods retail need for a static aggregate retention level of 96 per cent. As we made clear earlier in this section, we have found no strong evidence to make an allowance for under-trading or over-trading in the convenience goods sector. The quantitative needs, as set out in Row J of Spreadsheets 5.7 and 6.7, in terms of net floorspace, are summarised in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10 Quantitative Need in the Convenience Goods Sector (Sq.m Net)

	Scenario 1: ONS-Based Population	Scenario 2: ONS + Wirral Waters Population
2009-11	-7,266	-7,222
2009-14	-7,804	-7,406
2009-16	-7,733	-7,043
2009-21	-6,909	-5,631
2009-26	-6,395	-4,652

- 5.60 Table 5.10 confirms that the residual convenience goods need from 2009 up to 2026 is negative, even under the more ambitious ONS + Wirral Waters population growth scenario. This is due to the low forecast rate of expenditure growth in the convenience sector, and the substantial turnover requirements of extant permissions, in particular the planned Asda and Morrisons superstores in Birkenhead and New Brighton.

Qualitative Retail Need

- 5.61 Paragraphs 2.35 to 2.37 of PPS6 provide advice on the considerations LPAs should take into account in assessing qualitative needs in their development plan documents. Paragraph 2.35 states that the key consideration for an LPA is to provide for consumer choice, by ensuring that:
- i) an appropriate distribution of locations is achieved, subject to the sequential approach; and that
 - ii) provision is made for a range of sites for shopping, leisure and local services so as to allow for genuine choice and meet the needs of the whole community, particularly in deprived areas.

Comparison Goods Sector

- 5.62 In the comparison goods sector, there is a need to improve the quality of the offer in the Borough, and particularly Birkenhead Town Centre as the Borough's largest centre in order to enable it to withstand the strong competition from other centres. This is particularly so in relation to Liverpool city centre, where the substantial Liverpool One scheme has already opened. Liverpool One comprises six distinct districts providing 1.6 million sq.ft of retail space; a 14-screen cinema; 230,000 sq.ft of restaurants, cafés and bars; and over 600 apartments, two hotels and office space. The development is anchored by John Lewis - at 240,000 sq ft, the chain's largest in the North West - and by Debenhams, which is a first for Liverpool. An array of other high-profile comparison retailers are already trading, including names such as Austin Reed, Jane Norman, Karen Millen, La Senza, Jones Bootmaker, Mango, Monsoon and Zara.
- 5.63 Any substantial development in Chester would also represent a significant threat to Wirral's centres. However, for the reasons given in Sections 3 and 4 of our report, the developer of the proposed Northgate scheme recently announced that it is abandoning the scheme in its current form and is returning to the drawing board. Chester Northgate therefore now appears to represent a medium-term prospect at best.
- 5.64 We have noted, in Section 3, that Birkenhead Town Centre achieves only a 'lower' rating for fashion in MHE's Shopping Index. Furthermore, Birkenhead's food & drink offer is focused on fast food outlets and pubs which primarily cater for a 'vertical drinking' client base, with a complete absence of higher-quality café/bar/restaurant fascias. The comparison retail and food & drink offer in Wirral's second-largest centre, Liscard, is also firmly towards the lower end of the spectrum.
- 5.65 We therefore consider it inevitable that the aggregate comparison retention rate achieved by Wirral's centres and stores will start to deteriorate unless there is a substantial, comparison retail-led development scheme of sufficient critical mass and quality to stave off at least some of the intense competition from Liverpool and Chester city centres. However, at present, there are no planning commitments in Wirral for this type of scheme. The three commitments with the highest forecast comparison turnover are at Hind Street in Birkenhead, although this site is divorced from the town centre core and the scheme is likely to be geared towards bulky goods operators; the Asda superstore in Birkenhead which, although much-needed, will primarily be a food superstore with a non-food element; and the commitment for several new retail warehouses at Croft Retail & Leisure Park.
- 5.66 In Section 6, we consider in more detail potential actions which would help to strengthen the vitality and viability of Birkenhead Town Centre, as well as the other main centres in Wirral, and we consider the potential role of the emerging Wirral Waters proposals in addressing the issues identified above.

Convenience Sector

- 5.67 In the convenience sector, it is clearly important that needs are met on as localised basis as possible. An important part of the LDF process is therefore to remedy deficiencies in local shopping and other essential services facilities, so as to assist in reducing social exclusion (paragraphs 2.55 to 2.58 of PPS6).
- 5.68 However, although the localised convenience retention rate in Zone 3a (Seacombe, 4.6 per cent) is low, an Asda superstore is located nearby in Zone 3b. Similarly, most residents in Zone 5b (Lower Bebington), where the localised retention rate is 19.5 per cent, do not have to travel far for their convenience shopping given the proximity of an Asda superstore as well as a Tesco Metro in adjoining Zones 5a and 4b, respectively. The low localised convenience retention rate in Zone 4c (Birkenhead, 18.7 per cent) will be addressed by implementation of the extant permission for a new Asda superstore in Birkenhead Town Centre.

Need in the Commercial Leisure Sector

Forecast Increases in Leisure Expenditure

- 5.69 The approach taken by consultants to the assessment of quantitative need in the leisure sector is less well developed than in the retail sector. Furthermore, property development in the leisure sector has historically been very market-led, and it is only since the publication of PPS6 in March 2005 that leisure has been brought firmly into the range of uses covered by the sequential approach.
- 5.70 Nevertheless, Experian²⁴ and MapInfo²⁵ have published information on leisure spending in six COICOP (Classification of Individual Consumption by Purpose) categories. Analysis of the information reveals the following pattern of leisure spend across the Wirral catchment area:

²⁴ Experian, *Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1* (October 2008), Table 3.2.

²⁵ MapInfo, *2004 Leisure Goods & Services Expenditure at Output Area Level: Product Guide* (March 2007), and associated leisure expenditure dataset.

Table 5.11 Breakdown of Leisure Spend in Wirral's Overall Catchment Area in 2009

COICOP Categories	Description	UK		Wirral OCA	
		Spend Per Capita (£)	% of Total Leisure Services Spend	Spend Per Capita (£)	% of Total Leisure Services Spend
11.1.1	Restaurants, cafés, bars, etc	1,161	61.1	1,142	60.3%
9.4.2	Cultural services	248	12.8	217	11.5%
9.4.3	Games of chance	166	8.9	171	9.0%
11.2	Accommodation services	132	6.2	183	9.6%
9.4.1	Recreational and sporting services ²⁶	125	6.4	99	5.3%
12.1.1	Personal services (hairdressers etc)	90	4.7	81	4.3%
TOTAL 'LEISURE SERVICES' SPEND		1,922	100	1,893	100

- 5.71 Table 5.11 shows that total per capita spending on leisure services in Wirral's OCA is very similar to the UK average. Moreover, COICOP category 11.1.1 (*'restaurants, cafés and the like'*) accounts for three-fifths of the average per capita spend on leisure services. *'Cultural services'*, *'accommodation services'* and *'games of chance'* are the second, third and fourth highest categories, and these account for 11.5 per cent, 9.6 per cent and 9.0 cent of spending on leisure services, respectively. However, commercially oriented property developments, such as cinemas, account for only a small fraction of spend on cultural services (5.2 per cent)²⁷, and bingo halls and casinos account for just 7.2 per cent and 9.5 per cent of spend, respectively, of expenditure on games of chance²⁸.
- 5.72 Bearing in mind the structure of current spend on leisure services, our next step in the assessment of leisure need is to calculate the growth in leisure spend for residents of the Wirral catchment area in the period 2009 to 2021. We sourced year 2006 per capita leisure expenditure data from our in-house MapInfo dataset for residents of the same eleven zones that we used for the retail forecasts (as depicted in Figure 4.1 of Volume 2). The projected growth in expenditure on leisure services, which is set out in Spreadsheet 7, is based on population growth²⁹ and

²⁶ COICOP category 9.4.1, 'Recreation and sporting services', covers common leisure uses such as ice skating, bowling and gymnasia. However, the leisure expenditure data supplied by MapInfo do not go below the level of COICOP category 9.4.1, and so we are unable to determine the amount of expenditure that is available for specific 'recreation and sporting' services, such as those referred to above.

²⁷ The remaining spend on cultural services is accounted for by theatre visits, DVD/video rentals, social subscriptions, photographic processing and a plethora of other items, which together account for three-fifths of the spending on cultural services.

²⁸ Betting (including on the National Lottery) accounts for the greatest proportion of 'games of chance' expenditure (36.5 per cent at 2007, according to the Leisure Industries Research Consultancy).

²⁹ We have projected forward the population using the ONS's 2006-based sub-national population projections (published in June 2008). These projections do not take full account of the additional population growth that is likely to occur if Wirral Waters is implemented as currently planned. If an allowance for this additional population growth is brought into the assessment, the surplus expenditure available to support new leisure facilities would be greater than identified in this Section. If the Wirral Waters scheme does progress, therefore, the extra population growth will create some additional 'need' for

Experian's recommended growth rate for spending on leisure services of 0.8 per cent, per capita, per annum for the period 2008 to 2016³⁰. For completeness, we also project leisure spend forward to 2026. However, for the purposes of planning for commercial leisure needs, we caution against looking beyond 2021.

- 5.73 Spreadsheet 7 reveals that the total expenditure on leisure services in Wirral's OCA is projected to grow from £588.4m in 2009 to £597.9m by 2011, to £613.2m by 2014, to £623.8m by 2016, to £652.5m by 2021, and to £681.8m by 2026. Projected growth in spending on leisure services from 2009, therefore, amounts to 10.9 per cent in the period up to 2021 and to 15.9 per cent in the period up to 2026.
- 5.74 In absolute terms, the growth in leisure services spend within the catchment area from 2009 up to 2021 amounts to £64.1m, and to £93.4m by 2026. Applying the 2006 base year leisure spend shares (from Table 5.11 above), around 60 per cent of the growth in leisure spending can be expected to be absorbed by restaurants/cafés, pubs/bars and take-away outlets (i.e. £38.0m by 2021 and rising to £55.5m by 2026). In contrast, the growth that would be absorbed by '*cultural services*' would amount to just £7.8m by 2021 and £11.4m by 2026. Similarly, the growth in expenditure on '*games of chance*' up to 2021 would amount to just £6.2m by 2021 and £9.1m by 2026. However, commercial facilities such as cinemas will absorb only a proportion of the expenditure growth in cultural services, and casinos and bingo halls will absorb only a proportion of the expenditure growth on '*games of chance*'.

Conversion of Expenditure Increases to Additional Commercial Leisure 'Requirements'

Food and drink

- 5.75 Given the localised nature of spending on food and drink, it is reasonable to anticipate that much of the projected growth in expenditure on food and drink - of £38.0m by 2021 - will be retained within the study area. However, not all of the growth in retained expenditure will be available for new restaurants/cafés, pubs/bars and take-away outlets. In the same way that an allowance is made in the retail sector for existing operators to improve their turnover efficiency, it is reasonable to assume that some of the growth in available food and drink expenditure will be absorbed by existing operators (to allow them to grow their business, re-fit their premises, and so on). Unlike in the retail sector, however, there is a dearth of published advice on what proportion of expenditure growth in the food and drink sector should be ring-fenced for existing operators. In the absence of firm guidance, we have therefore allocated half of the growth in food and drink expenditure to existing restaurateurs and pub/bar operators.

leisure facilities - such as eating and drinking establishments - which could be accommodated as part of the scheme.

³⁰ Experian, *Retail Planner Briefing Note 6.1*, Table 3.2 (we do not have access to the corresponding MapInfo forecasts). Experian's forecasts do not go beyond 2016; in the absence of any better information we have therefore also applied the 0.8 per cent, per annum forecast growth rate to the post-2016 period.

- 5.76 The £19.0m 'residual' (half of the £38.0m growth in food and drink expenditure up to 2021) would be sufficient to support a range of new, good-quality restaurants - which typically generate annual turnovers of around £850,000 to £1m, but with some high-profile restaurant operators taking in excess of £1m per annum - as well as several branded pubs/bars, which typically have annual turnovers of between £800,000 and £1.2m, and possibly some smaller casual dining pubs which generally turnover less than £500,000 a year. Thus, in broad terms there would be sufficient expenditure growth to support around 20 new food and drink outlets across Wirral in the period up to 2021.

Cinemas

- 5.77 Data from Dodona, and our own research into the leisure sector, suggests that the average multiplex screen accounts for an annual spend of £305k in ticket revenue, whereas an independent screen accounts for £148k per annum in ticket revenue. Thus, the £405,000 increase in cinema expenditure arising in the Wirral catchment area by 2021, as a consequence of growth in population and per capita leisure expenditure, is theoretically sufficient to support development of one screen in a multiplex format (albeit development of a multiplex facility would require provision of more than one new screen³¹), or an additional two or three independent screens.
- 5.78 However, it is not sufficient to simply convert the potential growth in cinema revenue to a notional 'requirement' for screens. Cinema operators make decisions based on 'screen density' - that is, the existing cinema screen provision within appropriate drive-time isochrones, taking account of population levels (or the number of screens available per 100,000 people). The latest information that we have access to indicates that the average travel time to a cinema is around 18 minutes³². We have therefore analysed cinema provision within an 18-minute drive-time of Birkenhead Town Centre (which is located at the centre of the most densely built-up part of the study area). The findings are reproduced in Table 5.12, and the location of cinemas within and surrounding the catchment area is shown in Figure 5.1 of Volume 2.
- 5.79 Table 5.12 reveals that the population within an 18-minute drive-time of Birkenhead Town Centre is 413,672 persons³³. There are currently three cinemas within the 18-minute drive-time area of Birkenhead Town Centre, namely a 7-screen Vue Cinema at Europa Boulevard in Birkenhead, an 11-screen Odeon cinema at Croft Retail & Leisure Park in Bromborough, and a 10-screen Odeon cinema in Liverpool, although the latter cinema is somewhat divorced from the residents of the Wirral catchment area, being located on the opposite side of the River Mersey to Birkenhead.
- 5.80 Nevertheless, taking all three cinemas into account, Table 5.12 indicates that the screen density within an 18-minute drive-time of Birkenhead Town Centre is 6.8

³¹ Dodona defines a 'multiplex screen' as a being within a purpose-built cinema with five or more screens.

³² Source: Caviar

³³ Year 2005; source: MapInfo

screens per 100,000 population, which is above both the North West average of 6.3 screens per 100,000 population, and the UK average of 5.8 screens per 100,000 population³⁴.

Table 5.12 Cinema Screen Density Within an 18-minute Drive-time of Birkenhead

Town	No of Cinemas Within 18 Minute Drive-time	No of Screens Within 18 Minute Drive-time	Actual Popn Within 18 Minute Drivetime	Screen Density (i.e. screens per 100,000 people)	North West Average Screen Density	UK Average Screen Density
Birkenhead	3	28	413,672	6.8	6.3	5.8

- 5.81 Our analysis has been undertaken on a broad basis and residents in some parts of the study area are also close to cinemas in Chester (which has a 6-screen UGC cinema), and the 16-screen Vue cinema at the Cheshire Oaks Outlet Village. As such, the study area and its immediate environs do not, as a whole, appear to suffer from a lack of cinema provision.
- 5.82 Nevertheless, whilst residents located on the borders of the study area can relatively easily access cinemas near Liverpool, Ellesmere Port and Chester, and those residing towards the east of the study area can access the cinemas in Birkenhead and at Croft Retail & Leisure Park, residents located towards the north and west of the study area will have further to travel to visit a cinema. Furthermore, it is worth bearing in mind that not all young people - i.e. the main users of cinemas - have access to a car; these people might therefore find it difficult to access the out-of-centre cinemas or visit cinemas in other towns.
- 5.83 On the face of it, therefore, our assessment indicates that Wirral may be viewed favourably by some cinema operators as a potential location for additional cinema screen provision, and that there may be potential for a small-scale multiplex facility, or several independent cinema screens, subject to further market testing. However, the recently approved Neptune New Brighton scheme includes provision for a six-screen 1,000 seat digital cinema which will address this need.

Bingo

- 5.84 There are four bingo clubs in Wirral, these being an Embassy Bingo and Social Club in Wallasey, a Top Ten Bingo club in Moreton, a Gala Bingo at the Croft Retail and Leisure Park, and a Mecca Bingo at the Europa Centre in Birkenhead. Furthermore, Figure 5.2 of Volume 2 indicates that additional bingo facilities are located close to (but outside of) Wirral, with a Mecca Bingo in Ellesmere Port, a H.B Leisure and a Mecca Bingo in Chester, and several bingo clubs around Liverpool (including Paradise Island, Gala and Seldons clubs).

³⁴ North West and UK average screen density figures are sourced from the UK Film Council's 'Statistical Yearbook 2008' (whose statistics are based on Dodona Research RSU Analysis).

- 5.85 Thus, on the basis of existing provision there is not much of a qualitative requirement for further provision of bingo facilities. Similarly, in quantitative terms, the additional £450,000 in bingo expenditure arising in the catchment area by 2021 would be insufficient to support a new Gala or Mecca-type club (which generate average annual net stakes of around £1.47m per branch), although it could support one additional neighbourhood club, for which annual net stakes average around £444,000 per branch. More targeted market testing would be required to ascertain whether operators of neighbourhood bingo clubs would consider locating in the study area, and which locations might be attractive to operators.

Casinos

- 5.86 Figure 5.2 shows that there are currently no large casinos in Wirral (there is a casino at Oxtan Road, but this is a small facility). However, there are two planning permissions for new casino developments - at Europa Boulevard and at New Brighton - which will address this qualitative deficiency.
- 5.87 Our leisure assessment identified a surplus of £600,000 in casino expenditure arising by 2021, which is substantially below the level required to support a small-scale 'traditional' casino, which generate average annual turnovers of around £3.6m per casino³⁵. However, we do not consider that the apparent lack of expenditure capacity will have any implications for the two planned casino schemes. As we explain below, our assessment has been undertaken at a high level and is based on current market shares; our assessment does not take into account the substantial potential to divert expenditure from casinos located outside of Wirral.

Summary of Scope for Additional Commercial Leisure Facilities

- 5.88 Expenditure on leisure services in the Wirral catchment area is projected to grow by £64.1m in the period up to 2021. How this growth might be expended locally depends very much on what opportunities the market supplies - thus, current spending patterns can only provide a guide to what might happen in the future. We have undertaken a broad assessment of the scope for additional commercial leisure facilities, based on current patterns of spending, and our conclusions are summarised in Table 5.13 below.
- 5.89 On the basis of current spending levels in Wirral's OCA, around 60 per cent of this spending growth (£38.0m) will go to eating and drinking establishments (restaurants, cafés, take-away outlets and pubs/bars). Capturing a sizeable proportion of this growth in expenditure through the provision of a better and more appealing choice of restaurants, cafés and pubs/bars will be vital to the future health of all of the study centres in Wirral.
- 5.90 The remainder of the growth in expenditure on leisure services will go to a wide range of activities, with no single activity capturing a significant market share. Whilst our assessment indicates that Wirral may be viewed favourably by some

³⁵ Source: The Gambling Commission

cinema operators as a potential location for additional cinema screen provision, the recently approved Neptune New Brighton scheme includes provision for a six-screen 1,000 seat digital cinema which will address this need. Targeted market testing would therefore be required to establish whether Wirral is likely to be viewed favourably by small-scale multiplex/independent cinema operators, and the same applies to operators of neighbourhood bingo clubs. We also note that there are two planning permissions for casino developments - at Europa Boulevard in Birkenhead and at New Brighton - which will address the qualitative deficiency in casino provision within the Borough.

- 5.91 As we have stressed, the approach to the assessment of quantitative need in the leisure sector is less well developed than in the retail sector and so the quantitative 'needs' that we have identified should be treated as an indicative guide. Furthermore, the leisure sector is dynamic, changing and operator-led. Thus, if an investor feels capable of attracting customers by diverting spending from other facilities, the planning system does not seek to prevent additional development, provided such development meets the tests in PPS6.

Table 5.13 Summary of Scope for Additional Commercial Leisure Facilities in Wirral

Leisure Sub-Category	Surplus Expenditure Available in 2021	Capacity for Additional Facilities
Restaurants, Cafés, Bars	£38m	Approx. 20 food and drink outlets
Cinemas	£400,000	Small-scale multiplex, or several independent screens
Bingo halls	£450,000	One neighbourhood club
Casinos	£600,000	Two casinos - at Europa Boulevard and New Brighton - already granted planning consent.

Conclusions in Relation to Retail and Leisure Need

Comparison Retail Goods

- 5.92 We have considered 16 different scenarios (in order to sensitivity test the various data inputs and assumptions) in our assessment of the quantitative need for additional comparison floorspace. We found that there is a negative residual requirement in the comparison sector in the period up to 2016, under all 16 scenarios (Table 5.9). This means that the growth in retained expenditure up to 2016 is not sufficient to support prior 'claims' on that growth, namely an improvement in sales densities of existing centres and stores, and the turnover requirements of existing commitments.
- 5.93 However, over the longer-term period to 2021, there is a positive residual for additional comparison retail floorspace in most scenarios, the exceptions being Scenarios 1A, 1B and 3A, which assume either a static or declining retention rate.
- 5.94 Table 5.9 shows that the 'overall' range of net comparison floorspace requirements in the 2008-26 study period is from 11,300 sq.m (Scenario 1A, decreasing retention rate scenario with ONS population) to 86,300 sq.m (Scenario 4D, significantly

increasing retention scenario with ONS + Wirral Waters population). However, we do not consider that it is sensible to plan for a downturn in the retention rate, and have included it in this study purely for illustrative purposes, so as to demonstrate what might happen if material levels of high-quality development do not occur. Similarly, we do not advocate planning on the basis of a static retention rate.

- 5.95 Thus, stripping out the four decreasing retention rate scenarios and the four static retention rate scenarios leaves a range of 45,600 sq.m to 85,300 sq.m net (in the period to 2026), which is generated by Wirral Waters Scenarios 3C, 3D, 4C and 4D. Our suggested strategy and recommendations in Section 6 point towards 4D as the scenario that should be incorporated into the LDF.

Convenience Retail Goods

- 5.96 The residual convenience goods need in the period from 2009 up to 2026 is negative, even under the more ambitious ONS+Wirral Waters population growth scenario. This is due to the low forecast rate of expenditure growth in the convenience sector (relative to the comparison sector), and the substantial turnover requirements of extant permissions, in particular the planned Asda and Morrisons superstores in Birkenhead and New Brighton.
- 5.97 In the convenience sector, it is clearly important that needs are met on as localised basis as possible. An important part of the LDF process is therefore to remedy deficiencies in local shopping and other essential services facilities, so as to assist in reducing social exclusion (paragraphs 2.55 to 2.58 of PPS6). However, we have not identified any specific local deficiencies in convenience provision in the Borough.

Leisure Services

- 5.98 Expenditure on leisure services in Wirral's OCA is projected to grow by £64.1m in the period up to 2021. On the basis of current spending levels on leisure services by residents of the catchment area, around 60 per cent of this spending growth (£38.0m) will go to eating and drinking establishments. Thus, capturing a sizeable proportion of this growth in expenditure through the provision of a better and more appealing choice of restaurants, cafés and pubs/bars will be vital to the future health of all of Wirral's town and district centres. Further food and drink facilities, including better quality establishments, should be especially welcomed in Birkenhead Town Centre, where the food and drink offer is below the standard expected for a centre of its size and status.
- 5.99 In broad terms we identified sufficient expenditure growth to support around 20 new food and drink outlets across Wirral in the period up to 2021. There is, therefore, sufficient expenditure capacity in this important commercial leisure sub-sector to support additional eating and drinking establishments in the Borough's various centres, particularly Birkenhead. Some of the Borough's other main centres - such as Heswall, Hoylake, West Kirby and Moreton - already have a well-established food and drink offer and we consider that the Council should give favourable consideration to proposals for further A3-A5 uses which could complement the

existing offer in these centres. Promoting further high-quality food and drink uses in Hoylake, in particular, could be a good way of dealing with the high level of unit vacancy in the centre, although local stakeholders assert that the reported anti-social behaviour problem in the centre is associated with food and drink facilities and so enhanced security measures would need to be implemented in parallel with any expansion of Hoylake's evening entertainment role.

- 5.100 There will also be scope for some restaurants and bars at Wirral Waters - probably at East Float in particular, where Peel is proposing high quality and specialist cafés and restaurants to complement the major mixed-use development, which will also include employment opportunities and new housing - although as we explained earlier in this section it is evident that the details of the retail and leisure components of Wirral Waters have not yet been fully defined.
- 5.101 The remainder of the growth in expenditure on leisure services will go to a wide range of activities, with no single activity capturing any significant market share. In our assessment, parts of the Borough may be viewed favourably by small-scale multiplex/independent cinema operators and neighbourhood bingo clubs, although more detailed market testing would be required. We also note that there are two planning permissions for casino developments - at Europa Boulevard in Birkenhead, and at New Brighton - which will address the qualitative deficiency in casino provision within the Borough.

6 STRATEGIES FOR MEETING RETAIL AND LEISURE NEEDS

Introduction

- 6.1 In Section 2 of our report, we set out the requirements that PPS6 imposes on Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) and Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in preparing development plans; these include the need to consider:
- i) whether there is a need to avoid an over-concentration of growth in the higher level centres;
 - ii) the need for investment in those centres requiring regeneration; and
 - iii) the need to address deficiencies in the network.
- 6.2 Thus, in preparing their development plan documents within the context set by the RSS, LPAs, in turn, must:
- i) select appropriate existing centres to accommodate growth, making the best use of existing land and buildings, but extending the centres where appropriate using tools such as Action Plans, CPOs and strategies to improve transport, land assembly, crime prevention and design;
 - ii) manage the role of existing centres through the promotion of specialist activities, or specific types of uses; and
 - iii) plan for new centres of an appropriate scale in areas of growth, or where there are deficiencies in the existing network.
- 6.3 The test of soundness introduced by PPS12 requires the Council to demonstrate that its chosen strategy is the most appropriate, when considered against reasonable alternatives, and secondly, that the chosen strategy is effective and deliverable. Paragraph 4.1 of PPS12 further requires each core strategy to include:
- i) an overall vision which sets out how the area and the places within it should develop;
 - ii) strategic objectives focusing on the key issues to be addressed;
 - iii) a delivery strategy setting out how much development is intended to happen, where, when and by what means it will be delivered; and
 - iv) arrangements for managing and monitoring the delivery of the strategy.
- 6.4 When developing strategies, it is also imperative to ensure that the proposed course of intervention is deliverable in market terms. This is particularly pertinent given the current unfavourable market conditions whereby credit is much less accessible and investors and developers are less willing to commit to schemes without having secured tenants.
- 6.5 Another factor to take into consideration is the necessity to ensure that whilst retail and commercial led strategies are likely to form the basis of intervention, the economic base of the centres is broadened so as to ensure that they are less susceptible to the shocks inherent with such a volatile market sector. Thus, where the opportunity arises, other viable uses should be encouraged.

- 6.6 It is important to emphasise that intervention strategies cannot be prescriptive, and must recognise local circumstances, building on strengths and addressing weaknesses; indeed, the starting point for any vision for a centre should be a clear understanding of the current role and function of that particular centre. This is in line with the requirements of paragraph 4.2 of PPS12 which states that core strategy visions should be informed by an analysis of the characteristics of the area and its constituent parts, key issues and challenges.

Deliverability of Strategies in the Context of the Recession

- 6.7 In light of the current economic conditions, it is worth making mention of the impact that the recession may have on the deliverability of the strategies which we consider below.
- 6.8 In the short term, there may be a greater level of uncertainty over proposals given the recession that has stricken the UK and most of the world economy. However, many of the strategies which we consider below, or projects which are already underway, will involve public sector investment, which is generally atypical of most market investment activity. We therefore consider that most of the growth strategies will bypass the negative economic conditions imposed by the current recession, albeit we are mindful that significant reductions in public sector spending over the next few years are likely.
- 6.9 Moreover, whilst it is uncertain for how long this recession will affect the economy, the consensus is that we will begin to see a recovery in the next eighteen months with a return to peak market conditions sometime around 2012 to 2015. Thus, given the lengthy timeframes inherent in many of the growth strategies assessed, we consider that the main effect is likely to be that projects are temporarily put on hold until recovery is taking place.
- 6.10 Indeed, we consider that given the current economic conditions, it is more important than ever to ensure that regeneration of areas in need continues. This provides jobs and ensures that areas in need of investment are not neglected or subject to further decline, particularly given the unfavourable economic circumstances. In short, the negative impact of the recession on the retail sector makes the necessity for intervention more pressing than ever.

Strategic Growth Options

- 6.11 The sequential approach suggests that town and district centres should be the first choice for retail and leisure development; moreover, those forms of retail facilities which serve smaller and more localised catchments should be located in the smaller traditional suburban centres where we have identified that gaps in the market currently exist.
- 6.12 Nevertheless, there is also a clear need to consider the emerging proposals for Wirral Waters, which are likely to exert a considerable influence over the future direction of growth in Wirral. As we have stated earlier in this report, it is evident that the details of the retail component of Wirral Waters have not yet been fully defined. Therefore, for the purpose of our assessment, we have assumed that East Float will comprise high quality and specialist cafés, restaurants, boutiques and food retailers, complementary

to the major mixed-use residential and employment development proposed, while Bidston Dock will be a major 'nationally important' retail and leisure destination (in line with the content of the most recent material supplied to the Council by Peel).

- 6.13 In this context we assess the following six strategic growth options for accommodating the new retail and leisure facilities for which we identified a need in Section 5 of our report. Later in Section 6 we then identify our recommendations for addressing the different issues facing each of the Borough's main centres.

Table 6.1 Strategic Growth Options

Growth Option	Description
1 Dispersal across all 5 Town Centres (maintaining the 'status quo')	Distribution of floorspace in line with existing market share/current role.
2 Focus on Birkenhead Town Centre	Strategy of channelling strategic growth primarily into Birkenhead Town Centre.
3 Focus on Birkenhead and Liscard Town Centres	Strategy of channelling strategic growth primarily into the two largest town centres of Birkenhead and Liscard.
4 Focus on Birkenhead/Liscard Town Centres and Wirral Waters	Strategy of distributing strategic growth primarily into the two largest town centres of Birkenhead and Liscard, together with Wirral Waters.
5 Birkenhead Town Centre and Wirral Waters Focus	Strategy of focusing strategic growth in Birkenhead Town Centre and the proposed Wirral Waters development.
6 Wirral Waters Focus	Concerted strategy of focusing strategic growth predominantly on Wirral Waters.

- 6.14 Growth Option 1 assumes that the distribution of floorspace remains unchanged across each of the five Town Centres, which make up the top two tiers in our recommended hierarchy - namely Birkenhead, Liscard, Heswall, West Kirby and Moreton - in line with existing market shares and their current role in the retail hierarchy.
- 6.15 Growth Option 2 examines the implications of pursuing a strategy to enhance the scale and function of activity in Birkenhead Town Centre, so as to emphasise its position as the Borough's largest town centre. Growth Option 3 is similar, and explores the implications of a strategy which seeks to focus the majority of strategic growth in the two largest town centres, namely Birkenhead and Liscard.
- 6.16 Growth Option 4 examines the effects of a strategy which channels growth to the Borough's two largest town centres (Birkenhead and Liscard), while also directing a significant level of growth towards Wirral Waters. Growth Option 5 considers a strategy that focuses on Birkenhead Town Centre and Wirral Waters.
- 6.17 Growth Option 6 considers the effect of directing the majority of future growth to Wirral Waters, with no strategic growth directed to the Borough's traditional centres.
- 6.18 The Wirral Waters site is also out-of-centre, but it is capable of delivering a substantial mixed-use development including comparison and convenience retail along with residential, offices, other employment and commercial leisure uses, which when considered holistically could potentially overcome any conflict with Policy W5 of the existing RSS. We have not considered a potential further option of directing strategic

growth to existing outside-of-centre facilities such as the Croft Retail & Leisure Park and Junction 1 Retail Park; these existing retail parks do not offer anything like the same potential as Wirral Waters and so have dismissed this because, in our view, it does not represent a *'reasonable alternative'*.

Evaluation of the Strategic Growth Options

Key Policy Objectives

- 6.19 Reflecting paragraph 4.5 of PPS12, our remit in this strategic study is to evaluate various options for growth in broad terms. In order to examine the relative merits of the Growth Options described above, we have assessed each against a set of key overarching policy objectives, as set out in Table 6.2 below.
- 6.20 These key policy objectives and assessment criteria reflect key themes in the adopted RSS, the Government's key sustainability objectives as set out in Planning Policy Statements, White Papers and other guidance, and the Council's Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Objectives³⁶.

Evaluation Scoring Mechanism

- 6.21 Using a bespoke evaluation matrix (see Table 6.3), we have assigned each Growth Option's degree of compliance with each policy objective to one of three evaluation categories, namely 'good', 'moderate' or 'poor'. We firmly believe that it would be inappropriate to apply a scoring system in the evaluation process. This is because the 'deliverability' and 'contribution to the wider spatial vision for Wirral' criteria are of greater weight than other assessment criteria, meaning that an option could conceivably perform poorly against one of the criteria but still be a good scheme overall or, conversely, could perform well against most criteria but fall down on deliverability, rendering it a poor or moderate option overall. Moreover, the matrix is intended to provide a useful guide - based on factors which are inherently broad in scope and therefore difficult to quantify - and our overall assessment and overall rating must therefore be based on professional judgement as opposed to a scoring system.
- 6.22 Accordingly, the broad definition of each evaluation 'rating' is as set out below:
- **'Good'** - A Growth Option will attain this rating if it is wholly or substantially consistent with the policy objective. Thus, in our assessment, Growth Option 2 ('Birkenhead Focus') performs very well in relation to the 'Retail Development' policy objective, since it directs growth to Birkenhead Town Centre in accordance with Policy W5 of the adopted RSS.
 - **'Moderate'** - A Growth Option will attain this rating if it only partially complies with the policy objective. For instance, we consider that Growth Option 3 ('Birkenhead and Liscard Focus') performs moderately well in relation to the policy objective of

³⁶ As set out in Appendix 3 of the Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (July 2007). It should be noted that ultimately any spatial options being considered by the Council will need comprehensive assessment against all of the Sustainability Appraisal objectives through the Core Strategy process.

'Marrying Opportunity to Need'. This option directs the majority of strategic growth towards Birkenhead and Liscard Town Centres; although both centres would benefit from focused economic and physical regeneration, other centres in Wirral would also benefit from some level of investment in our assessment, and these needs would not be met under this strategy option.

- **'Poor'** - A Growth Option will attain this rating if it is wholly or substantially in conflict with the policy objective. For instance, we consider that Growth Option 1 ('Dispersal Across all 9 Town Centres) performs poorly in relation to the 'Deliverability' policy objective. Our research has shown that, in reality, there is unlikely to be sufficient interest in all nine town centres for this distribution of growth to be delivered, and in any case, few of the centres have the physical capacity to accommodate further strategic development.

Table 6.2 Key Policy Objectives and Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Main Source(s)	Policy Requirements/Explanation
Manage Travel Demand - Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility	RSS Policy DP5, SA Objectives 3 and 24	Development should be located so as to reduce the need to travel, especially by car, and to enable people as far as possible to meet their needs locally. Major growth should, as far as possible, be located in urban areas where strategic networks connect and public transport is well provided. All new development should be genuinely accessible by public transport, walking and cycling, and priority will be given to locations where such access is already available.
Marry Opportunity to Need	RSS Policy DP6	Priority should be given, in locational choices and investment decisions, to linking areas of economic opportunity with areas in greatest need of economic, social and physical restructuring and regeneration.
Promote Environmental Quality	RSS Policy DP7, SA Objectives 16 and 21	Environmental quality should, <i>inter alia</i> , be protected and enhanced by (1) reclaiming derelict land and remediating contaminated land for end-uses to improve the image of the region and use land resources efficiently, and (2) maximising opportunities for the regeneration of derelict or dilapidated areas.
Retail Development	RSS Policy W5, SA Objective 9	Comparison retailing facilities should be enhanced and encouraged in Birkenhead. Investment should be consistent with the scale and function of the centre, and should not undermine the vitality and viability of any other centre. RSS Policy W5 also sets out a presumption against new out-of-centre regional or sub-regional comparison retailing facilities.
Deliverability	PPS 12	It must be demonstrated that strategies and objectives are deliverable, taking into account the need for sufficient infrastructure, policy considerations, involvement of key stakeholders and partners, and compatibility with aspirations in neighbouring authorities where cross boundary issues are relevant.
Contribution to Wider Spatial Vision for Wirral	RSS Policies LCR 1 & 2, HMRI Pathfinder, Mersey Heartlands Growth Point Initiative	LCR1 emphasises the need for ' <i>...a significant improvement in the sub-region's economic performance by encouraging investment in the regional centre, its surrounding inner areas, the towns and cities identified in RDF1 and in other accessible suburban centres...</i> '. Policy LCR2 identifies the 'Inner Areas' of the Liverpool City Region (comprising the New Heartlands HMR area, which incorporates the eastern part of Wirral and the East Float area of Wirral Waters) as a focus for residential development, so as to secure a significant increase in population and support regeneration activity. LCR2 explains that the role of Birkenhead to provide community facilities, services and employment should be maintained, along with the development of the New Heartlands HMR Pathfinder.

Table 6.3 Strategic Growth Options - Evaluation Matrix

Growth Option	Compliance with Assessment Criteria/Policy Objectives						Overall Assessment	Overall Rating
	Manage Travel Demand - Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility	Marry Opportunity to Need	Promote Environmental Quality	Retail Development	Deliverability	Contribution to Wider Spatial Vision for Wirral		
1. Dispersal across the Borough's 5 Town Centres (maintaining the 'status quo')	GOOD - Travel patterns remain relatively unchanged. Larger centres continue to attract more visitors, although smaller centres are able to cater for local needs and thereby minimise the need to travel.	MODERATE - Most centres benefit from investment, although it may be more appropriate to concentrate on a smaller number of areas with good economic opportunities that are in need of regeneration to realise potential.	MODERATE - This approach may facilitate the re-use and/or remediation of dilapidated land across the nine town centres. However, it may be more beneficial to channel additional investment into specific centres in order to ensure regeneration opportunities are maximised as there is an uneven distribution of dilapidated land.	GOOD - Investment would naturally continue to be consistent with the scale and function of each centre, and would allow for additional floorspace in Birkenhead as advocated by RSS Policy W5. This approach would also discourage major out-of-centre development.	POOR - There is little evidence of demand or aspirations for strategic investment in all five of our recommended Town Centres, and projects are therefore unlikely to progress. Furthermore, few of the centres have sufficient physical capacity to accommodate large-scale growth.	POOR - Directing growth towards the 5 Town Centres is broadly in accordance with RSS Policy LCR1. However, we consider that it is necessary to channel a significant proportion of strategic growth towards Wirral Waters, if the wider vision for Wirral is to be realised. This will be necessary to achieve the substantial critical mass and scale of development required to underpin the wider scheme.	Although Option 1 appears to perform fairly well against most of the assessment criteria, we consider that there is insufficient operator/developer interest for there to be a realistic prospect of dispersing investment across all the 5 Town Centres. In our assessment this strategy is unlikely to be delivered and it should therefore achieve an overall rating of 'poor'.	POOR
2. Birkenhead Focus	MODERATE - Access to Birkenhead by car and public transport is good. However, this option does reinforce the need to travel to Birkenhead, and would be detrimental to the provision of accessible facilities in other centres.	MODERATE - Birkenhead has suffered from a lack of investment over recent years, and is failing to perform to its full potential. The town centre would certainly benefit from focused economic and physical regeneration. However, in our assessment there are other centres which are also in need of further investment.	GOOD - Parts of Birkenhead Town Centre are suffering from a lack of maintenance, particularly towards the western end of Grange Road. The core area also has a high incidence of unsightly vacant units. Concentrating investment in Birkenhead town centre would encourage these issues to be addressed, subject to the availability of resources.	GOOD - RSS Policy W5 seeks to direct comparison retailing facilities into Birkenhead, and discourages out-of-centre development. This strategy therefore accords with RSS current policy objectives.	POOR - There has been little evidence of significant investment in Birkenhead over recent years, and no progress has been made in terms of formulating plans to redevelop the eastern part of the centre. Indeed, our research suggests that there is a lack of operator interest in the centre, and the physical expansion of the town centre is constrained to the north, south and west.	POOR - Directing growth towards Birkenhead is in accordance with RSS Policy LCR1. However, we consider that it is necessary to channel a significant proportion of strategic growth towards Wirral Waters, if the wider vision for Wirral is to be realised. Peel maintains that this will be necessary to achieve the substantial critical mass and scale of development required to underpin the wider Wirral Waters scheme.	Option 2 performs at least moderately well against most of the assessment criteria, and is fully in accordance with the RSS. However, there is little evidence of firm operator/developer interest in Birkenhead, and the town centre is physically constrained and in complex multiple ownerships; we therefore consider that it will be difficult to attract this level of investment into the town centre. Accordingly, this strategy is unlikely to be delivered and should achieve an overall rating of 'poor'.	POOR
3. Birkenhead and Liscard Focus	MODERATE - Access to Birkenhead by car and public transport is good, and Liscard can be easily reached by bus. Nevertheless, this strategy will reinforce the need to travel and would be detrimental to the provision of accessible facilities in other centres.	MODERATE - Birkenhead has suffered from a lack of investment over recent years, and is failing to perform to its full potential. Our evidence also suggests that the long-term decline which Liscard has suffered from has continued since our previous Retail Study in 2004. Both town centres would therefore benefit from focused economic and physical regeneration, although the same could be said for other town centres in Wirral.	GOOD - Parts of Birkenhead Town Centre are suffering from a lack of maintenance, particularly towards the western end of Grange Road. The core area also has a high incidence of unsightly vacant units. Although Liscard has benefited from some recent environmental improvements, there remain a significant number of run-down buildings in prominent locations. Concentrating investment in these centres may encourage such issues to be addressed, subject to the availability of resources.	GOOD - RSS Policy W5 seeks to direct comparison retailing facilities into Birkenhead, and discourages out-of-centre development. Concentrating development within the existing centres of Birkenhead and Liscard would therefore accord with current RSS policy objectives.	POOR - Our research suggests that there is a lack of operator interest in Birkenhead Town Centre, and the physical expansion of the centre is constrained to the north, south and west. Although the only realistic direction for growth is towards the east, there has been no progress in terms of formulating plans to redevelop this part of the centre. Similarly, Liscard has only benefited from minor recent investment, and the vacant Capitol building on the southern end of Seabank Road represents the only significant redevelopment opportunity. However, we consider that there is unlikely to be sufficient demand for a substantial town centre scheme in Liscard.	POOR - Directing growth towards Birkenhead and Liscard is broadly in accordance with RSS Policy LCR1. However, we consider that it is necessary to channel a significant proportion of strategic growth towards Wirral Waters, if the wider vision for Wirral is to be realised. Peel maintains that this will be necessary to achieve the substantial critical mass and scale of development required to underpin the wider scheme.	Option 3 also performs at least moderately well against most of the assessment criteria. However, as with Option 2, we consider there to be a limited prospect of attracting the required level of operator/investor interest in Birkenhead and Liscard Town Centres. In our assessment this strategy is unlikely to be deliverable and it therefore achieves an overall rating of 'poor'.	POOR
4. Birkenhead, Liscard and Wirral Waters Focus	MODERATE - Access to both Birkenhead and Liscard by car and public transport is good, and the proposed Wirral Waters site is served by bus and train services. Nevertheless, this strategy will reinforce the need to travel and would be detrimental to the provision of accessible facilities in other centres. In particular, the scale of the Wirral Waters scheme suggests that it is likely to generate a significant number of additional journeys. Nevertheless, it should be noted that once the residential element of the scheme is complete, it is likely that a number of journeys will be made by new residents who will be able to walk/use public transport to access the new retail facilities. Furthermore, the Wirral Waters scheme will itself deliver new and improved transport infrastructure, and so it would be prudent to take this into account, rather than simply assessing the proposals against existing provision.	GOOD - Birkenhead and Liscard have suffered from a lack of investment over recent years, and both centres are generally failing to perform to their full potential. The 50 hectare Wirral Waters site consists of largely underused and redundant docks at Birkenhead and Bidston. Therefore, it could be argued that focusing investment in both of these areas could potentially bring about much needed improvements in Birkenhead and Liscard, while maximising the opportunity to regenerate the dock area.	GOOD - Parts of Birkenhead Town Centre are suffering from a lack of maintenance, particularly towards the western end of Grange Road. The core area also has a high incidence of unsightly vacant units. Although Liscard has benefited from some recent environmental improvements, there remain a significant number of run-down buildings in prominent locations. The substantial Wirral Waters site contains a considerable amount of derelict and despoiled land and buildings. A strategy to channel investment into these areas would facilitate necessary environmental improvements in Birkenhead and Liscard, while encouraging the comprehensive regeneration of the currently underused docks. There is developer commitment to the regeneration of the docks.	MODERATE - A strategy that includes channelling additional comparison retailing facilities into Birkenhead and Liscard Town Centres would accord with RSS retail policy W5. However, this policy also discourages out-of-centre retail development, and asserts that investment should be consistent with the scale and function of the centre, so as not to undermine the vitality and viability of any other centre. Wirral Waters is a major out-of - centre mixed use scheme which - depending on what is proposed - could draw trade from a wide catchment area. However, the retail element(s) of Wirral Waters must be viewed in the wider context and is essential to the delivery of the vision for Wirral Waters as a whole. Taken together with the important residential and commercial elements along with regeneration and deliverability benefits, the scheme when considered holistically could overcome any conflict with RSS Policy W5	MODERATE - There has been little evidence of significant investment and/or interest in either Birkenhead or Liscard Town Centres over recent years. However, Peel Holdings is committed to the delivery of Wirral Waters; the extensive site benefits from being in single ownership, and a planning application for retail development on the site is currently in the pipeline. Importantly, the scheme is viewed as a long-term project, and Peel is therefore confident that current economic conditions will not hamper delivery.	GOOD - Directing growth towards Birkenhead and Liscard is broadly in accordance with RSS Policy LCR1. Wirral Waters is within the HMRI boundary and at the heart of the Mersey Heartlands Growth Point. Furthermore, Wirral Waters is mostly located within the 'surrounding inner area' of the regional centre, where RSS Policy LCR2 places emphasis on providing a significant increase in the residential population, and is therefore earmarked as a first priority for new housing. The Wirral Waters scheme seeks to re-use redundant and under-utilised port land for major mixed-use regeneration purposes. The retail element(s) of the proposals must be viewed within the wider context, and are integral to the successful delivery of the vision as a whole. We therefore consider that taken together with the important residential and commercial elements of the scheme, channelling growth towards Wirral Waters will contribute positively to the wider spatial vision for Wirral.	Option 4 performs at least moderately well against the assessment indicators. As we have explained above, there appears to be relatively little interest in either Birkenhead or Liscard Town Centres, despite the clear need for further investment in these centres. However, Peel Holdings has made clear its intention to progress the proposals for Wirral Waters. We therefore consider that Option 4 could at least be partially implemented, and it therefore achieves an overall rating of 'moderate'.	MODERATE

Growth Option	Compliance with Assessment Criteria/Policy Objectives							Overall Rating
	Manage Travel Demand - Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility	Marry Opportunity to Need	Promote Environmental Quality	Retail Development	Deliverability	Contribution to Wider Spatial Vision for Wirral	Overall Assessment	
5. Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Focus	MODERATE - Access to Birkenhead Town Centre by car and public transport is good, and the proposed Wirral Waters site is served by bus and train services. Nevertheless, this strategy will reinforce the need to travel and would be detrimental to the provision of accessible facilities in other centres. Furthermore, the scale of the Wirral Waters scheme suggests that it is likely to generate a significant number of additional journeys. Nevertheless, it should be noted that once the residential element of the scheme is complete, it is likely that a significant number of journeys will be made by new residents who will be able to walk/use public transport to access the new retail facilities. Furthermore, the Wirral Waters scheme will itself deliver new and improved transport infrastructure, and so it would be prudent to take this into account, rather than simply assessing the proposals against existing provision.	GOOD - Birkenhead has suffered from a lack of investment over recent years, rental values are low, and the centre is generally failing to perform to its full potential. The 50 hectare Wirral Waters site consists of largely underused and redundant docks at Birkenhead and Bidston. Therefore, it could be argued that focusing investment in both of these areas could potentially bring about much needed improvements in Birkenhead, while maximising the opportunity to regenerate the dock area.	GOOD - Parts of Birkenhead Town Centre are suffering from a lack of maintenance, particularly towards the western end of Grange Road. The core area also has a high incidence of unsightly vacant units. The substantial Wirral Waters site contains a considerable amount of derelict and despoiled land and buildings. A strategy to channel investment into both these areas would facilitate necessary environmental improvements in Birkenhead while encouraging the comprehensive regeneration of the currently underused docks. There is developer commitment to the regeneration of the docks.	MODERATE - A strategy that includes channelling additional comparison retailing facilities into Birkenhead Town Centre would accord with RSS retail policy W5. However, this policy also discourages out-of-centre retail development, and asserts that investment should be consistent with the scale and function of the centre, so as not to undermine the vitality and viability of any other centre. Wirral Waters is a major out-of-centre mixed use scheme which - depending on what is proposed - could draw trade from a wide catchment area. However, the retail element(s) of Wirral Waters must be viewed in the wider context and is essential to the delivery of the vision for Wirral Waters as a whole. Taken together with the important residential and commercial elements along with regeneration and deliverability benefits, the scheme when considered holistically could overcome any conflict with RSS Policy W5.	MODERATE - Peel Holdings is committed to the delivery of Wirral Waters; the extensive site benefits from being in single ownership, and a planning application for retail development on the site is currently in the pipeline. Importantly, the scheme is viewed as a long-term project, and Peel is therefore confident that current economic conditions will not hamper delivery. Although Birkenhead has for a long time been overlooked in terms of investment, it is hoped that funding from the Mersey Heartlands New Growth Point will prompt the development of a suitable scheme in the town centre. Nevertheless, as noted, there is little evidence of firm operator/developer interest in Birkenhead and the town centre is physically constrained and in complex multiple ownerships. For these reasons, Growth Option 5 achieves a 'moderate' rating against the deliverability criterion rather than 'good'.	GOOD - Directing growth towards Birkenhead is in accordance with RSS Policy LCR1. Wirral Waters is within the HMRI boundary and at the heart of the Mersey Heartlands Growth Point. Furthermore, Wirral Waters is mostly located within the 'surrounding inner area' of the regional centre, where RSS Policy LCR2 places emphasis on providing a significant increase in the residential population, and is therefore earmarked as a first priority for new housing. The Wirral Waters scheme seeks to re-use redundant and under-utilised port land for major mixed-use regeneration purposes. The retail element(s) of the proposals must be viewed within the wider context, and are integral to the successful delivery of the vision as a whole. We therefore consider that taken together with the important residential and commercial elements of the scheme, channelling growth towards Wirral Waters will contribute positively to the wider spatial vision for Wirral.	Option 5 performs at least moderately well when assessed against our criteria. Focussing the majority of strategic growth in Birkenhead would accord with the development plan, albeit we are concerned that a significant level of investment in Birkenhead Town Centre might not come forward in practice. Meanwhile, while the Wirral Waters proposal is a major out-of-centre mixed use scheme which - depending on what is proposed - could draw trade from a wide catchment area, our research suggests that those involved are committed to the delivery of the scheme, which could potentially yield wider benefits for Wirral and when considered holistically Wirral Waters could overcome any conflict with RSS Policy W5. We therefore conclude that this strategy achieves an overall rating of 'good'.	GOOD
6. Wirral Waters Focus	MODERATE - The Wirral Waters site broadly benefits from existing public transport links and good road connections. However, the scheme is in an out-of-centre location, and will generate a significant number of additional journeys, many of which are likely to be made by car. Furthermore, this option reinforces the need to travel, and would be detrimental to the provision of accessible facilities in other existing centres. Nevertheless, it should be noted that once the residential element of the scheme is complete, it is likely that a significant number of journeys will be made by new residents who will be able to walk/use public transport to access the new retail facilities. Furthermore, the Wirral Waters scheme will itself deliver new and improved transport infrastructure, and so it would be prudent to take this into account, rather than simply assessing the proposals against existing provision.	MODERATE - The 50 hectare Wirral Waters site consists of largely underused and redundant docks at Birkenhead and Bidston, and would therefore benefit from wholesale redevelopment. However, channelling the majority of strategic investment into Wirral Waters may dilute the likelihood of significant regeneration activity taking place in parts of Birkenhead Town Centre, and other smaller centres in the Borough.	GOOD - The Wirral Waters site contains a considerable amount of derelict and despoiled land and buildings. A strategy to channel investment into this area would facilitate necessary environmental improvements and maximise the opportunity to comprehensively regenerate the currently underused dock area. There is developer commitment to the regeneration of the docks.	MODERATE - RSS retail policy W5 discourages out-of-centre retail development, and asserts that investment should be consistent with the scale and function of the centre, so as not to undermine the vitality and viability of any other centre. Wirral Waters is a major out-of-centre mixed use scheme which - depending on what is proposed - could draw trade from a wide catchment area. However, the retail element(s) of Wirral Waters must be viewed in the wider context and are essential to the delivery of the vision for Wirral Waters as a whole. Taken together with the important residential and commercial elements along with regeneration and deliverability benefits, the scheme when considered holistically could overcome any conflict with RSS Policy W5. Option is therefore rated as 'moderate' on this basis.	GOOD - Peel Holdings is committed to the delivery of Wirral Waters; the extensive site benefits from being in single ownership, and a planning application for retail development on the site is currently in the pipeline. Importantly, the scheme is viewed as a long-term project, and Peel is therefore confident that current economic conditions will not hamper delivery.	GOOD - Wirral Waters is within the HMRI boundary and at the heart of the Mersey Heartlands Growth Point. Furthermore, Wirral Waters is mostly located within the 'surrounding inner area' of the regional centre, where RSS policy LCR2 places emphasis on providing a significant increase in the residential population, and is therefore earmarked as a first priority for new housing. The Wirral Waters scheme seeks to re-use redundant and under-utilised port land for major mixed-use regeneration purposes. The retail element(s) of the proposals must be viewed within the wider context, and are integral to the successful delivery of the vision as a whole. We therefore consider that taken together with the important residential and commercial elements of the scheme, channelling strategic growth towards Wirral Waters will contribute positively to the wider spatial vision for Wirral.	Option 6 performs well against the assessment criteria. The Wirral Waters proposal is a major out-of-centre mixed use scheme which - depending on what is proposed - could draw trade from a wide catchment area. However, past experience suggests that there is little prospect of attracting significant investment into many of the Town and District Centres, while the proposals for Wirral Waters are more likely to come forward, the land required is in single ownership, and the scheme will yield significant wider benefits for Wirral, which when considered holistically could overcome any conflict with RSS Policy W5. We therefore consider that this strategy should receive an overall 'good' rating.	GOOD

Strategic Growth Options - Summary of Evaluation Findings

- 6.23 The final column of Table 6.3 provides our overall evaluation 'rating' for each of the alternative Growth Options for meeting retail and leisure needs in Wirral. Table 6.3 also provides a summary of each Growth Option's performance in relation to the key policy objectives, in terms of 'good', 'moderate' or 'poor'.
- 6.24 The table shows that three Growth Options achieve an overall 'poor' rating. Option 1 ('Status Quo') achieves mostly 'good' or 'moderate' ratings against the majority of the assessment criteria, but falls down in terms of deliverability because it assumes a continuation of current market shares, which in turn generates a theoretical floorspace 'requirement' in all study centres; this is something that the market is highly unlikely to deliver. Option 2 ('Birkenhead Focus') falls down because there are no major proposals for town centre redevelopment in the pipeline, the town centre is in complex multiple ownership, and physical constraints (such as the surrounding road network) place a limit on the ability of the centre to expand. Option 3 ('Birkenhead and Liscard Focus') directs a substantial level of growth into Liscard alongside Birkenhead; our research suggests that there is unlikely to be a sufficient level of interest in either of these centres to support this scale of growth.
- 6.25 One Growth Option achieves an overall 'moderate' rating. Option 4 ('Birkenhead, Liscard and Wirral Waters Focus') scores at least moderately well in relation to most aspirations and policy objectives, but we consider that the scale of growth it would require in Birkenhead and Liscard will be difficult to achieve. However, this Growth Option also seeks to direct strategic growth towards Wirral Waters, the proposals for which perform well in terms of deliverability and their contribution to the wider vision for Wirral; Option 4 could therefore at least be partially implemented, which means it achieves a higher overall rating in the matrix than Options 1-3.
- 6.26 In our evaluation matrix, two Growth Options achieve an overall 'good' rating. The first, Growth Option 5 ('Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Focus'), performs well against the assessment criteria because it directs a high proportion of growth to Birkenhead in line with RSS Policy W5, while supporting Wirral Waters which is likely to yield significant wider benefits for Wirral. This Option also provides an opportunity to regenerate a substantial amount of underused, previously developed land at Birkenhead and Bidston docks, while investing in the upgrading of Birkenhead Town Centre. We therefore consider that Option 5 strikes a good balance between maintaining the role of the Borough's largest existing centre, while looking towards the future contribution of Wirral Waters, and the broader vision for Wirral as a whole.
- 6.27 The second Option that achieves an overall rating of 'good' in the Matrix is Option 6 ('Wirral Waters Focus'), which is arguably the most deliverable of all the potential strategies. The Wirral Waters scheme is integral to the achievement of the Mersey Heartlands Growth Point dwelling targets, and is mostly located within the 'surrounding inner area' of the regional centre, where RSS Policy LCR2 places emphasis on providing a significant increase in new housing. The retail element(s) of the Wirral Waters proposals must be viewed within the wider context, and are essential for the successful delivery of the vision as a whole. We therefore consider that taken together with the

important residential and commercial elements of the scheme, channelling strategic retail growth towards Wirral Waters will contribute positively to the wider spatial vision for Wirral.

- 6.28 Taking into account the aforementioned, in our assessment there are two clear preferred Growth Options for distributing identified retail and leisure needs in Wirral, as follows:
- **Growth Option 5**, which seeks to channel the majority of strategic growth towards Birkenhead Town Centre and Wirral Waters. However, it is important to note that this strategy will only be successful if a viable redevelopment scheme for the town centre can be brought forward, which would require the commitment of key landowners in Birkenhead Town Centre such as Warner Estates. If this Growth Option was to be pursued by the Council, it would be imperative that retail and leisure development at Birkenhead Town Centre and Wirral Waters is complementary.
 - **Growth Option 6**, which focuses on meeting the majority of retail and leisure needs at Wirral Waters. This is the most deliverable Growth Option, since the land involved is in the single ownership of the developer (Peel Holdings), and the vision, planning and implementation strategy is already at a relatively advanced stage. We consider that this is the best long term opportunity to raise the profile of Wirral, and to re-position the Borough as a serious retail and leisure destination.

- 6.29 It is important to emphasise that, under both Options 5 and 6 - which involve strategic growth at Wirral Waters - we would still expect Birkenhead Town Centre to retain its status as a strategic centre as per the RSS. Furthermore, we would not advocate that Birkenhead's position in the sub-regional hierarchy of centres should be changed. Even under Option 6 - which would see most of the Borough's retail and leisure growth taking place at Wirral Waters - we would anticipate a range of smaller scale development opportunities coming forward in Birkenhead Town Centre to provide retail, leisure and other town centre uses.

Designation of New Centres

- 6.30 Paragraph 2.53 of PPS6 repeats the advice earlier in PPS6 that *'new centres should be designated through the plan-making process where the need for them has been established, such as in areas of significant growth, or where there are deficiencies in the existing network of centres, with priority given to deprived areas... Whether this is done at the regional or local level will depend on the size of the proposed centre and its proposed role in the hierarchy of existing centres...'*
- 6.31 Paragraph 2.10 of PPS6 is clear that *'the identification of new centres which are of more than local significance should be addressed initially at the regional level.'* Therefore, the *'Major nationally important retail and leisure destination'* which Turleys refers to in relation to Bidston Dock would have to come through the RSS process (we reiterate again here that Policy W5 of the existing version of the RSS would rule out any type of town centre designation at Bidston Dock).
- 6.32 A key consideration for the Council in preparing its LDF will, however, be whether or not to designate a new centre to support the new dockland community (and the wider Wirral community) at Wirral Waters. As we have repeatedly emphasised throughout our report,

it is clear that the precise details of the retail and leisure components of Wirral Waters have not yet been finalised. Nevertheless, it is plain that the overall plans for Wirral Waters are of such a scale that it represents an '*area of significant growth*', with substantial population growth anticipated.

- 6.33 Our initial view is that there is likely to be a strong case for designating a new centre at Wirral Waters. Designating a centre in that location would be a more sustainable option than not doing so, and therefore assuming that existing convenience retail and service facilities in Birkenhead and Liscard would be adequate to support the growth in population at Wirral Waters. Further, more detailed work would be required once the proposals for Wirral Waters are clarified; this work would need to include the following:
- the most appropriate location for a new local centre;
 - timescales and 'triggers' for designation - for instance, what level of housing/population growth would have to take place (or at least be firmly committed) first; and
 - the mix and scale of uses that would be acceptable at the centre.

Centre-Specific Strategy and Interventions

- 6.34 In evaluating the various strategic Growth Options for delivering retail and leisure needs, set out above, we were considering the best way forward for the Borough as a whole. Although our forward approach is to channel a significant amount of strategic growth into Birkenhead - at Wirral Waters and potentially also the Town Centre, if a scheme can be brought forward - the Council will still need to consider how the vitality and viability of the Borough's other main centres can best be ensured. Therefore, in the remainder of this section we recommend a range of centre-specific interventions which could help to address the issues identified in the performances analyses contained in Appendix 3 of Volume 3, and summarised in Section 3 of this report.
- 6.35 At the end of Section 3 we set out our recommended changes to the current retail hierarchy as defined in the UDP. We recommend that Bromborough Village, Hoylake and Prenton (Woodchurch Road) should be reclassified as District Centres, and that New Ferry should be reclassified as a Local Centre. Nevertheless, for completeness, we identify potential interventions for each of the existing nine UDP-defined Key Town Centres in the remainder of this section.
- 6.36 We have placed each of the nine UDP-defined Key Town Centres into one of three distinct intervention models, as follows:
- i) **Minor intervention** - centres which are considered to be healthy, or where there is no/limited evidence of decline;
 - ii) **Moderate intervention** - centres with some evidence of decline, but which are deemed to be sustainable; and
 - iii) **Major intervention** - centres which are no longer commercially sustainable, are in long term decline, or which are significantly under-performing and would benefit from comprehensive redevelopment/regeneration.

- 6.37 Some of our recommendations - for instance in relation to consolidation of centres - are fairly ambitious, and so they would require a commensurate level of investment. It is beyond the remit of this strategic study to identify the range of specific interventions in the form of comprehensive strategies, or to formulate detailed implementation plans. Accordingly, in Tables 6.3 to 6.5, we identify the broad future directions that we consider are appropriate for the Borough's main centres, together with a range of key interventions.
- 6.38 Some of the actions are ongoing, or have a commitment to be implemented, while others can only be brought forward through the submission of planning applications or other action by private interests. Importantly, the suggested interventions are proportionate to the level of intervention required - taking account of their current level of vitality and viability - and the current and potential scale/function of the centre. More detailed work would be required to flesh out these early ideas although some of the potential tools/interventions which might be required are highlighted below:
- In Birkenhead Town Centre, there should be an aspiration to achieve a development scheme to attract new retail and leisure operators which are presently missing from the offer. This does not mean that such a scheme could only happen if the Wirral Waters proposals do not materialise (and vice versa); in our assessment the aim should be to achieve complementary development at Birkenhead Town Centre and at Wirral Waters.
 - In some cases, such as New Ferry, the key to a sustainable future will be to accept that the centre is physically too big for its current (and future) role in the Borough's hierarchy of centres. Consolidating the centre around a more appropriate core area would require a range of proactive, targeted measures, including:
 - acquisition and clearance of poor quality/vacant/low demand property, preferably through co-operation with landowners but potentially by recourse to CPO, if necessary;
 - relocation of existing occupants from affected property;
 - provision of new, more appropriate premises within a better laid-out centre;
 - rental incentives to attract businesses into the new premises; and
 - provision of complementary non-retail facilities.
 - Some centres are generally healthy and require a more limited level of intervention. In these cases there are a range of measures which, although relatively small-scale, could collectively have a marked effect in terms of maintaining and enhancing vitality and viability. Examples include traffic calming measures, enhanced pedestrian crossing facilities and relatively low-cost physical interventions such as shopfront improvements, as well as public realm enhancement.
- 6.39 Through the more detailed work that would be needed to develop the centre-specific strategies, it will be necessary to cost the individual interventions and identify potential funding sources, timescales for implementation and lead delivery agencies/partner organisations.
- 6.40 The focus of this study is retail and, to a lesser extent, commercial leisure. It is therefore not necessary for us to undertake a market or capacity assessment in relation to the office sector. Furthermore, office uses are covered in the Employment Land Study which BE

Group recently completed for the Council. Nevertheless, we consider it useful to briefly comment on the scope for offices in the Borough's main centres, given that offices are specified as one of the 'town centre uses' under paragraph 1.8 of PPS6.

- 6.41 The Employment Land Study identifies a shortage of office premises across the Borough and suggests, among other things, that there should be an enhancement of Birkenhead's office sector provision and creation of small/serviced offices in the key service centres in West Wirral. Through our consultations with agents for this study we understand that much of the existing office stock in Birkenhead is out-of-date and is consequently frequently vacant. This appears to support the need for existing office stock in Birkenhead to be refurbished if it is to appeal to the requirements of modern businesses.
- 6.42 Analysis of the CLG's 'State of the Cities Database' (SOCDB) shows that Birkenhead Town Centre contained 105,400 sq.m of 'office' floorspace in 2004, followed by Liscard which contained substantially less (8,800 sq.m). The only other centres in Wirral with more than 1,000 sq.m of office floorspace according to the SOCDB are Heswall (3,300 sq.m), Moreton (2,000 sq.m) and West Kirby (1,100 sq.m). This demonstrates that, aside from Birkenhead, the office markets in the Borough's town centres are small-scale, and so they are unlikely to be candidates for substantial office development. Nevertheless, the aspiration should be to accommodate office uses in town centres wherever possible and proposals for office uses should be subjected to the sequential test, as required by PPS6. In formulating strategies for the Borough's Town Centres the Council could consider how to encourage the use of upper floors for office uses or ensure that retail and other development schemes include proposals for upper floor uses.

Centres Where Minor Intervention is Considered Appropriate - Bromborough Village, Heswall, Moreton and West Kirby

- 6.43 Bromborough Village, Heswall, Moreton and West Kirby are relatively healthy centres, and we consider that there is no need for intervention on the scale that is necessary in some of Wirral's other centres. Nevertheless, in Table 6.4 below, we identify various measures that Wirral Council, and its partners, could seek to implement in order to improve these centres' ability to serve the needs of the local community.

Table 6.4 - Strategy and Interventions for Centres Where Minor Intervention is Considered Appropriate

Key Recommendations - Minor Intervention Centres		
Centre	Project, Action or Programme	Description
Bromborough Village	a - Physical upgrading of the shopping precinct	Although the external appearance of most buildings in the centre is good, the shopping precinct is now a little tired in its appearance, and would certainly benefit from some upgrading/external enhancements.
	b - Monitor impact of Croft Retail and Leisure Park	Croft Retail and Leisure Park (CRLP) is located around one mile north of Bromborough Village, and is ranked significantly higher than the town centre itself, at 669th position. Our analysis of retailer requirements confirmed that whilst there is strong operator demand for the purpose-built retail space at CRLP, interest in the town centre itself is much weaker. Given the lack of larger floorplate retail units in the town centre, we consider it prudent to monitor activity at CRLP to ensure that town centre uses are located within Bromborough Village itself where possible, to ensure the future vitality and viability of the centre.
Heswall	a - Reoccupation of the former Kwik Save unit	The Kwik Save unit, which has been vacant for over a year, is in a prominent position along The Mount, and the site would benefit from conversion/redevelopment.
	b - Selective property upgrades	Heswall is a generally pleasant and attractive centre, and many of the town centre buildings are of high architectural quality and the exterior condition of the majority of properties is very good. Notwithstanding this, there is still room for improvement, with parts of the town centre - in particular Pensby Road/Downham Road - in need of further environmental enhancement.
Moreton	a - Improved parking provision	Moreton suffers from insufficient car parking provision, with only around 60 spaces available. Although we acknowledge that there is limited land available to provide additional spaces, we consider that the lack of parking may be discouraging visitors, and the centre may benefit from increased footfall if further parking could be achieved.
	b - Provide public realm/streetscape enhancements	Moreton is a relatively clean and pleasant centre, with no notable litter/graffiti problems. Several buildings within Moreton are of architectural significance, which adds to the ambience of the centre. Moreton is, however, dominated by the through-flow of heavy traffic, and would benefit from the provision of additional street furniture and planting to improve the pedestrian environment.
West Kirby	a - Ensure delivery of the Greater Concourse Project	The main development opportunity in West Kirby is the Greater Concourse Project. The Concourse site, which is allocated in the adopted UDP (Policy SH6) for A1, A2, A3, B1 or D1 uses, is earmarked for a £20m redevelopment. The scheme is expected to deliver re-cladding of the existing building; creation of a new health centre and fire station; provision of improved car parking and a new, high quality public square; and development of additional, quality retail provision. We consider that this is an important opportunity for West Kirby, and its delivery should be supported.
	b - Provide selective public realm/streetscape enhancements	We understand that there are plans to introduce high quality improvements to the public realm in Banks Road, Dee Lane, Grange Road and The Crescent, and we consider that these improvements should be fully supported.
	c - Improved pedestrian linkages	We suggest that consideration should be given to improving pedestrian linkages throughout the town centre, to ensure that further development towards the north of the centre is not detrimental to traders located along the south of Banks Road.

*Centres Where Moderate Intervention Is Required - Hoylake and Prenton
(Woodchurch Road)*

- 6.44 Of the nine UDP-defined Key Town Centres, Hoylake is the lowest-ranking, and the centre's poor retail performance can partly be explained by the limited and contracting comparison retail sector, high vacancy rate, low footfall, limited operator demand, and a poor physical environment in parts.
- 6.45 Although Prenton (Woodchurch Road) is a generally healthy centre, and is able to meet the convenience and day-to-day service requirements of local residents, there are indications that the centre is declining as a comparison retail destination. In particular, we note that Prenton has experienced significant recent slippage in the national retail rankings, and the vacancy rate is rising. We therefore consider that this centre would benefit from moderate intervention, as described in Table 6.5 below, in order to stem this decline and ensure that the centre remains viable.

Table 6.5 - Strategy and Actions for Centres Where Moderate Intervention Is Required

Key Recommendations - Moderate Intervention Centres		
Centre	Project, Action or Programme	Description
Hoylake	a - Reoccupation of vacant units	There were 26 vacant units in Hoylake Town Centre in May 2008; this equates to a vacancy rate - as measured by the proportion of units - of 20.6 per cent, which is almost twice the UK average vacancy rate of 11.1 per cent. The vacant units in Hoylake are generally small in size and are distributed throughout the length of the centre, although there is a greater concentration of vacancies towards the north of Market Street. We consider this to be a worrying level of vacancy for a centre the size of Hoylake, and that vacant units should be redeveloped or reoccupied, either individually or in conglomeration. The Council could give favourable consideration to proposals for further A3-A5 uses which would complement the Centre's well-established evening entertainment role, although commensurate improvements to security measures should be undertaken in parallel.
	b - Selective property upgrades, and improvements to the public realm/streetscape	Hoylake has benefited from recent investment in its streetscape and public realm, focused primarily around the northern end of Market Street. The environmental improvement works have included new paving, street lamps, street furniture, signage and tree-planting. However, local stakeholders have commented that the maintenance of buildings needs to be improved, and we noted that the large number of vacant units and other non-descript buildings in Hoylake detracts substantially from the character of the centre. This problem is particularly acute towards the southern end of Market Street/Birkenhead Road. The frequent usage of security shutters in some areas of the centre also undermines the quality of the streetscape. We therefore recommend that similar improvements should be made to the other parts of the centre, and that buildings should be better maintained.
	c - Possible contraction of the centre	Hoylake is a long, linear centre interspersed with vacant units. We thus consider that the centre may benefit from consolidation and intensification around a central core, although we accept that achieving this in practice is likely to be challenging.
Prenton (Woodchurch Road)	a - Monitor levels of vacancy	There were six vacant units in Prenton (Woodchurch Road) in May 2008; this equates to a vacancy rate - as measured by the proportion of units - of 12.0 per cent, which is similar to the UK average vacancy rate of 11.1 per cent. However, the vacancy rate has increased since 2004, when we identified only one vacant unit within the town centre boundary. Although we are not currently concerned by the level of vacancy, we consider that this situation should be closely monitored given that it would appear that the number of vacant properties is beginning to noticeably increase. The Council could consider looking favourably upon proposals for non-retail uses, particularly those which would complement the Centre's growing role as a service centre.
	b - Selective property upgrades, and improvements to the public realm/streetscape	Prenton (Woodchurch Road) is a generally clean and tidy centre. The external condition of most buildings is generally good, and the centre appears well-maintained. The derelict site adjacent to Kwik-Fit (to the east of the centre) is, however, an eyesore and should be addressed, and the centre would also benefit from the provision of more street furniture.

Centres in Need of Major Intervention - Birkenhead (Core Area), Liscard, and New Ferry

- 6.46 Birkenhead, Liscard and New Ferry have all experienced significant and sustained decline, and are in need of major intervention if they are to remain competitive and viable.
- 6.47 Most of the health check indicators suggest a decline in Birkenhead Town Centre's overall vitality and viability since the last retail study in 2004. The centre has consistently suffered from high levels of vacancy, low levels of footfall, a disappointing retail and service offer, and a sub-standard physical environment. Unless a comprehensive, high-quality scheme can be formulated to attract the sort of middle-market comparison retailers and better quality food & drink outlets which are currently missing from the town centre offer, then we consider it inevitable that Birkenhead's comparison market share and its position in the sub-regional hierarchy will continue to deteriorate further.
- 6.48 In considering where a development scheme in Birkenhead Town Centre could be located, we have taken account of the requirements of paragraphs 2.4 to 2.8 of PPS6, and Policies EC5 and EC7 of the Consultation Paper on a new PPS4. However, as the plan in Appendix 4 in Volume 3 shows, physical expansion of Birkenhead Town Centre to the south is constrained by the presence of the busy A552 (Borough Road) and the flyover from the Queensway Tunnel. Expansion in a westward direction is similarly difficult because the A5029 (Exmouth Street/Whetstone Lane) is also very busy. Thus, expensive and challenging road diversion, and acquisition of property at the densely built-up Oxton Road and Grange Road West, beyond Charing Cross, would be required. The commitment for a new Asda superstore means that expansion to the north is no longer possible.
- 6.49 Consequently, the only realistic direction to look for a major development scheme is towards the east. Although the Hind Street site has long been touted as a candidate for retail development - and it now has planning permission for 8,500 sq.m of non-food retail floorspace (gross) - this site is divorced from the town centre core and is on the wrong side of the flyover. Achieving successful pedestrian linkages between Hind Street and the town centre core will therefore be challenging, and in any event the scheme is likely to be geared towards bulky goods operators.
- 6.50 As a consequence, a comprehensive redevelopment of the Grange Centre appears to be the only obvious opportunity for a substantial town centre development in Birkenhead with potential for high street type units. This would need to involve the Council, Birkenhead Market and the main landowner, Warner Estates, although as far as we are aware Warner has no current plans in place regarding the future of the Grange Centre.
- 6.51 Most of the key indicators of vitality and viability suggest that the trend of long-term decline in Liscard which we identified in 2004 is also continuing. Liscard has experienced a significant slippage in the national retail rankings, and the town centre's comparison retail offer remains firmly at the lower end of the spectrum. The vacancy rate is above the UK average, the physical appearance of the centre is generally lack-lustre - despite recent environmental improvements - and anti-social behaviour and vandalism remains a problem in the town centre.

- 6.52 New Ferry is Wirral's second lowest ranking 'Key Town Centre' in the national retail rankings and, in our assessment, has been in acute long-term decline. New Ferry has a limited comparison retail offer, very high levels of vacancy, and a proliferation of derelict and vacant property which contributes to a generally poor physical environment. We consider that the centre would benefit from being physically contracted to a more appropriate size. The vacant property in peripheral locations could then be redeveloped for alternative, more viable uses.
- 6.53 In Table 6.6, below, we summarise various key interventions and actions that we consider will help to address some of the key issues described above.

Table 6.6 - Strategy and Actions for Centres in Need of Major Intervention

Key Recommendations - Major Intervention Centres		
Centre	Project, Action or Programme	Description
Birkenhead (Core Area)	a - Attract a greater diversity of retailers	Birkenhead has a relatively disappointing retail offer considering its position in the retail hierarchy as a sub-regional centre. Most of the multiple retailers present in Birkenhead Town Centre are within the middle and, more frequently, the lower end of the retail spectrum, although the Asda commitment will substantially improve the town centre's convenience offer. We consider that there would be merit in seeking to improve Birkenhead's retail offer to address the clear deficiencies that we have identified. However, we accept that there is limited physical scope to achieve this in practice, with the eastern part of the Town Centre being the only realistic direction for significant future growth. We are also concerned about the lack of progress that has been made to date in formulating concrete plans. If the retail offer is not improved, then Birkenhead's comparison market share and its position in the sub-regional hierarchy will continue to deteriorate further.
	b - Physical upgrading and maintenance of the public realm/streetscape	We observed in our 2004 study that the public realm - both within and on the approaches to Birkenhead Town Centre - is of mixed quality, and this remains the case. Whilst the predominantly pedestrianised core shopping area is reasonably well maintained, some parts of the core area are suffering from a lack of maintenance. In particular, a high proportion of the properties at the western end of Grange Road are poorly maintained; the spine roads into the centre are generally low-grade; and the high proportion of vacant units at the Grange Centre has a significant negative effect on the appearance of the eastern part of the Town Centre.
	c - Address vacancy, particularly at The Grange Centre	There were 38 vacant units in Birkenhead Town Centre in May 2008; this equates to a vacancy rate - as measured by the proportion of units - of 16.0 per cent, which is above the UK average unit vacancy rate of 11.1 per cent and higher than the vacancy rate in 2004. A significant proportion of the vacant premises are located at the Grange Centre, including some substantial units in prominent locations; this is a deliberate strategy on the part of the centre owner, which is intentionally keeping units vacant and offering short-term leases in order not to restrict any possible reconfiguration of the Centre. However, the same strategy was in place when we undertook the 2004 study and little or no progress appears to have been made in the interim period in terms of developing plans for the area. In contrast, the vacancy rate at the Pyramids Centre and other parts of the town centre core are low. We therefore consider that more should be done to encourage the take-up of property at The Grange Centre, which is currently responsible for a large proportion of the vacant units in the centre, and that serious consideration should be given to devising a development scheme.
	d - Enhanced service sector and night time economy	The proportion of service outlets in Birkenhead is significantly lower than the UK average, with such uses accounting for 21 per cent of town centre units and 9 per cent of total floorspace, compared to the UK averages of 33 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively. In particular, Birkenhead is under-represented in the 'restaurants, cafés, coffee bars, fast food and take-aways' sub-category. Indeed, stakeholder consultees stressed the need for Birkenhead Town Centre to secure a good range of higher quality restaurants, coffee houses and family-orientated eating places. We consider this to be a key deficiency in the town centre offer, and in particular there is a lack of quality food & drink establishments open at night. However, anti-social behaviour associated with the night-time economy seemingly remains a problem in the town centre, and so this will need to be addressed in parallel with any improvements in this sector.
Liscard	a - Attract a greater diversity of retailers	Asda remains the only fully fledged supermarket in the centre (although we understand that there is now a commitment for a new Tesco store in part of the former Roseby's building), and in the comparison sector, representation is below the UK average in terms of both the number of units and floorspace. Indeed, most of the multiple comparison retailers in Liscard Town Centre are geared towards the lower part of the retail market, and Liscard is particularly weak in the fashion sector.
	b - Reoccupation of vacant units	Our update of Experian's Goad survey in May 2008 revealed 38 vacancies in Liscard Town Centre, equating to a vacancy rate of 14.5 per cent across the town centre as a whole - as measured by the proportion of units - above the UK average of 11.1 per cent. The substantial, vacant Capitol building at the southern end of Seabank Road is prominently located just to the north of the town centre core and it therefore represents one of the few redevelopment opportunities in the town centre.
	c - Provide public realm/streetscape enhancements	In recent years Liscard Town Centre has benefited from the painting of railings, replacement of trees, and so on. However, the town centre still contains a significant number of run-down buildings, particularly on the approaches to the centre and around main gateways. One notable example is the Capitol building at the southern end of Seabank Road, which we have already referred to as having redevelopment/reoccupation potential.
New Ferry	a - Provide comprehensive public realm/streetscape enhancements	The physical environment in New Ferry Town Centre is generally low-grade, and is dominated by vacant and derelict property. Although some environmental improvement work has recently been undertaken along New Chester Road, the centre still lacks street furniture and plantings which would enhance the atmosphere of the centre. Gateways into New Ferry are poor, and are characterised by vacant buildings, often with heavy shutters. Overall, we thus consider that New Ferry exudes a negative image and would benefit from further environmental enhancement.

	b - Address acute levels of vacancy	The incidence of vacant property is a long-standing problem in New Ferry. There were 30 vacant units in New Ferry Town Centre in May 2008; this equates to a vacancy rate of 31.6 per cent, which is almost triple the UK average vacancy rate of 11.1 per cent. The vacant units in New Ferry are distributed throughout the centre, although there are particular concentrations of vacancies at the periphery of the existing town centre boundary (towards the north of New Chester Road and New Ferry Road, and towards the south of Bebington Road and New Chester Road). These vacant units - which are located in prominent gateway locations - create an eyesore and the sites would benefit from redevelopment for alternative uses.
	c - Consolidate and contract the centre	We consider that the centre would benefit from consolidation and intensification around a central core. In particular, property located at the southern tip of the centre (along Bebington Road and New Chester Road), and towards the north of the centre (New Chester Road and New Ferry Road) would benefit from being redeveloped for alternative uses. This would enable the centre to be contracted to a more appropriate size and would improve the gateways into the centre.
	d - Capitalise on the Farmers Market	Despite the deficiencies outlined above, New Ferry does benefit from a key asset - the Wirral Farmers' Market. There may be scope to capitalise on this asset in the future.