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# **Accrington Area Action Plan Review**

**September 2018**

# 1. Plan Review

1.1 On 6 April 2018 the Government brought forward legislation<sup>1</sup> to ensure that local planning authorities review local plans at least once every five years from their adoption date. Reviewing a plan means undertaking an assessment of whether policies within it need revising. Planning policies will age at different rates according to local circumstances and a plan does not necessarily become out-of-date automatically after five years. The review process is a method to ensure that a plan remains appropriate, maintaining its weight in decision making.

1.2 The Government's draft Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), published for consultation in March 2018, stated that reviews are expected to be proportionate to the issues in hand, and are to ensure that policies remain relevant, effectively addressing the needs of local communities, particularly with regard to the need for housing<sup>2</sup>.

1.3 PPG goes on to state that in a review of Local Plan documents Local Authorities will need to consider:

- conformity with national planning policy
- changes to local circumstances;
- their Housing Delivery Test performance;
- whether the authority can demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable sites for housing;
- appeals performance; and
- success of policies against indicators in the Development Plan as set out in their Authority Monitoring Report

1.1 It is recognised that it may be necessary for a local planning authority to gather new evidence to inform their plan review. Proportionate, relevant and up-to-date evidence should be used to justify a decision not to revise policies.

1.2 Following consideration, Local Authorities should decide either that policies do not need revising (and publish reasons for this decision on their website) and/or that one or more policies do need revising and update their Local Development Scheme to set out the timetable for this revision.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1244/regulation/4/made>

<sup>2</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/687239/Draft\\_planning\\_practice\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687239/Draft_planning_practice_guidance.pdf)

# 1. Review of the Accrington Area Action Plan (AAP)

- 1.1 The Accrington Area Action Plan (AAP) was formally adopted as part of the Hyndburn Local Plan in January 2012. In light of the requirements for plan review set out above, in July 2018 Officers from the Planning, Regeneration, and Conservation sections of the Council undertook a review of the AAP to determine whether it was in need of any formal update.
- 1.2 In the Foreword the Accrington AAP states that its primary purpose is to assist the Council in working with its partners *'to make Accrington Town Centre a distinctive, prosperous and vibrant centre recognised for the collective quality and attractiveness of its specialist retail offer, historic heritage and public realm'*. Delivery of the vision that *'Accrington will become a vibrant floral market town with an excellent quality of place at the heart of Pennine Lancashire'* is articulated through a series of objectives, and 24 topic based policies. These are knitted together in the final section of the AAP through area based policies which extol development of a series of seven distinct Quarters across the town centre.
- 1.3 A summary of the Council's analysis of the continued relevance of the AAP against each of the considerations set out by the PPG is detailed below:

## **Conformity with national planning policy**

- 1.4 The key aims of the Accrington AAP, from which each of the specific planning policies within it flow, are:
- Strengthening the Retail Provision in the Town Centre
  - Becoming a Visitor Destination
  - Enhancing the quality of the Environment
  - Improving Access, Movement, and Transport
  - Promoting Investment and Business Development
  - Improving Educational and Training Opportunities
- 1.5 The Government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in July 2018. The key aims of the Accrington AAP have been considered in light of the revised NPPF.
- 1.6 In terms of the aim of the Accrington AAP to strengthen retail provision in the town, whilst it is recognised that the need for further retail floorspace is limited (as evidenced in the Council's Retail Study published in 2016), this policy aim

does not just relate to the provision of new floorspace, it also focuses on enhancing the quality of existing retail floorspace. As a result, whilst national policy on town centres is recognising the changing structure of town centres, and increasing flexibility for other uses (e.g. removing the requirement for local authorities to identify primary and secondary frontages as a policy initiative), the aim of the AAP is still considered to remain in general conformity with national planning policy.

- 1.7 The remaining policy aims of the Accrington AAP are also considered to reflect a sustainable approach to dealing with the continued development of the town centre and remain in general conformity with national planning policy.

### **Changes to local circumstances**

- 1.8 The Accrington AAP has been an adopted part of the Hyndburn Local Plan for over six years. Over this period town centres across the country have faced significant challenges, with Accrington being no exception. Falling real incomes, changing shopping and spending habits, and in Hyndburn a declining population, have all led to a change in composition and structure of the town centre commercial core.
- 1.9 As part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan the Council had a Retail Study undertaken in 2016 (completed by Peter Brett Associates) which looked at future requirements for retail floorspace, and undertook detailed health checks of each of the five main centres in Hyndburn. The study identified modest quantitative requirements for comparison goods retail floorspace over the plan period to 2033 (between 1,600sqm and 4,000sqm depending upon rates of population growth). It also identified the need for qualitative requirements to expand consumer choice. The study concluded that both should be focused on Accrington Town Centre due to it being the Borough's main centre for comparison retail.
- 1.10 The health check for Accrington, published in the 2016 study, concluded that it *'benefits from good accessibility and some attractive historic assets. However, it is evident that the town centre is struggling on a number of indicators of vitality and viability. Its vacancy rate is significantly higher than the UK national average and the proportion of comparison retail outlets is also well below the national average. Representation from national operators is limited and has been further undermined by the loss of the anchor Marks & Spencer store at Broadway. We also note that whilst service sector uses account for a high proportion of commercial premises within the town centre, the important food and drink sector is significantly under-represented, and those outlets that are present cater for the lower end of the market'*.

- 1.11 Whilst this summary clearly identifies challenges for the town centre, the key aims set out in the Accrington AAP are considered to remain relevant to meeting these challenges and are therefore not seen as requiring review at this stage.
- 1.12 Much of the content of the AAP revolves around heritage matters, re-branding of the town, and about management and implementation of changes as opposed to specific policies. The Accrington AAP has been successful in steering some key development projects and infrastructure in the town centre since its adoption; it was instrumental in ensuring a successful Compulsory Purchase Order to deliver the new bus station; and it has also helped to secure Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) funding for public realm works in the town centre that are ongoing today.

### **Housing Delivery Test performance**

- 1.13 The Council does not consider this to be of relevance to the review of the Accrington AAP at this stage.

### **Whether the authority can demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable sites for housing**

- 1.14 The Council produces a separate statement on an annual basis on its five year housing land supply position. The latest statement, published in August 2017, indicates that the Council has at least a 6.6 year supply of housing land. Geographically, the Accrington AAP covers a very small area of the Borough, the commercial core of Accrington town centre and its environs. Whilst there are some development opportunities identified in the AAP boundary for housing, none of these sites are reflected in the Council's latest 5 year supply statement. As such, the Council does not consider this to be of relevance to the review of the Accrington AAP at this stage.

### **Appeals performance**

- 1.15 There have been no appeals determined within the boundary of the Accrington AAP since its adoption; therefore the Council does not consider this to be of relevance to the review of the Accrington AAP at this stage.

### **Success of policies against indicators in the Development Plan as set out in their Authority Monitoring Report**

- 1.16 The Council has reported progress against its Town Centre indicators in Chapter 13 of its latest AMR (published in September 2018). On consideration

of the findings set out in the AMR, none of the individual points raised (or collective matters raised) are considered to constitute justification for review of the Accrington AAP at this stage.

### **Overall conclusions**

- 1.17 For the reasons set out above, the Council does not consider it necessary at this time to review any specific elements of the Accrington AAP. Whilst some specific policies may contain outdated references (e.g. to bodies/organisations that no longer exist, or to Government Planning Policy Statements) any review needs to be justified in the context of the significance of the plan document to meeting housing need (as stated by the Government), Council resources available, and the overall ambition/priorities of the Council. Hyndburn is a small district authority and is currently in the process of updating its Core Strategy and producing a Site Allocations DPD which are seen as strategic priorities. Resources are considered to be best placed focusing on completing these key strategic Local Plan documents first, before revisiting the Accrington AAP in more detail.
- 1.18 The Core Strategy Review and Site Allocations DPD will be submitted for examination in 2020, and anticipated to be adopted some point in 2021 (dependent upon the length of the examination process). Amongst the scope of the Site Allocations DPD will be the identification of appropriate Town and Local Centre boundaries, along with a Primary Shopping Area and other relevant retail locations including local retail parades and other commercial locations. As such some aspects of the AAP Policies and Map may end up being updated or replaced through this work however this will be reported through the Site Allocations DPD as opposed to a separate review of the AAP.
- 1.19 At this point, the Council does not intend to update any policies in the Accrington AAP, but this will be re-visited for consideration in 2021/22 in the context of new strategic policies in the Borough that will have been adopted in the Core Strategy Review and Site Allocations DPD.