

Manchester Retail and Leisure Study Update - Moston Lane

Moston Lane District Centre Planning Policy Recommendations

Introduction

1. This Supplementary Advice has been prepared by Nexus Planning on behalf of Manchester City Council to inform the emerging Local Plan and support the proposed designation of Moston Lane as a District Centre. It provides an assessment of the current role and function of Moston Lane, its relationship with surrounding centres and the overarching hierarchy of centres across the authority area, and the suitability of relevant draft policies in the context of national planning policy.
2. The report looks at the role of Moston Lane within the wider retail hierarchy, including its relationship with nearby centres specifically Harpurhey, and its ability to accommodate growth over the Local Plan period to 2039.
3. Since the Manchester Retail and Leisure Study was published in 2023, the context for Moston Lane has changed. In particular, the Moston Lane Development Framework, published later in 2023, sets out a clear direction for regeneration, backed by planned investment in public realm improvements, new homes and community infrastructure. Alongside this, there are a number of development opportunities coming forward, with a preferred bidder now appointed for the key sites behind Moston Lane that will see the creation of a new mixed-use development including circa 150 homes, a public square and a health centre. This is over and above the 190 homes either completed or proposed in and around Moston Lane.
4. The National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'), places emphasis on the importance of supporting the vitality and viability of centres, therefore a forward-looking approach is needed. The 2023 Study remains a useful baseline, but it does not fully capture the scale of planned investment at Moston Lane. Relying on it alone would risk understating the centre's future role over the plan period.
5. In particular, this report seeks to:
 - Assess the position of Moston Lane within the retail hierarchy;
 - Identify appropriate policy interventions to support the delivery of the Moston Lane Development Framework;
 - Considers a suitable boundary for the centre; and
 - Provides a summary healthcheck assessment for the centre.
6. The findings of this report are intended to provide an evidence-based justification for the proposed designation of Moston Lane as a District Centre and to support the development of the draft local plan policies.

Policy Context

7. The NPPF at paragraph 90 encourages the promotion of a network and hierarchy of centres that are resilient, diverse and capable of adapting to changing economic conditions. It encourages local planning authorities to

define a hierarchy of centres, allocate sites to meet the needs of town centre uses, and support the diversification of uses to maintain vitality and viability.

8. The NPPF also seeks to ensure that communities have access to a range of services locally, thereby reducing the need to travel and supporting sustainable patterns of development.
9. In this context, the proposed designation of Moston Lane as a District Centre aligns with national policy objectives by supporting the provision of accessible services, encouraging regeneration, and strengthening the role of centres in meeting local needs.

Local Policy Context

10. The Draft Manchester Local Plan (September 2025) sets out the spatial strategy for growth and development across the city to 2039 and establishes a hierarchy of centres to support sustainable communities. The Plan seeks to strengthen the role of centres as accessible locations for retail, leisure and community uses, while supporting regeneration and investment across neighbourhoods.
11. Of particular relevance is Policy C1, which establishes the overall centre hierarchy, and Policy C4, which identifies a number of centres within North and East Manchester as District Centres, including Moston Lane. This represents a notable evolution in policy, as Moston Lane has not previously been formally designated within the retail hierarchy.
12. The inclusion of Moston Lane as a District Centre reflects the Council's ambition to support regeneration within the area and to respond to the scale of planned investment, including residential-led mixed-use development, public realm improvements and enhanced community infrastructure. The Draft Local Plan also includes a suite of policies relating to town centre uses, leisure, amenity and design, which will be relevant to managing growth and ensuring that development contributes positively to the vitality and viability of the centre.
13. The emerging policy framework therefore provides a strong basis for considering the future role of Moston Lane and supports the need for a detailed assessment of its function, boundary and policy requirements as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

Moston Lane Healthcheck Summary

14. Moston Lane comprises a linear cluster of retail, leisure and service uses which serve the day-to-day needs of the surrounding residential communities. Located approximately 900 metres east of Harpurhey District Centre, it performs a complementary and more localised role, characterised by a strong independent and service-led offer.
 15. The 2023 Retail and Leisure Study provides an overview of the performance of centres across Manchester and highlights the important role that such locations play in supporting local communities, particularly in areas characterised by higher levels of deprivation. The Study emphasises the contribution of convenience retailing, service uses and independent operators in maintaining the vitality and viability, as well as the need for policy intervention to support centres in the context of changing retail patterns.
 16. These findings are directly relevant to Moston Lane, which exhibits a strong service-led and community-focused role, underpinned by a diverse range of independent operators and a retail offer tailored to the needs of its local catchment.
 17. Notwithstanding the conclusions of the 2023 Retail and Leisure Study, it is evident that Moston Lane has undergone a material shift in both its current function and future trajectory.
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18. Nexus has undertaken a full review of the health of Moston Lane to provide the justification required to define the centre's place within the hierarchy of the authority area.
 19. The full healthcheck report, which can be found in Appendix 1, confirms that the centre accommodates approximately 97 units, representing a scale comparable with smaller district centres across the wider authority area (see Section 5 of the Manchester Retail and Leisure Study 2023, which provides the composition of the other district centres in the authority area).
 20. Moston Lane performs an important localised role, providing a diverse range of convenience, service and independent retail uses that meet the day-to-day needs of the surrounding community. The centre is characterised by a strong convenience and service offer alongside a distinctive multicultural retail function, reflected in its concentration of specialist independent operators. This contributes to a vibrant street presence, an active daytime economy and a strong sense of place, supporting its role as a community-focused high street. Notwithstanding these strengths, the centre faces a number of environmental challenges relating to public realm quality, shopfront conditions and commercial waste management.
 21. In considering its position within the wider retail hierarchy, it is necessary to assess its relationship with Harpurhey District Centre, which is located approximately 900 metres to the west. Harpurhey performs a different and higher-order role, characterised by a substantially greater quantum of floorspace and the presence of large-format national multiple operators, including major foodstores and comparison retailers like Asda and B&M. Its retail offer is focused around purpose-built units within a defined shopping centre environment and is underpinned by a strong convenience sector, which generates significant levels of footfall.
 22. By contrast, Moston Lane is more linear in form and is characterised by smaller units and a predominance of independent operators. Its retail and service offer is more locally focused and includes a range of culturally specific businesses that are not represented within Harpurhey. As such, the two centres are not directly competing but instead perform complementary roles within the wider network of centres, with Harpurhey acting as a higher-order destination and Moston Lane serving a more localised, service-rich and community-oriented function. The two function well alongside each other, providing this qualitatively different offer to the catchment.
 23. Looking forward to the Local Plan period to 2039, there is clear evidence that Moston Lane is transitioning towards a district-level role. This is driven by the scale of planned investment in the centre, including residential-led mixed-use development, the creation of new public space and wider regeneration initiatives aligned with the Development Framework. In parallel, a pipeline of new housing development will increase the local population and generate additional demand for retail, leisure and community services within walking distance of the centre.
 24. This evolving role is reflected in the Draft Local Plan, which identifies Moston Lane as a District Centre within the proposed retail hierarchy. This designation aligns with national policy objectives to support the vitality and viability of centres and to ensure that communities have access to a range of services locally.
 25. Taking these factors into account, it is considered that the designation of Moston Lane as a District Centre is justified and appropriate. The designation reflects both the centre's existing characteristics and its anticipated growth over the plan period, and will provide the necessary policy framework to support its continued development. Importantly, the proposed designation does not undermine the role of Harpurhey but instead strengthens the overall network of centres within North Manchester by providing complementary functions and improving access to services for local communities.
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26. Overall, the proposed designation represents a proportionate and forward-looking response to the changing role of Moston Lane and will ensure that the centre is appropriately supported to fulfil an enhanced function within Manchester's retail hierarchy to 2039.

Boundary

27. Paragraph 90 (b) of the NPPF requires local plans to 'define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas'.

28. Annex 2 identifies that a town centre is the:

'Area defined on the local authority's policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.'

29. Annex 2 also defines main town centres uses as:

'Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).'

30. Based on the existing uses and the proposed planned redevelopment projects in the area, we have proposed a boundary which covers the areas. A proposed boundary can be found in Appendix 2.

Policy Recommendations

31. In order to assist the Council in finalising the draft policy position, we have set out below a summary of our policy recommendations against the relevant Draft Local Plan policy (Reg 18). In doing so, we provide commentary where we consider amendments should be made to policy to reflect the findings of this Study.

Policy No.	Current Policy Wording	Nexus Recommendations
Policy C1-Centre Hierarchy	Development of town centre uses (as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework) should be located in the centres identified in the hierarchy below. The scale of development should be appropriate to the role of the centre within the hierarchy and not adversely impact other centres. To maintain their vitality and viability, a mix of town centre uses will be considered suitable, allowing centres to grow and diversify. The City Centre Primary Shopping Area and district centre boundaries are shown on the Policies Map. Manchester's centre hierarchy is:- District Centres District Centres have an essential role in providing a neighbourhood's retail and service needs and ensuring that residents can access them easily. They are the focus for shopping, commercial, leisure, public and community functions, providing an important opportunity to define local character. Manchester's eighteen district centres are set out below. Development in these centres should primarily respond to the needs of their catchment and	We agree with the designation of Moston Lane as a district centre within the hierarchy established by Policy C1. In this regard, we consider that the centre performs a distinct role within the wider hierarchy. While it clearly serves the day-to-day needs of the local catchment, the concentration of culturally specific retail, food and service uses also enables it to draw trade from a wider area. This character is consistent with the role envisaged by Policy C1, which recognises the function of district centres in defining local character and responding to catchment needs. The designation is therefore supported.

Policy No.	Current Policy Wording	Nexus Recommendations
	recognise the need to support the vitality and viability of centres.	
Policy C4-North and East Manchester District Centres	The district centres in North and East Manchester will continue to be the focus for retail, services and leisure provision. The district centres serve a predominantly convenience role and continuation in this role will be supported. A range of town centre uses will be considered suitable. Development should seek to improve the environmental quality of centres, enhance public realm, connectivity and the street scene, including improved shopfronts, reduce inactive frontages, ensure shutters are up during the day and be in accordance with Policy DM 5 Shop Fronts and Related Signs. This is a priority in Cheetham Hill, Eastlands, Moston Lane, Newton Heath and Openshaw and will be supported where it can attract additional investment and redevelopment. Diversifying the leisure offer by introducing new restaurants, and other food and drink outlets and encouraging longer opening hours will benefit Harpurhey, Newton Heath and Openshaw, bringing activity into all parts of the district centre at different times of the day, subject to no adverse impact. In district centres dissected by busy arterial roads, priority should be given to improving crossings and connections across centres. Opportunities should be taken in Eastlands to enhance connectivity between the western and eastern sections of the centre, including new signage and additional active street frontages, to encourage linked trips and allow the two 'halves' to become mutually reinforcing. Activities that will attract footfall into a centre will be supported. Increasing the residential offer in a centre can further increase footfall and is supported where it does not reduce active street frontages. This is a priority in Newton Heath.	We agree with the aims of Policy C4, and in particular the priority placed on improving environmental quality, public realm and shopfronts. This approach is directly relevant to Moston Lane, where the Council has already committed to a programme of regeneration and residential intensification through the Neighbourhood Development Framework (NDF) adopted in 2023. The environmental improvement objectives of Policy C4 are therefore already being actively pursued. We recommend that the Council considers referencing Moston Lane explicitly within Policy C4 alongside the other priority centres, to ensure that the policy framework and the regeneration programme are mutually reinforcing.
Policy C3-District Centres	Within district centres development will be promoted which supports the vitality and viability of centres, complements the distinct local character and contributes to providing a good range of accessible key services, including retail, health facilities, public services, leisure activities, financial and legal services. Housing will also be considered an appropriate use within district centres, provided it supports the vitality and viability of the centre. Development which has the potential to impact on the centre hierarchy and the current or future vitality and viability of other centres in Manchester will only be acceptable if there is no prospect of the affected centres accommodating growth themselves. Development in district centres should: • Prioritise delivery of key 'visitor' services, including retail, public and commercial services, food and drink and retail services (such as beauty and	We agree with the framework established by Policy C3, and note in particular its recognition of the importance of health facilities and the appropriateness of housing within district centres. The emphasis on improving shopfront quality is particularly welcomed, given the existing condition of frontages in parts of Moston Lane, where there are instances of a clear need for enhancement.

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	hairdressers). Retail will be expected to remain the principal use in district centres. Subject to impact on overall character and local amenity, the Council will support development which extends the time during which District Centres are active; • Promote a range of retailers and shop formats; • Enhance shop frontages ensuring designs improve the appearance of district centres, considering the character of individual centres, accessibility, unit frontages and size, (see Policy DM 5 Shop Fronts and Related Signs.). New development should deliver improvements to the quality and accessibility of the centre environment. Opportunities should be taken to adopt sustainable building design and practises to assist in adapting to climate change, (see 11 Net Zero Carbon and Resilience.).	
Policy C10- Leisure and Evening Economy (Amenity)	Policy C 10 Leisure and the Evening Economy : Amenity Development proposals for cultural, entertainment and leisure F1(b, c, d, e)/ F2(c, d), food and drink E(b) and sui generis leisure uses which are in accordance with Policy C 9 Leisure Developments will be permitted subject to: • Residential and wider area impact - the proposals should not create an unacceptable impact on residential amenity and the operation and amenity of existing areas and sites. Specific consideration will be given to: a. Cumulative Impact –development will not have an unacceptable impact, either individually or cumulatively, on the amenity and character of the surrounding area, particularly due to noise, opening hours, litter, odour, traffic generation, parking or disorder/nuisance; b. Balance - new uses in Manchester centres should support both the day-time and evening/night-time economies and ensure the mix of uses supports the vitality and viability of centres, including the function of centres and safety of residents and visitors; c. The storage and collection of refuse and litter - relevant planning applications should be accompanied by a waste management strategy setting out how the proposal will deal with its own waste and also the waste generated by customers. Developments should incorporate sufficient mitigation to ensure existing activities in the surrounding area are not impacted in their function and operation by the new development. This particularly applies in areas with an existing leisure and night time economy or employment/commercial use, these activities and venues should be unaffected by new development proposals. In these locations, the agent of change principal will apply, particularly in the City Centre which is a mixed-use area. When considering the amenity	We support the overall approach set out in Policy C10 in seeking to balance the growth of leisure and evening economy uses with the protection of residential amenity. Moston Lane is likely to benefit positively from the policy given the current plans for residential development around the centre.

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	impact of a proposal in the City Centre it is recognised that mixed-uses sit together and mitigation measures can be critical in ensuring a proposal's impact is acceptable.	
Policy C12-Hot Food Takeaways	Hot food takeaways will be supported in district and local centres, or parades of 10 or more retail units, where the cumulative impact of introducing them would not be detrimental to the vitality and viability of a centre, the balance between the day time and night time economy and the health of the population. A proposal will be considered to be harmful to the vitality and viability of a centre if it: - Increases the concentration of hot food takeaway ground floor frontages in a centre to more than 10% of all non-residential ground floor frontages. In centres where the proportion of hot food takeaway ground floor frontages is approaching 10%, consideration will also be given to the impact of the proposal on the character of the area surrounding the application site. Applications will not normally be permitted if the proposal would lead to the proportion of hot food takeaway frontages being more than 10% of non-residential ground floor uses in a particular part of the centre concerned - Creates a cluster of more than two hot food takeaways together; and - Reduces the number of units between hot food takeaway clusters to less than two non-hot food takeaways. Exceptions to the above are Manchester City Centre and Rusholme District Centre. A key role of these centres is to serve the night-time economy. They have become known as locations for food and drink, attracting visitors from across Greater Manchester and beyond. In these centres, hot food takeaway applications will be considered based on an assessment of the impact on the role and character of the surrounding area. In centres where vacancy levels are more than 10% (or 25% in centres with less than 20 units) the Council will wish to see evidence that effort has been made to fill the unit with another town centre use (other than a hot food takeaway) before hot food takeaways will be permitted. In areas where it can be shown that it would be compatible with surrounding uses, residential use should also be considered. Where there is evidence of no demand for an alternative use in a vacant unit, hot food takeaways could be considered favourably even if this would increase the proportion of hot food takeaways to above 10% of ground floor frontages. To prevent any harmful effect on the visual amenity of the street scene, shutters should be up between the hours 9am and 5.30pm.	We support the approach set out in Policy C12 in managing the concentration of hot food takeaways and protecting the vitality and viability of centres. In the case of Moston Lane, the policy will help control any future concentration of hot food takeaways within the centre and encourage a wider range of uses within the centre to promote a more diverse offer for residents.
Policy DM 5-Shop Fronts and Related Signs	Development affecting shop fronts will: Ensure the proportion, scale, style, detailing, colour and materials make a positive contribution to the	We agree with the aims of Policy DM5. As Moston Lane undergoes regeneration through the NDF, there is a significant opportunity to raise the quality of

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	building and its context. This will require designs to consider the location and heritage assets such as conservation areas and Listed Buildings or whether more contemporary shop fronts are required; Ensure new shopfronts and alterations are considered in the context of the whole building and the streetscene, in terms of design, proportion and position; Allow full access for people whose mobility is impaired and ensure proposals are in accordance with relevant Building Regulations. The only exceptions which the Council may consider are where there are particularly difficult physical constraints, or where the architectural character of a listed building would be damaged; Ensure that proposals for security grilles, advertisement signs, canopies and awnings, ventilation are in keeping with the character of the building, adjoining buildings and shopfronts and the area within which the premises are located; Avoid externally mounted security grilles or shutters if they are of solid construction. In cases where externally mounted security grilles or shutters are considered acceptable, the boxes housing the grille or shutter should wherever possible be located behind the fascia; and Security shutters should be raised during the day and should ensure that any shutters have sufficient perforation to enable natural surveillance and promote the feeling of activity and being overlooked. For major new developments in the City, a shopfront and signage strategy may be required to ensure consistency of approach to shopfront design and advertising to separate commercial premises across a building or a group of buildings	shopfronts across the high street, and the policy provides the appropriate basis for doing so.

