

Accrington Stakeholder Workshop 16 October 2024

A workshop was held at The Globe Conference Centre, Accrington, about the future masterplan framework for Accrington Town Centre. Representative stakeholders were invited from Hyndburn Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, local businesses, local charity/community groups and other interested parties.

A total of nineteen 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.

There were some recurring themes from the various groups such as:

- There is little currently in Accrington to draw people in.
- Accrington does not have enough greenery.
- Accrington does not feel safe, particularly at night.
- The various parts of the town are quite disparate and not well linked together.
- The Arndale centre is not fit for purpose and there is no offer there for young people.
- People in Accrington are proud of its heritage, which they would like to see preserved.

The discussion was steered around five specific subject areas:

1. Celebrating Accrington's Unique Identity

All four groups agreed that the architecture of Accrington is something special and that this should be preserved and built upon. Aside from this, there was agreement that there was not much else happening in Accrington to make people want to come in and, those that did, used the town out of necessity rather than desire. Several people mentioned feeling unsafe in certain quarters, particularly around the town hall area and particularly at night.

2. Encouraging Enterprise & Economic Growth

There was general agreement that there is much vibrancy to the town. Several members spoke about encouraging young people in either with affordable housing or with the sort of offering that may appeal to younger people. A couple of groups spoke of the need to improve the nighttime economy and there was also discussion around transport links into town as well as natural walking links within the town being poor. That is, Accrington doesn't encourage walking from one place to the next or make it easy for cars to find their way in.

3. Greening the Town Centre

There was general agreement that greenery had been lost over a number of years so it needed to come back to make Accrington more attractive. There was also talk of using greenery for a specific purpose: parks to encourage healthy living such as walking or sports; access to the sort of outdoor facilities available at Accrington Stanley; also using green areas

strategically to condense businesses into one location, creating a sense of vibrancy in that area, rather than being separate and isolated as they are presently.

4. Connecting Communities

There was general agreement that Accrington is very disjointed. It isn't easy to move about the town from one place to another. It isn't easy to get in by car. Bus routes do not suit the town. Links to the bus station are poor. Existing walking paths can be quite intimidating as they are not open and can be quite dark.

5. Town Centre Living

All agreed that housing was essential to get life back into Accrington as businesses won't succeed without customers living there. A sense of safety will come back if there are people about. Most groups agreed that housing needed to be mixed to allow younger people to get onto the housing ladder and to lure them into the town centre.

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Summary notes

Celebrate Accrington's Unique Identity

Summary from groups

- Architecture and heritage.
- In the Youth Focus Group the kids all know about the history of Accrington and it is important to them.
- Some areas are safe and some aren't. Areas that are brighter and more open are safer.
- We like the independent shops.
- People only come out of necessity, not desire.
- Difficult to get in to town from some directions.
- Struggle to park.
- Need more greenery
- Arndale car park is not fit for purpose.
- Viaduct is a key asset.

Summary from facilitators

- Arndale - not fit for purpose
- Businesses in there could be relocated.
- AD car park horrible.
- Warner Street Positive
- Festivals – ecofest, spring parade, soapbox derby, food festival (but not making the most of these opportunities)
- Blackburn road - restoration of building positive.
- Warner Street is a great place to wander at lunch - diversity - independent shops - Doesn't like Blackburn to be - AC is more intimate and independent.
- Work
- Out of town stuff sports centre.
- Don't think there is a lot to draw you in - don't feel safe not a lot in town centre - just go to Tesco instead.
- Heritage Architecture and green spaces close to town centre key strengths
- Have a greater number of independent businesses/retail/f&b than competitor towns (Rawtenstall, Haslingden, Great Harwood etc.) – but they are spread to thinly across the town rather than in one clear cluster
- Oswaldtwistle Genealogy Centre in Hyndburn – brings international visitors to Accrington
- Backs of Properties exposed along East Gate unwelcoming
- Unattractive gateways to town centre (by car/walking routes on key roads and bus station)

Encourage Enterprise & Economic Growth

Summary from groups

- ASB and perceived ASB because of youths congregating.
- Need more eateries around Broadway to make it somewhere people sit and stay. More greenery needed.
- Maybe a play area on Broadway.
- Want to draw young people into town centre.
- Affordable homes/apartments could work.
- Bring the college closer to town centre.
- Bring in vibrancy and spend and also support the night time economy.
- Too many buildings, need more spaces.
- It is hard to find good quality accommodation.
- Leisure offering is needed for young people.
- Transport routes don't suit the town.
- Encouraging all quarters to flow into each other is important.
- Need the right mix of businesses and offers to young people.

Summary from facilitators

- Peel Street independents.
- Don't want big box retail.
- Walk in on black path back of Tesco come out at the train station - some people are scared if not familiar - dark covered in trees.
- Transport routes don't suit the areas.
- Eastgate as a barrier - put in pinch points to redirect people.
- Community performance space - dedicated space for kids.
- Young people need a leisure offer to bring a different aspect.
- Not safe round the town hall - good place to encourage F&F to self-police.
- Walk through down Blackburn Road not great.
- Perceived antisocial behaviour - how young people are perceived in the media - encouraging young to hang around in well-lit spaces - staying away from board way as not safe - more to bring communities/ age / ethnicities together.
- Leisure centre need to drive to - need one in town.
- Think there are too many buildings in the centre it needs to breath.
- Getting right mix of businesses in certain areas / high streets in town crucial to success
- Key challenge – independent businesses draw customers from far and wide but challenge is to encourage people to not visit one shop but move on to visit other parts of the town. Physical intervention (improved public realm etc) can help this, as well as centralising services/amenities in the town centre and other non-physical initiatives (Accrington independent shop vouchers etc.)
- Space for community performances (indoor and outdoor) would bring more footfall
 - Would help bring different communities together

Green the town centre

Summary from groups

- Lack of green space. Would love to see big open green space where people can lunch + experience events.
- Town centre looks in on itself. Needs to be more open.
- Increasing greenery could help decrease the size of the trading town centre so it could be more concentrated (which is good).
- Accrington is surrounded by green spaces which are fantastic but nothing to link them to the town.
- Climate change needs considering.
- Greenery has been lost so we need more of it.
- Could help bring people in. A park with a lake like Thomson Park.

Summary from facilitators

- Linking Platts Lodge into the town centre - routes in backs of properties not welcoming.
- Park to bring people in - Thompson Park nice place/ lake/ water sports activities/ swimming pool.
- Family space - Accrington Stanley people go to - make it more public.
- More space to sit/ dwell.
- Decrease the size of the town centre.
- More direct and significant interventions - green/ parks.
- Eastgate is scruffy and a mess.
- Peel park - lots of parks round the town - wood nut vale - these all need to be looked to the town.
- Climate change needs to be considered in all the plans - look to the future.
- Need to work with Accrington Green Team and work on existing initiatives
- Feels a bit like full circle – many trees that were in town centre were removed over past 10-15 years
- A destination park in town centre would be a huge draw and bring different communities and age groups together (similar to Thompson Park in Burnley)
- Play provision along Broadway would encourage families to spend more time and money in town centre
- Town square is transient – nowhere to sit in town centre
- Liked idea of viaduct park and play – a space for people
- Need to design to push out anti-social behaviour

Connect communities

Summary from groups

- Walking routes into town could be better. The Black Path from Tesco is a main source of entry but it can be intimidating.
- Links from bus station into town is terrible.
- Access in by car is difficult because you are diverted around everywhere. Hard to get in.
- Viaduct is hidden at the moment.
- It's a bit piecemeal.
- How do we connect all the town to make it the sort of place people want to visit and stay?

Summary from facilitators

- Better job of signposting free parking - not issue with parking. - parking could advertise what in town
- Arndale - used to love it now nothing for young people - just I use WH Smiths - just for mags. Savers for cosmetics
- Love the building and Xmas tree. Sit in there it's a nice space and no one is there. Like how it looks.
- Board way - would like to see a play park - parents with young children.
- Coming in past viaduct its hidden - having to negotiate round the Arndale - making it a scenic route in.
- Currently not joined up - Connecting big and small businesses with young people and investors.
- Making it a town centre for everyone - Viaduct cuts it in two.
- Market hall idea for bands - food stalls - cultures and foods - more choice.
- Bus station to town centre is horrible.
- Black Path - one of main walks in - intimidating - lighting - better gateways.
- More Connections/crossings across East Gate to communities to East
- Better wayfinding and connections from Bus Station to Town Square/Market Hall
- Accrington Stanley Stadium – key destination for community events – need to better connect to town centre
- Try and create more reasons for young people to spend time in town centre (youth work, activities, education etc.)
- Eastgate – all the buildings along it are backs – can they be knocked down? Town is too enclosed, looks in on itself
- Difficult to find parking – need for better signage and clearly defined car parks – open to idea of strategic car parks to remove parking from streets
- Arndale presents an unattractive back to the town and is failing – not an asset to town
- Lack of understanding of where the town centre is when you arrive by car, train or bus
- Retail area is too spread out across the town centre

- Too many takeaways
- Scale of deprivation (didn't feel Altrincham was comparable as different demographic)

Town centre living

Summary from groups

- Encouraging a diverse group of young people into town.
- Also need to ensure new builds are sympathetic to the style already here.
- Willow St – lots of unused buildings going to waste, would make excellent housing.
- Young people needed in town centre. Diversifying land uses. Need more people in for businesses to thrive.
- Housing is needed to regenerate Accrington. Mixed between social/private/retirement. Affordability but also to suit needs.

Summary from facilitators

- Too much going on - current town centre
- Church redeveloped as apartments with amenities.
- New buildings to be sympathetic.
- Vital regen - Need to be a mixed - adds to footfall.
- HMO issue - Struggling to find a place to rent - affordability - the right housing stock.
- Young people in the town centre - garden village.
- Diversify the land uses - visitors/ workers/ diff people into the town in different ways.
- Need a more representative group of people large Asian population may have different needs.
- Desire to see more housing in town centre – but needs to be a mix for local needs (young people, older generation,
- Build on clusters of independents and successful businesses (retail and F&B/ service – along Warner Street, Abbey st/Whalley Rd and Blackburn road)
- Need to make pavement licenses cheaper and easier to get approval for – seeing people enjoying and socialising in public realm would be virtuous cycle that would bring more and more people into town centre
- Getting right mix of uses clustered in key locations key to attracting footfall and increasing time visitors spend in town centre – if spread too thin or uncomplimentary uses together it can be counterproductive
- Attract more young people to live in the town
- Greater mix of homes
- Encourage more people into town for different activities and reasons
- Encourage mix of uses
- Was reference to Arndale (from Cllr who had seen out presentation so not clear if own idea!)

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Q1

Good

- architecture
- heritage - original ideas
- Warner St ← indie shops → Peel St.

Bad

- Skatepark - now avoid, tired people ruined it → needs reworking and expand

- Sit outside town hall, buses, Malls
- Me D's hot spot for ASB
- Want more shops - clothes
- Black path - some people scared, groups smoking, dark, bikes
- Buses good + cheap

- Green space @ St James church well used
- ↳ no benches, sit on wall
- ↳ being improved

- want to hang out around nature → quiet
- Warner St arcade is beautiful could be more vibrant
- Broadway needs a play park, benches get well used

Library
St James Church
Blackburn road - The Exchange

Evening

- Abbey St - regenerated
- ↳ Abbey pub
- ↳ Topsy Tades
- avoid poundland @ night as big groups, ASB
- go to town hall
- big boxes have ruined it
- needs more lighting Black Path

Access

- drive or walk, make of shopping
- struggles with parking, needs better signage (free car parks)
- better signage of what see/on

Arndale

- nothing in it for young people
- just WHSmiths /aves
- love architecture, Xmas tree → remodel not remove
- nice space to sit
- like indoors