

Openshaw District Centre

Description

Openshaw district centre is located adjacent to Ashton Old Road, approximately 5.5 kilometres to the east of Manchester city centre. The Manchester Core Strategy Proposals Map defines a centre which is linear in nature and wholly comprising of properties situated on Ashton Old Road. In practice, we do not believe that this definition correlates with the area which is being used as a centre.

In this regard, we note that Lime Square Retail Park, to the north of Ashton Old Road, opened in 2010. Whilst Lime Square provides large format retail anchors (in the form of Morrisons, The Range and B&M), it also includes a row of smaller commercial units which accommodate a range of operators, including Greggs, Peak Pharmacy, a Post Office, and The Tanning Shop. Lime Square is immediately adjacent to the defined district centre and, in practice, functions as part of it. Visitors are able to park in the Lime Square car park, visit its attractions and then also walk across a clear pedestrian route which links to Ashton Old Road and the more traditional high street aspect of the centre. Given this, this healthcheck assessment incorporates Lime Square as a principal part of Openshaw's offer that is physically and functionally connected to the remainder of the centre.

On this basis, Openshaw is medium-sized district centre in terms of commercial floorspace supported. Whilst the centre has fewer different uses than some district centres, this reflects the character of Lime Square and the significant footprints of B&M, Morrisons, Poundland and others.

Openshaw is also shaped by its location adjacent to the busy Ashton Old Road and by the level of car parking provided at Lime Square. This perhaps means that the centre has less of a neighbourhood feel than some centres in Manchester, albeit that its function is supported by the Florence House Medical Practice and by the New Roundhouse community centre which is operated by the Manchester Settlement charity. The New Roundhouse supports a range of services, including educational classes, a wellbeing programme, careers advice, art workshops, and so on. In addition, the Sporting Edge Community Sports Centre is located a short distance from Lime Square Retail Park on the eastern side of Fairfield Road.

Table 1 Openshaw District Centre Floorspace Composition

GOAD Category	Floorspace at 2023 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2023 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	7,366	32.3%	30.1%
Convenience	8,484	37.2%	15.5%
Financial	584	2.6%	6.6%
Leisure	2,538	11.1%	26.3%
Retail Service	3,387	14.9%	7.2%
Vacant	447	2.0%	13.8%
TOTAL	22,806	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Composition of District centre based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of February 2023; UK Average from Experian Goad Report February 2023.

Table 2 Openshaw District Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2023	Units at 2023 (%)	Units UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	15	21.7%	26.9%
Convenience	11	15.9%	9.3%
Financial	5	7.2%	8.7%
Leisure	15	21.7%	25.4%
Retail Service	18	26.1%	15.8%
Vacant	5	7.2%	13.8%
TOTAL	69	100.0%	100.0%

Source: District centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of February 2023; UK Average from Experian Goad Report February 2023.

Uses

A total of 69 commercial units have been recorded in Openshaw. Four retailers account for more than half of the commercial space in the district centre, these being (in order of size) Morrisons, The Range, Lidl and B&M. The four units collectively account for 11,577 sq.m of floorspace.

The Morrisons superstore comprises the largest anchor unit within Lime Square Retail Park and the Lidl store unit is located a short distance away to the south of Ashton Old Road. The convenience goods offer is supplemented by a Farmfoods supermarket (also part of Lime Square) and by a range of smaller stores which include further national multiples and independents. Given the level of large format provision, the convenience goods offer in the centre is proportionately strong compared to the national average position. The 11 convenience retailers occupy 15.9% of all commercial units (which compares to 9.3% of units nationally) and 37.2% of all floorspace (which is significantly higher than the national average of 15.5%).

In terms of Openshaw's comparison goods offer, key retailers include the homewares and discount variety operators, The Range, B&M bargains and Poundland. This is supplemented by charity shops, chemists, a card shop, a florist, a pet shop and a carpet shop. The emphasis is on meeting day-to-day and household comparison goods needs. There are a total of 15 comparison goods units which collectively provide 7,366 sq.m of floorspace. The proportion of units and floorspace dedicated to comparison goods use is substantially above national average position. In total, nearly 70% of floorspace in the centre is dedicated to retail use.

The dominant service sector is retail services, with such uses accounting for proportions of floorspace and units substantially above the corresponding national average figures. The retail service sector comprises a good range of useful operators, including three hairdressers, two barbers, two beauty salons, two opticians, a gym, nail bar, Post Office, and so on. The largest retail service unit by far is The Gym Group, which is located at the south-eastern corner of Lime Square Retail Park.

Openshaw's leisure service sector is more modest, accounting for 21.7% of units (the national average position is 25.4%) and 11.1% of floorspace (26.3% nationally). Of the 15 operators present, there are six takeaways, three bookmakers, three pubs, two cafes and a restaurant (this being McDonald's). The number of cafes and restaurants is very limited, albeit this perhaps reflects the character of the centre which is split between the Lime Square Retail Park units and the more traditional units on Ashton Old Road. Neither location perhaps provides the ideal setting for café and restaurant uses to thrive.

As one would expect with a district centre of this size, the provision of financial and business services units and floorspace is below the relevant national averages. Two of the five financial and business service operators are currency exchanges. There is also a building contractor, a graphic design and printers, and a solicitors.

Daytime/Evening Economy

As stated above, Openshaw's leisure service sector is limited. Whilst most of the operators open into the evening, they are sporadically sited and there is not considered to be a critical mass such that Openshaw could be considered a centre with a thriving evening economy. The nature of the centre acts to some degree to constrain opportunities to develop an evening economy. Furthermore, current economic pressures are impacting on households' discretionary spending which means that any substantial expansion in respect of leisure service provision is not considered likely in the short term.

Vacancies

Just five vacant units were recorded during our visit which account for a total of 447 sq.m of floorspace. This equates to just 7.2% of units (the national average vacancy rate in respect of units is 13.8%) and 2.0% of floorspace (the national average vacancy rate in respect of floorspace is also 13.8%).

The position in respect of vacancies is extremely encouraging and reflects the strong retail function of the centre and the apparent good performance of Lime Square Retail Park. The vacancies which are apparent are generally located in a sporadic manner on Ashton Old Road. The exception is to this is the former Openshaw Community Church premises which are located at on Fairfield Road.

Opportunity Sites

The Openshaw area has been the subject of a significant amount of recent housing development. The area directly to the north of Lime Square Retail Park is currently being built out as the Edgefield Green residential development (pursuant to planning permission reference 126674/FO/ 2020) and a substantial number of new homes have also been delivered in the area which lies between Ashton Old Road and Silverlace Avenue.

In terms of specific future opportunities, there is a part-vacant and part-derelict plot at the junction of Ashton Old Road and Ogden Lane which is behind hoardings and which would benefit from being brought into active use. This site is the subject of planning permission reference 134305/FO/2022 which seeks to provide 22 apartments and six ground floor commercial units. The development would comprise five storeys. The application remains underdetermined at the time of reporting.

More generally, some of the commercial accommodation to the southern side of Ashton Old Road is of limited value and is in a relatively poor state of repair. There may be potential to invest in these building or for sites to be redeveloped in order to provide modern accommodation and additional residential accommodation above ground floor level.

Market Summary

With reference to CoStar data sourced in June 2023, the average annual market rent per sq.ft currently achieved in Openshaw is £14.50, with this figure representing a 3.8% increase on the £13.97 per sq.ft average achieved in the previous 12-month period. CoStar predicts that rents should increase further to around £14.70 by 2027.

The average market sale price per sq.ft has remained largely static at £162 which corresponds to a figure of £163 for the previous period.

In respect of yields, CoStar finds that the current market yield is 7.8%, with this figure remaining the same as the market yield observed in the previous 12-month period.

Increases in rents and decreases in yields are generally considered positive signs in respect of investor confidence in a given location. In this instance, Openshaw's yields are amongst the highest in Manchester, with only Levenshulme having a higher average yield. This issue is compounded by the average rental return being one of the lowest in the city. This low rents and high yields perhaps in part reflect the condition and attraction of the historic stock on Ashton Old Road which are the premises which are most frequently marketed.

No data is available relating to the probability of leasing vacant premises, which reflects the scale of the centre and the relatively limited number of vacancies.

Pedestrian Flows

As we would expect, the greatest level of activity in the centre is focused around Lime Square Retail Park which accommodates all of the centre's principal commercial anchors and is supported by a substantial level of car parking. We understand that around 370 car parking spaces are available at

Lime Square. As a consequence, all parts of Lime Square (the north and southern terraces and the central connecting pedestrian link) have been busy during our visits. This activity continues into the evening given the opening hours of Morrisons and McDonald's, and the propensity for gym members to exercise after work (The Gym Group occupies a large unit adjacent to the junction of Ashton Old Road and Fairfield Road). Shoppers are able to park for free for three hours at Lime Square and some linked trips were observed from the retail park to other parts of the centre.

Whilst the commercial units on Ashton Old Road are much smaller and typically accommodate independent operators, they still benefit from a good level of footfall. This perhaps reflects the fact that the surrounding residential areas are of a relatively high density and the general level of activity arising from traffic on Ashton Old Road.

Accessibility

Ashton Old Road is a key bus route and there are a good number of well located stops in and around the centre. Regular bus services run to Broadbent Fold, Chorlton, East Didsbury, Gorton, Newton Heath, Stalybridge, Stockport, and the city centre.

Openshaw district centre is also well located in respect of being surrounded by residential areas which provide straightforward access to the centre's shops and services. Notwithstanding this, a key focus of the centre is Lime Square and its convenience goods offer, and it is clear that a substantial proportion of visitors travel to the centre by car. In this regard, Ashton Old Road is subject to congestion – particularly at peak times – which impacts on travel times. The Lime Square car parks have a good number of disabled and parent and child parking bays, which are located close to shops.

There are no dedicated cycle lanes on Ashton Old Road with the principal cycle route in the area running along the Ashton Canal towpath between Ashton-under-Lyne town centre and Manchester city centre. The towpath runs a short distance to the north of the district centre.

Within the centre itself, Ashton Old Road bisects the centre and may create a barrier for some in terms of accessibility on foot. Notwithstanding this, there are a good number of pelican crossing points throughout the centre (situated at Halfords, Lidl and at the south-eastern corner of Lime Square Retail Park to provide access across Ashton Old Road, and at Fairfield Street). Footways are generally of a good width albeit we did notice some unauthorised car parking on pavements during our visit.

Overall, the general access to the centre is considered to be good given the bus services and proximate housing. Access throughout the centre reflects its character and the level of congestion on Ashton Old Road.

Perception of Safety

Openshaw benefits from a very good level of activity relating to both passing vehicular traffic and from users of the centre itself. Lime Square has open car parking areas and CCTV in operation. It is close to residential dwellings and at some parts is overlooked by domestic properties.

Whilst the centre generally feels safe and secure during the day, the evening economy is focused around takeaway uses which may encourage some congregation in the evening. There are only a limited number of commercial operations open in the evening and further activity may help foster the perception of a varied centre which is open and attractive to all in the evening.

Environmental Quality

The environmental quality of the centre reflects the character of its component parts. Lime Square is a privately managed environment which is well maintained. The two Lime Square car parks have a good number of trees and clearly demarcated walkways comprised of brick sets. The pedestrian route through Lime Square is also laid out in brick sets. Street furniture is limited throughout the retail park and there is nowhere to sit/dwell outside for visitors or employees. The pedestrian access entrance to the centre is marked by 'The Dead Blow' sculpture which is based on a steam hammer (reflecting Manchester's industrial heritage). The sculpture successfully adds interest and acts as a gateway into Lime Square.

The environmental quality of the remainder of the centre along Ashton Old Road is largely functional. Pavements are comprised of tarmacadam surfaces and street furniture is principally limited to bins. Some shops use the pavements to display goods and A-boards which narrow the footway in places.

Commercial premises along Ashton Old Road are in a variable state of repair with some requiring investment to improve their appearance and potentially bring upper floors into active use. Some operators have installed signage which is out of scale with their premises and almost all units have roller shutters. The environmental quality of this area is also impacted by Ashton Old Road itself which is a key arterial route into the city centre and is heavily trafficked (particularly at peak times). It is noted that the Florence House Medical Practice and New Roundhouse community centre have introduced new and well maintained premises along this stretch which lift the environment and help anchor the eastern part of the centre.

We find that the environmental quality of Openshaw is rather mixed. Lime Square is well maintained (albeit lacking any public area to dwell and relax) and parts of Ashton Old Road are in need of investment and impacted by their proximity to the busy road.

Conclusions

Openshaw district centre is comprised of two separate areas which is significantly different in character. Lime Square Retail Park is the retail focus of the centre and accommodates large format anchors, including Morrisons, The Range and B&M together with smaller commercial units. Lime Square was fully occupied at the time of our survey in February 2023 and is evidently successful in meeting needs arising in the area and bringing activity into the centre.

As a consequence of Lime Square, the composition of the centre is skewed towards retailing with grocery and household shopping particularly well catered for.

Service provision is focused around the retail service sector which supports three hairdressers, two barbers, two beauty salons, two opticians, a gym, nail bar, and a Post Office. The function of the centre is also boosted by the Florence House Medical Practice and by the New Roundhouse community centre. Openshaw can therefore meet a good and complementary range of day-to-day needs.

Just five vacant units were recorded during our survey, which equates to just 7.2% of all units and 2.0% of the centre's overall floorspace, which is reflective of a viable centre which is generally attractive to national multiple operators and independents (and has varied commercial stock to support both).

Whilst there is a good level of activity in the centre its attractiveness is impacted by the volume of traffic along Ashton Old Road and the maintenance and quality of some older properties adjacent to the road. It will be important for Openshaw to attract additional investment and redevelopment in order to improve the fabric of the centre and create further activity. Notwithstanding the need for further investment and visual improvement, Openshaw is considered to be a vital and viable centre.



Openshaw district centre

Manchester Retail and Leisure Study

Survey Date - February 2023

Key

Comparison	Leisure Service
Convenience	Retail Service
Financial & Business Services	Vacant