# Wigton Town Centre Review 2012

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1. Introduction

As part of the preparation of the Local Development Framework Allerdale Borough Council will be reviewing its existing policy with regards to Town Centres and retail development. As part of this review, the Council will set locally distinctive policies in relation to:

- the definition of boundaries and frontages within its town centres; and
- the floorspace threshold for scale of edge-of-centre and out-of-centre development which should be subject to an impact assessment.

This document summarises the investigative work carried out as part of this review and highlights relevant evidence that will be used to inform the preparation of these new policies, from the following sources:

- Town Centre Health Checks (2011)
- West Cumbria Retail Study (2009)
- Site visits (October/November 2011)

2. National Policy

Whilst the Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is currently under consultation, Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4) remains the extant national policy.

The Government recognises that town centres are important places for communities. Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4) states that the principal objective of national policy for town and other centres is to promote their vitality and viability. This means ensuring that existing centres are alive and busy, at different times of the day and evening throughout the week, and that they are attractive to businesses and investors both economically and environmentally. In order that polices may be set which protect and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres, it is necessary that the spatial boundaries and physical limits of the centres are defined and documented.

PPS4 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPA) should clearly outline the extent of town centres within their plan area, within which realistically defined primary and secondary frontages can be set. Once defined, it should be made clear which uses will be permitted in such locations.

PPS4 also states that LPA’s should consider setting locally distinctive thresholds, to which the impact test (EC16.1) would apply for proposals in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations. Where a local threshold is not set, PPS4 requires impact
assessments to be submitted for retail and leisure developments over 2,500sq.m gross.

Whilst Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4) remains the extant national policy, the Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is currently under consultation and expected to be adopted in spring 2012. It is therefore important to consider the emerging national policy direction from this document.

The draft NPPF maintains the current ‘town centre’s first’ principle and continues to direct LPA’s to define town centre boundaries and frontages. It also recommends the introduction of a locally defined threshold to which the Impact assessment should apply. Therefore, at present, there is no indication of a shift in national policy and this review of town centre boundaries, frontages and thresholds is considered relevant and necessary in the course of the preparation of the LDF.

3 Local Policy

3.1 Cumbria & Lake District Joint Structure Plan (JSP) - 2001 - 2016

The JSP recognises the importance of mixed uses within town centres and sets out policies which seek to secure and promote the sustainability of communities. The sequential approach for retail and leisure development in edge or out-of-centre locations is supported, however the requirements for compliance are mainly related to the assessment of ‘need’ which has now been revoked from national policy and accessibility issues.

3.2 Allerdale Local Plan (1999)

The Allerdale Local Plan (1999) follows the ‘town centre’s first’ approach as based upon national guidance at the time of its production (PPG6 - 1996). As such existing local town centre policies relate mainly to the development of retail and shopping services and do not refer to other relevant town centre uses such as leisure, culture or office developments.

Policy RG2 sets out the need for sequential assessments of out-of-centre retail development, however the requirements for compliance relate mainly to shopping services and accessibility. There are currently no thresholds set for the requirement of an impact assessment and the test is not required for leisure, cultural or office developments.

Policies RG7 - RG10 relate to the town centre as a whole and cover issues relating to non-retail uses; cultural and leisure facilities and use of upper floors within town centres. As in line with the national policy direction of the time, the main focus of
the policies within the Local Plan is upon the protection of the retail presence within the town centre. It is therefore considered that these policies are now out of date and require a full review.

4 Wigton Town Centre - Existing Boundary & Uses

Figure 4.1 - Existing town centre boundary as defined in Allerdale Local Plan (1999).

The existing Wigton town centre boundary, as defined in the Allerdale Local Plan (1999), focuses upon the hub of the Market Place, with the streets of West Street, King Street and High Street forming spokes from here.

Evidence gathered as part of the Allerdale Town Centres Health Check (2011) provides up to date information regarding the existing distribution of uses throughout Wigton town centre. When recorded spatially, the data can be used to create a table of ground floor units by different use types for individual streets. This process allows an initial identification of the town centre boundary. Higher proportion of A1 retail uses will suggest the areas suited to primary frontage policies. Areas with a higher diversity of uses will be identifiable for secondary frontages.
Figure 4.2 - Existing distribution of uses in Maryport Town Centre (Allerdale Town Centres Health Check 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market Place / West Street</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>% of Total (102)</th>
<th>Av Floorspace - sq.m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 Retail</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 Financial &amp; Professional Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 Restaurants &amp; Cafes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4 Drinking Establishment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 Takeaways</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1 Offices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 Hotel &amp; Guest Houses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3 Dwellings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1 Non Residential Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2 Assembly &amp; Leisure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Numbers of units in this area are too low to provide meaningful statistics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>% of Total (102)</th>
<th>Av Floorspace - sq.m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>% of Total (102)</th>
<th>Av Floorspace - sq.m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5  Assessment of Wigton Town Centre 2011

This section sets out the council’s assessment of existing town centre boundaries informed by evidence gathered through the Town Centre Health Checks (2011) and site visits carried out in October 2011.

5.1  North Eastern Boundary

The eastern edge of this area extends along King Street towards the natural boundary of Speet Gill. The predominance of residential uses and lack of the character and setting of the town centre suggests that current boundary remains a valid approach. The south of this zone contains the majority of car parking in Wigton town centre as well as a range of town centre uses along the King Street frontage. Additionally there are several planned housing development sites along Water Street adjacent to the east side of the car park. The area to the south of the car park is dealt with in the narrative on the Southern section below.

The north of this area is dominated by the Co-op supermarket while Station Road includes several retail as well as many residential units. Given the dominance and location of the Co-op Supermarket there is the potential to extend the boundary accordingly. In addition, evidence also suggests that there is potential to tighten the boundary on the west side of King Street to reflect the current use and character.
5.2 Southern Boundary

The area including High Street enters south from West Street including a diverse number of uses with a concentration of retail as well as financial and professional services. The current boundary extends as far south as St Mary’s Church on the eastside and a travel agent on the west side. Both the character of adjoining street and the changing use of the market site (towards retail) suggests the boundary could be extended southward to take in more of High Street, in addition to properties along Proctors Row.

5.3 Western Boundary

Figure 5.2 – High Street

Figure 5.3 – West Street
This area on the west side of the currently defined town centre extends along both side of a busy but narrow road. The current usage is dominated by the Factory Shop which accounts for the largest unit, in addition to several vacant premises, including a large hotel. The usage does not suggest the need expand the centre along west street, and there are no natural boundaries to define the western edge. Furthermore, lack of town centre type uses on the south side of the road suggests the opportunity to tighten the boundary and form a more compact edge to the centre boundary.

6 Proposed Town Centre Boundary

The main changes are shown on the map above and include;

- Expansion of the northern edge to include the Co-op supermarket;
- Reduction and tightening of the boundary along the northern edge to the west of Station Road;
- Reduction and tightening of the boundary along the eastern edge of the current boundary along King Street;
- Expansion of the south edge to take in more of High Street, in addition to properties along Proctors Row;
- Reduction and tightening of the boundary along the western edge to reflect current uses along King Street;
7 Frontages

Whilst the Town Centre Boundary represents the broad area of functional town centre including all uses, the guidance on the definition of the Primary Shopping Area is clear. PPS6 states that the Primary Shopping Area is the;

‘defined area where retail development is concentrated (generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages which are contiguous and closely related to the primary shopping frontage)’.

7.1 Primary Shopping Frontages

Establishing the Primary Shopping Frontage Boundary is relatively straightforward given the size of the town centre and the evidence gathered. Figure 7.1 below shows the main use classes by functional areas clearly demonstrating the relative importance of each use to the diversity and vitality.

The west end of King Street has long been the most important retail street and remains the clear choice to be designated primary shopping frontage. Evidence clearly demonstrates the importance of retail, accounting for 42% of all the streets usage. It should be noted that given the diversity of use along the main streets the primary shopping boundary suggested contains a number of non-retail town centre uses. Given these factors it is considered that the very end of West Street and along King Street until just after the junction with Station Road be designated as the Primary Shopping Area. Additionally evidence suggests that High Street Southward

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2 Category ‘Other’ includes any uses out with those listed such as: hot food take away, hotels, offices and Sui Generis.
from Market Place could also be included in the primary shopping area as 60% of its units are currently in retail use.

Figure 7.2 – Preferred Primary Shopping Area

7.2 Secondary Frontages

It is considered that Wigton does not require the designation of secondary shopping frontages given the extent of the primary area and the size and nature of the remaining town centre.

8 Thresholds- Impact Assessment

Wigton town centre is characterised by small mainly independent businesses, with an average floorspace of 133 sq.m with 63% of units are below 100 sq.m. Notable large units include the Co-op supermarket (1,351 sq.m), Haldines (723 sq.m), Market Hall (723 sq.m), The Original Factory Shop (527 sq.m), vacant hotel (419 sq.m) and Barclays Bank (382 sq.m).

National policy (PPS4) allows local planning authorities to set out specific floorspace thresholds in LDFs for edge of centre and out of centre development above which Impact Assessments will be required. Where authorities decide not to set out a specific floorspace threshold national policy requires impact assessments to be submitted for retail and leisure developments over 2,500sq.m.

In setting such thresholds, the PPS states that important considerations include;
- the scale of known proposals relative to town centres;
- the existing vitality and viability of town centres;
- the cumulative effects of recent developments;
- the likely effects on a town centre strategy and;
- the impact on any other planned investment.

Given the size and nature of Wigton and the considerations above it is clear that this threshold is excessive and the LDF should consider setting a more locally distinctive level.

In order to inform the provision of a locally distinctive floorspace threshold, analysis of the typical scale of floorspace within the centre has been undertaken. The following charts show the level of floorspace currently occupied within Wigton town centre for each Use Class (Figure 8.1) and each town centre category (Figure 8.2).
Therefore a threshold of 200sq. m is an considered appropriate level, however, following PPS4 there may be occasions where it may occasionally also be relevant to consider the impact of proposals below this threshold, where the proposal is likely to have a disproportionate effect or ‘tip the balance’ of a vulnerable centre.

9 Markets

As part of the evidence gathering and evaluation of Wigton’s Town Centre it is important to consider the need for all types of uses and forms of retail such as street market stalls. A street market can be a good opportunity to increase trading and footfall within a town centre, adding to the retail offer. There is currently an unofficial market operating every Friday along Proctors Square and the surrounding area, however, due to the future development of the auction market site the Council plan to establish an official market to meet the needs of the town. The location that has been suggested by the Council is shown on 9.1 below.

![Figure 9.1 – Proposed location for Wigton Street Market](image-url)