

# Withington District Centre

## Description

Withington district centre is an 'L-shaped' centre focused around commercial units on Wilmslow Road and Copson Street. The centre's composition is dominated by its leisure service offer, which has historically serviced an extensive young professional and student population. The leisure service offer is principally focused around cafés, restaurants, and takeaways (rather than licensed premises).

There are a total of 98 commercial units in the centre which collectively provide 11,549 sq.m of floorspace. Whilst Withington supports a good number of units, it is the smallest district centre in Manchester by quantum of floorspace. The centre is principally comprised of two and three-storey period properties, which are limited in scale. Many units have residential accommodation above and adjacent streets are residential in nature. This results in Withington benefiting from a strong walk-in catchment.

The district centre is well used both during the day and into the evening, which reflects the local demographic and the leisure uses supported. The overall function of the centre is boosted by the library on Wilmslow Road and the Co-op supermarket, which meets some main (as well as top-up) grocery shopping needs.

Whilst the centre's environment reflects its Wilmslow Road location, it benefits in places from a good public realm in (with stone paving and brick setts in the northern part of the centre) and some attractive historic buildings. The centre has an informal feel which reflects its leisure function and the number of independent operators present. Significant interest is also added by the Withington Walls community street art project which has transformed street fronts and walls throughout the centre (the Marcus Rashford mural has had significant media attention).

The centre also seeks to support use by cyclists with albeit a dedicated cycle lane does not run the full length of the centre as the carriageway is relatively narrow in places. The centre's offer is supplemented by Withington Baths & Leisure Centre (operated by a charitable trust) which lies to the south-west of the defined centre boundary.

*Table 1 Withington District Centre Floorspace Composition*

<b>GOAD Category</b>	<b>Floorspace at 2023 (sq.m)</b>	<b>Floorspace at 2023 (%)</b>	<b>Floorspace UK Average at 2023 (%)</b>
Comparison	2,092	18.1%	30.1%
Convenience	2,068	17.9%	15.5%
Financial	1,175	10.2%	6.6%
Leisure	3,746	32.4%	26.3%
Retail Service	1,504	13.0%	7.2%
Vacant	964	8.3%	13.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,549</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*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 Withington District Centre Unit Composition*

<b>GOAD Category</b>	<b>Units at 2023</b>	<b>Units at 2023 (%)</b>	<b>Units UK Average at 2023 (%)</b>
Comparison	18	18.4%	26.9%
Convenience	11	11.2%	9.3%
Financial	11	11.2%	8.7%
Leisure	32	32.7%	25.4%
Retail Service	17	17.3%	15.8%
Vacant	9	9.2%	13.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*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

Withington accommodates 98 commercial units which collectively provide 1,549 sq.m of floorspace. Almost one third of units and floorspace is dedicated to leisure service use. The largest retail units include the Co-op supermarket and Withington Discount Store at Copson Street, and the Sainsbury's Local at Wilmslow Road.

In retail terms, the centre has an important role in meeting day-to-day local needs. As such, it has a higher than average proportion of convenience goods retailers and a lower than average proportion of comparison goods retailers.

The largest convenience store is the Co-op, which Experian Goad identifies has a gross floorspace of 899 sq.m. The Sainsbury's Local has a gross floorspace of 429 sq.m. Other multiple convenience goods retailers within Withington are Go Local and Martins (the latter being a regional chain). The convenience goods offer also accommodates a good number of independents including Withington Fruit n Veg, the No1 Plug tobacconist and Nassar Halal Meat.

The comparison goods function of the centre is relatively modest. In total, 18.1% of the centre's floorspace is used for comparison retailing, which equates to just over half the national average of

30.1%. Similarly, 18.4% of Withington's commercial units are occupied by comparison goods retailers, which compares to a UK national average figure of 26.9%. Other than some national multiple charity shop operators, such as Oxfam and Cancer Research, the offer is wholly independent and includes chemists, discount shops, a clothes store, jewellers and DIY/kitchen retailers.

Retail uses are very much focused in the southern part of the centre, around the junction of Copson Street and Wilmslow Road.

As set out above, leisure service is the single most prevalent use within the district centre, with Withington's proportion of leisure floorspace and units being significantly above the corresponding national average figures.

Withington's leisure service offer is focused around independent operators. There are a good number of cafes (six in total), takeaways (nine) and restaurants (11), with a good range of cuisines provided.

Withington also has relatively strong retail service offer, with the proportion of retail service floorspace also well above national average level. The proportion of retail service units is closer to the national average level. Withington provides a goods range of retail services, including barbers, hairdressers, opticians, a post office, nail bar, and a tattooist.

Financial and business services account for proportions of floorspace and units above the corresponding national average figures. Six of the 11 financial and business service operators are estate agents which reflects the strength of the local property market and in particular the high number of rental properties in this part of south Manchester.

## Daytime/Evening Economy

Withington district centre is of a small scale and is busy throughout the day and into the evening. In this regard, it is assisted by its proximity to a walk-in catchment and the level of traffic on Wilmslow Road (which is particularly well served by bus routes).

Much of the activity is focused around the leisure service offer, with cafes and restaurants securing footfall across their opening hours. The evening economy is also boosted by the number of takeaways which generally open later and continue trading in the evening (and in some cases the early hours of the following morning). It should be noted that the evening economy is principally focused around eating (whether that be on the premises or takeaway) and that there are few licensed premises. Just two pubs – The Albert and The Victoria, both of which are on Wilmslow Road – are located within the centre.

## Vacancies

The vacancy rate in Withington is relatively low, equating to 8.3% of floorspace and 9.2% of units. Both of these figures are below the respective UK national average level.

There are a total of nine vacant units which are generally dispersed throughout the centre and do not unduly impact on its character and attraction. Vacant units are generally small in scale. The largest vacant unit is 467 Wilmslow Road, which was formerly occupied by RBS. This is a characterful property and its appropriate re-use will be of benefit to the centre.

## Opportunity Sites

The Withington Village Framework was published by the Council in 2021. It identifies a series of opportunity sites, which include: Withington Baths; Withington Adult Learning Centre; the former NatWest bank at 437 Wilmslow Road; and the Co-op car park.

Some of these opportunities have been realised (the NatWest bank was repurposed as the Libertine restaurant in August 2022 and then subsequently re-opened as Almost Famous restaurant in May 2023). Other opportunities – such as the Co-op car park – are likely to be longer term and dependent on operators' commercial requirements.

We note that the Withington Village Framework also identifies that Gledhill car park (which is located behind units on the western side of Wilmslow Road) has potential for environmental improvement or to accommodate more wholesale redevelopment).

## Market Summary

With reference to CoStar data sourced in June 2023, the average annual market rent per sq.ft currently achieved in Withington is £18.01, with this figure representing a 1.0% increase on the £17.83 per sq.ft average achieved in the previous 12-month period.

Additionally, the average market sale price per sq.ft has increased slightly over the past 12-month period, up 1.6% to £174 per sq.ft. CoStar currently predicts market rents will increase to around £18.20 per sq.ft in the period to 2027.

In respect of yields, CoStar finds that the current market yield is 7.6%, with this figure remaining static over the past 12 months. However, yields are forecast to increase to around 8.2% in the period to 2027. This is perhaps reflective of the historic nature of most of the commercial accommodation which requires ongoing investment and maintenance. The centre is also subject to demographic changes resulting from the student accommodation market having a greater focus on the city centre in recent years.

Increases in rents and decreases in yields are generally considered positive signs in respect of investor confidence in a given location. In this instance, Withington's yields are slightly higher than the average recorded across all centres in Manchester, which suggests that other areas are considered a safer investment.

Insufficient data is available to identify trends in respect of the leasing of vacant premises.

## Pedestrian Flows

The district centre is focused around a small geographic area which benefits from a good level of pedestrian activity. This is generated by the commercial uses, the bus routes which travel along Wilmslow Road, and general pedestrian activity related to the residential location. Copson Street benefits from activity associated with the Co-op supermarket and its associated car park. Further car parks at Gledhill Street and Egerton Crescent, whilst tucked away, also help support activity.

As referred to above, Wilmslow Road is an extremely busy arterial route and supports numerous bus services. This too helps drive pedestrian footfall.

## Accessibility

Key bus stops which serve Withington district centre are located at Withington library, at St Paul's Church (to the south of the centre), and at the northern end of Palatine Road (which is again to the south of the centre). Frequent services run to Ancoats, Chorlton, Crumpsall, East Didsbury, Handforth Dean, Manchester Airport, Reddish, Sale, Stockport, West Didsbury, and the city centre.

The nearest Metrolink stop is situated at Burton Road, which is around a ten minute walk from the southern edge of Withington district centre and the centre is therefore less well served by this mode of transport. However, the nature of the centre is that it principally meets localised day-to-day needs. In this regard, the centre is well located in respect of the surrounding Withington catchment area. Furthermore, the very high number of bus services ensures that the centre is generally accessible by public transport to those living beyond the immediate catchment area (and to those who may not be able to walk more than a short distance).

Like a number of district centres in Manchester, Withington is bisected by an A-road (Wilmslow Road) which may create a barrier for some in terms of pedestrian movement. However, Wilmslow Road is a single carriageway in each direction and relatively narrow as it runs through the district centre. In addition, pelican crossings allow easy access across Wilmslow Road in both the northern (near Withington Library) and southern parts (near Costa Coffee) parts of the centre. Footways are generally of a good width (even where on-street parking is provided) and bollards run through the centre to provide demarcation and aid pedestrian safety. The centre is also generally flat.

Whilst pedestrian lanes are present throughout much of Wilmslow Road, there is no dedicated provision across much of the centre which reflects the constrained nature of the highway (in terms of its width) and the need to balance competing uses (including bus stops). Provision is made for cyclists at junctions and Sheffield bike stands were noted in the northern part of the centre close to Withington Library.

## Perception of Safety

Withington benefits from a very good level of activity relating to both passing vehicular traffic and from users of the centre itself. It is close to residential dwellings and at some parts is overlooked by domestic properties. Whilst there are a significant number of takeaway uses which may encourage some congregation in the evening, the centre is naturally surveyed through the activity that it generates.

As a consequence, we believe that Withington generally feels like a welcoming and safe centre both during the day and into the evening.

## Environmental Quality

Withington is a generally attractive centre which benefits substantially from the Withington Walls public art project. This adds colour, general interest and helps ensure that businesses and the wider community are invested in the centre.

The centre is generally comprised of historic properties with ground floors in commercial use and upper floors often being used as residential accommodation. The centre takes the form of traditional high street focused around Copson Street and Wilmslow Road. The latter is an extremely busy arterial route which is heavily trafficked by buses and private vehicles. Due to the tight urban street pattern, there is limited space and the environment is principally functional. Notwithstanding this, footways in the northern part of the centre are stone paving with parking bays being set out in brick setts. Some outdoor seating is provided adjacent to Withington Library with this area also benefiting from trees, planters, Sheffield bike stands, and bins.

There are a number of high quality period buildings in the centre, including Withington Library, the former NatWest bank building, Withington Methodist Church, and the Sainsbury's Local building (former White Lion pub).

We note that the centre has been allocated funds from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund which will provide for improvements within the district centre. This will be in two parts:

- the part-pedestrianisation of Copson Street, improving accessibility, creating opportunities for outdoor seating and a venue for street markets; and

- to create a new library square where Wellington Road meets Wilmslow Road, creating a new high quality green public space suitable to host local events.

## Conclusions

Withington is a smaller district centre which benefits from its location within a densely populated residential area and adjacent to Wilmslow Road.

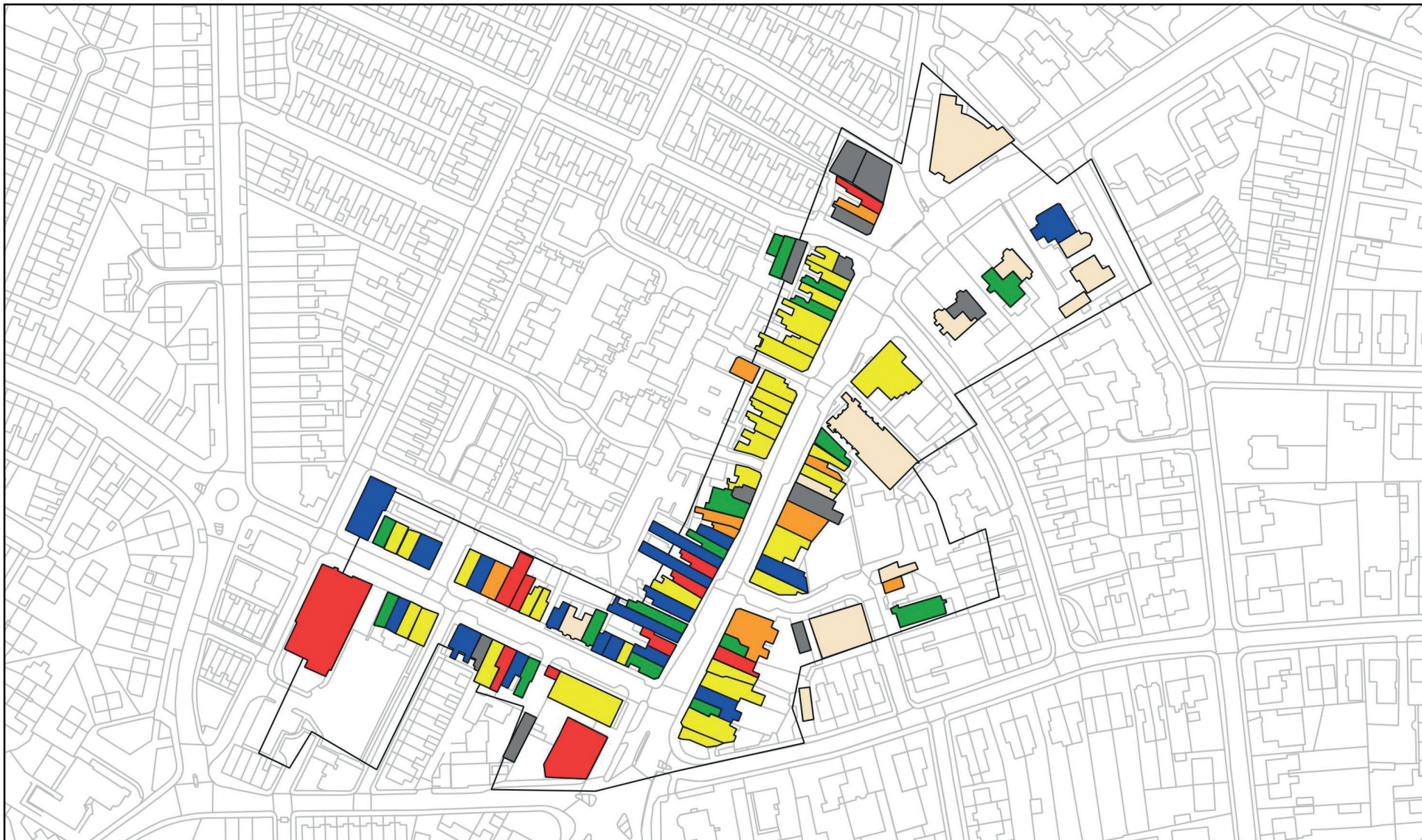
The centre is formed around the junction of Wilmslow Road and Copson Street, and is characterised by commercial uses (generally accommodated within period properties), often with residential uses above.

The centre's composition is skewed towards its leisure service offer, which has historically serviced an extensive young professional and student population. The leisure service offer is principally focused around cafés, restaurants, and takeaways (rather than licensed premises).

The local environment is to some degree shaped by Wilmslow Road which runs through the centre. This both creates activity and results in some congestion. The nature of the centre also reduces opportunities to create communal public space, albeit we note that the Council's intention to address this through the pedestrianisation of Copson Street funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund.

The district centre is well used both during the day and into the evening, which reflects the local demographic and the leisure uses supported. The overall function of the centre is boosted by the library on Wilmslow Road, the Co-op foodstore and Withington Baths (which is located a short distance outside the centre boundary). The centre has a relatively low vacancy rate and provides an important range of goods and services. It is considered to be generally vital and viable.





## Withington district centre

### Manchester Retail and Leisure Study

Survey Date - February 2023

#### Key

Comparison	Leisure Service
Convenience	Retail Service
Financial & Business Services	Vacant