

## Accrington Masterplan Framework Business Workshop 10 November 2024

A workshop was held at Accrington Town Hall with local town centre business representatives to discuss the future masterplan framework for Accrington Town Centre.

A total of 24 people attended and they were divided into four groups, which were led by members of the project team in discussions on what does/doesn't work in the town centre and what they would like to see in future.

### Ice Breaker

The session started with some ice-breaker questions:

**What 3 words would you use to describe Accrington today?**



- Sleeping, Potential, Friendly
- Dark, Bland, Desecrated
- Deprived, Community, Outdated
- Quiet, Tired Looking, Potential
- Character, Depressed, Local
- Sad, Empty, Community
- Tired, Underutilised, Construction
- Mismatch, Lack of Direction, Antisocial Behaviour
- Confused, How long will it take, Parking
- Community, Historic, Deprived
- Quiet, Historic, Too many Shops/Cafes
- Small, Friendly, Close knit, Rundown, Needs Care
- Betting Shops, Takeaway, Charity Shops
- Shithole, Drug City, Not Safe
- Rundown, Depressing, Soulless
- Old Fashioned, Barren, Tired
- Tired, Quiet, Lifeless
- Community, Big Area to Cover, Too Many Empty Shops
- Lonely Countryside, Safety, Lovely People







office space and too many similar shops near to each other. General feeling that the more recent additions has eroded the quality of the place/ built environment – e.g. lack of planning/ design restrictions on shop frontages appearances, etc. It was also felt that there was no control over the type and quality of businesses allowed within the town – too many betting shops, takeaways, charity shops.

People spoke highly of the independent businesses and the market hall. They also saw great value in events such as Soap Box Derby for bringing people into the town and wanted to see more of this. New cultural museum for Market Chambers was mentioned as a positive thing.

There were issues around crime and safety with people feel threatened/scared and issues with anti-social behaviour on Broadway. Given crime concerns, shops have shutters down which aren't welcoming.

*What do you think makes Accrington special?*

- Heritage
- Buildings – architecture, brickwork, cobbles, glass verandas
- Accrington FC
- Businesses are ambassadors
- Hard working people
- Independents such as on Church Street/Warner Street
- Haworth Art Gallery
- Train links
- Events like the Soap Box, Halloween Trail
- Abbey Street evening economy
- Market Hall – attracting traders, independents?
- Free parking – fit for purpose
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*What could be improved?*

- Divided town centre, too spread out, needs a central hub
- Broadway neglected
- Office space – poor condition
- Lack of good quality space
- Industry is needed
- Needs more for young people
- Needs a map of shops/app showing what's where and what's on
- Moving the bus station was a disaster
- Arndale shouldn't have been built
- Don't need big shops
- Shop units not looked after
- Empty offices

## **2. Vision aim: Encourage Enterprise & Economic Growth**

Attendees felt there wasn't currently the right mix of uses in the town centre. It was felt there needed to be more things for young people, more nighttime economy, things to keep football fans staying in the town after a match. There's a lack of diversity of building use, many

similar businesses opening next to each other. Lack of affordable modern office space – had to go elsewhere as no space available.

There was a strong perception of anti-social behaviour in the town centre, with several commenting that it drives people out of town and is bad for businesses. The need to reduce ASB and for more visible policing were recurring themes.

Arndale site is an eyesore and should be demolished to make a public space/space for housing. Mix of housing required to encourage range of demographics into the town – not just cheap housing.

The number of empty units in the town creates a vicious cycle of businesses leaving. Why are shops empty and not for sale? There is need for an anchor – there was a previous proposal for the college to be in the heart of town centre (Burton Chambers building) which fell away. Previous interest from Bowland Brewery also fell away – it is felt that the Council could do more to support securing an anchor.

Lack of communication regarding existing LUF projects – not clear on what's happening with the Market Hall. Are existing traders retained, is there an F&B offer? Stakeholders want to see a more contemporary offer provided. How long are the external stalls in place? Recommended the council create an exhibition space within the townhall indicating all LUF projects plus the masterplan so people are more informed – progress reports etc. It was also suggested that a Town Centre Board/Partnership is established.

There were general complaints that bus routes through town were not adequate, the town was not properly connected, the planning process didn't seem joined up or to account for the needs of the town. Concerns raised over skills levels and worklessness/deprivation. Need for digital skills/ upskilling.

A key selling point from investment/ business perspective is accessibility – within 1 hr drivetime of customers/ supply chain, etc, with connections to Liverpool, Manchester, Yorkshire cited as important. Manufacturing is considered a key strength of the town. Other reasons for locating in Accrington included cheaper rents

Some great events take place in the town with clear ambassadors for the place in Amazing Accrington – e.g. soapbox derby, light switch on, Jess Glynn concert, food festival. Events typically held outside the town centre, in the football ground etc. More space for public events in the town centre with business opening hours amended. Many of the local independent pop-up shops have done well. Need to reduce the bureaucracy of organising events.

Need to encourage more independents and retain important businesses that are already there/ support the ambassadors for the place. Need to maximise assets the town already has, such as the Town Hall which is not well used.

Attendees felt that there needed to be better signage and sharing of what's on. Suggestion of creating a map or town app – similar to Melton Mowbray or Raunds Town Council –

connecting all businesses/services and keeping all updated on upcoming events to improve communication.

Issue with pub licensing, open to 5am – reopening at 8am, many concentrated around the bus station which puts people off from visiting the town.

Free parking is a positive although some suggested there wasn't enough. Arndale car park is not fit for purpose, does not accommodate modern cars/does not feel safe. People want to be able to park outside the shops .

Competing centres an issue – need to provide key services in the town, e.g. health (concerned re hospital closing, need a walk-in centre). Streets compete with each other pulling people away from the centre. Street scene needs to be improved – unify the shops and surfaces.

### **3. Vision aim: Green the town centre**

There was agreement that more greenery was needed to make Accrington more attractive and provide places for people to meet and for families to enjoy. As business owners they also saw the potential for parks and open spaces to be used for events and live music to attract people into the town. Several people suggested that the Arndale could be demolished and turned into a green space. Areas that were highlighted as needing greening included: Warner Street; near the church by the viaduct; Arndale; outside the Town Hall; Avenue Parade; Platts Lodge could be a community garden. There was also mention of the Town Centre Greening Group and the importance of getting them involved.

The importance of maintaining green spaces was raised. It was suggested that more be planted as they require less maintenance than flowers. Although others felt that flowers bring colour. Edible plants were also suggested. More seating is required and covered spaces to sit. There is a need to cut back on restrictions around outdoor seating for F&B. It was felt that improving shop frontages and verandas would also help.

### **4. Vision aim: Connect communities**

There was a strong feeling that the town is not well connected to residential areas. The one-way system is hard to navigate, that signage isn't clear and that roads are in a poor condition. It was felt that the town centre is not pedestrian-friendly (not enough space or crossings) and access to public transport could be improved (previous plans for a circular bus route would be welcomed). It was felt that moving the bus station out of the centre has had a detrimental effect on people coming in.

### **5. Vision aim: Town Centre Living**

Attendees saw the need to attract young professionals and young families into the town to make it more vibrant, to support local businesses and to create natural surveillance. This is presently hindered by the poor offering in the town, particularly at nighttime.

All agreed that the masterplan should include more residential in the town centre, with quality housing that could attract commuters, family housing and older person accommodation – however it still needs to be affordable. It was felt that the Arndale could be repurposed for residential.

# Appendix 1 - Icebreakers

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## What 3 words describe Accrington to day?

Sleeping, Potential, Friendly  
 Dark Disenfranchised BLAND  
 Isolated Community Accidents  
 Character Depressed Local Sad Empty Community  
 Community Historic Deprived.  
 BETMAN SHOPS Takeaway Charity shops.  
 Old fashioned barren Tired  
 Lively energetic Safety Long Park  
 Quiet HISTORIC TOO MANY HISTORIES/CHURCHES  
 SHIPMOLE Diversity NOT 90%  
 Tired Quiet Likes.  
 potential communication working together  
 Potential  
 MISMATCH Lack of Direction Antisocial Behaviour  
 COURTESY How long has it taken to arrive... all day waiting  
 1) Quiet  
 2) Tired Looking  
 1) Downward  
 2) Depression  
 3) Success  
 Community big areas to cover  
 1) Urban  
 2) Suburban  
 3) Not in Community

②

## What 3 words to describe Accrington in 10 years?

VIBRANT BUSTLING REGENERATED  
 VIBRANT THRIVING PLACE TO GO  
 Growing Economy Hub  
 Interesting Lucky People  
 Contemporary Busy Caring  
 Busy Families Community  
 BUSTLING/NEVER MORE STREETS BUSTLING/VIBRANT  
 Vibrant and Proud  
 Place to be Braver Thriving  
 Bustling Safe environment Greenery Pleasant shops  
 VIBRANT BLOOMING FRIENDLY  
 More Old Vibrant More Children  
 Vibrant Growth Strong  
 Prosperous Vibrant Successful  
 Safe Vibrant  
 1) Bustling community 2) Thriving economy 3) Regenerated  
 "Bustling Atmosphere"  
 Leisure Retailer Financial Hub  
 Busy VIBRANT destination  
 1) Vibrant 2) Bust 3) Happy people  
 Friendly Community Active/like going on Do out  
 Bustling Busy Priority  
 bustling vibrant appealing



**Appendix 2  
Vision 1**

Vision 1 unique identity

- heritage
- buildings
- ambassadors / businesses / invest
- art gallery
- indie bars
- indie businesses

VISION AIM 1. ACCRINGTON UNIQUE IDENTITY

+ WHAT MAKES ACCRINGTON SPECIAL?

- + DIVIDED TOWNCENTRES
- + CHURCH/WARNE ST INDEPENDENTS.
- + BEAUMAY NEGLATED.
- + OFFICE SPACE - POOR CONDITION.
- + LACK OF GOOD QUALITY LIVABLE SPACE
- + INDUSTRY - NEEDED
- + 60% OF PEOPLE NOT EARNING.?
- + HAWORTH ART GALLERY. UNBLES.
- + WARNE ST.
- + TRAIN LINKS

VISION AIM - CONNECT COMMUNITIES.

- + BUS NETWORK - CIRCULAR ROUTE.
- + BLACKBURN ROAD - MAIN ARTERY.
- + OTHER ROADS - MANCHESTER OR. INFRASTRUCTURE
- + EVENTS: JESS GYNN NOT AT FOOTBALL.
- + SPACE HEYHAY LIGHT SHOW.
- + MUMBER...
- + TOWN APP. CONNECT BUSINESSES MELTON MUMBERAY.
- + COMMUNICATION IS AN ISSUE.

Vision 1

- heritage
- buildings
- FC.
- brickwork
- Arndale shouldn't have been built
- used to be all indie shops
- not modern.
- needs to blend
- hard working people
- colder
- don't need big shops
- shop units not looked after
- empty offices
- glass verandas
- businesses split out
- Warner Street
- Halloween Trail
- connectivity
- unique, indie offer like Madder Bridge
- Events, entertainment
- govt → increase footfall.
- map of shops etc.
- too spread out
- needs a central hub
- moved bus station → disaster.
- too far for people to walk
- things for young people
- Not Altrincham
- market hall

## Vision 2

Vision 2 Economic growth

- empty shops
- Safety / ASB / <sup>cleanliness</sup> lighting - pop up shops ✓
- Competing streets / free parking / bus routes through town
- planning
- green spaces / young people
- Improve Blackburn Rd
- Engagement / TC Forum
- Skills / deprivation
- Events ✓
- Leisure, garden centre.
- cheap rent
- More communication from Council
- Abbey St ✓
- Town app - info
- Theatre / art space
- Inclusive growth
- Needs an anchor / catalyst
- retain traditional businesses

VISION AIM - ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURS + ECONOMIC GROWTH.

- + something for young people.
- + youth zones.
- + NORTH LANCS TRAINING - SPONSOR.
- + LOCAL BUSINESSES - QUOTE.
- + LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS.
- + GYM FACILITY - BURTON CHAMBERS.
- + THEATRE - IN TOWNHALL? DANCING COMPETITIONS. PARKS?
- + LONGTOWN - BUSINESS TO BUSINESS WANTS DISCOUNT NEXT DOOR. VOUCHERS.

↓

CHURCHES  
COFFEE  
MARKETING  
STREET  
ARTISTS.

↓

PEOPLE  
FRIENDLY  
↓  
EVERYONE  
WANTS IT  
TO SUCCED!

+ VARIETY SHOP  
PLANNING  
COMMERCIAL.

TOWN APP.

Vision 2

- Not right mix Variety, events
- Arcade club
- bus stops in town centre
- better signage, whats on, map,
- missing the market
- lack of communication from Council
- things to attract people in
- town centre living is where? affordable?
- ASB
- locate here?
  - ↳ live here
  - ↳ cheaper rent
  - ↳ location to motorway
- adult learning @ college
- Limited parking - needs more
- better bus routes through town
- how keep football fans stay?
- needs night life
  - Abbey St good - Crafty Fox, Tiger lounge.
  - warmer or a cafe.
- More visible policing.
- ASB a problem @ night.
- staggered around.

### Vision 3

- #### Vision 3 Greening
- Knock down Arndale
  - More trees
  - Family friendly
  - red tape for events
  - plenty of spaces for events
  - Civic Society
  - Events - outdoor
    - at town hall
  - Maintenance
  - Trees
  - Covered space, Seating
  - Licensing decisions
  - ongoing engagement with businesses
  - Loads of parks
  - Live bands in pubs
  - greening areas like church eg. by viaduct
  - TC greening group
  - Sculpture

- #### Vision 3
- not many
  - Park at gallery
  - church green space needs doing elsewhere
  - outside town hall
  - bottom of Avenue Parade
  - better verandas
  - better shop frontages
  - Coppice could be improved
  - outdoor seating (F&B)
  - pedestrianize streets
  - cut back on restrictions eg outdoor seating
  - nowhere for kids/families
  - Live music / festival eg. bands on Abbey St. Azon Magazine, Tracy Simmons
  - Council not working for traders
  - events at the town hall.

- #### Vision Aim - green the town centre
- + STRUK - greening network of main parade group cap homes
  - + trees retained
  - + FAMILY FRIENDLY - people straight from main parade - Abbey St. Night market - food
  - + LICENSING to 5PM open at 8PM.
  - + PLANNING - CHALLENGES WITH COMPETITION
  - + PUBLIC CONSULTATION. How do we engage.
  - + PROGRESS REPORTS / FEELING INFORMED
  - + AVOIDANCE - SPACE - PUBLIC SPACE / GREEN. COMMUNITY SPACE - HERBS.

## Vision 4

### Vision 4 Connect Communities

- Exitgate difficult to cross
- One way systems wrong way!
- Improve streets for pedestrian
- Town app
- Roads lead out - Needs a road through
- Businesses work together
- Improve Blackburn Rd
- Toilets!

### Vision 4

- More communication from Council with indie businesses
- rethink local roads - one way, loading bays, bus routes → hard to get around
- could pedestrianise some roads
- Moved bus station out of town - needs a mini-law
- improve pathways
- better connectivity from bus and train station
- not many cyclists
- better signage
- better use of town hall for community use, information point.
- play area in market hall.
- skate park - improve
- Arndale needs to go → replace with residential, knock it down.
  - community square with shops and residential above.
  - could be a central hub
- multi-storey car park doesn't get used. → charged. / fines.

## Vision 5

### Vision 5 - Town Centre Living

- Yes
- Younger families / professionals
- Old Arzobispo building
- Community Square
- Quality housing - commuters
- Not MMs.

### Vision 5

- older population - single person flats
- young professionals
- well maintained, pride
- not MMs,
- apartments - high quality
- students
- More high quality nightlife
- BTR
- pub housing where Ardale is
- entertainment district, hotel?
- needs commercial on ground floor
- all needs council support in long term to drive forward.