

Didsbury District Centre

Description

Didsbury is a well-connected and thriving district centre, lying within walking distance of rail and Metrolink stations and serving one of South Manchester's most affluent catchments. The main shopping frontages comprise Wilmslow Road, which runs from north to south, and Barlow Moor Run, which runs east to west.

The centre's success is underpinned by a strong convenience and service offer, with a good range of national multiples being supported by a diverse mix of high-quality independents, and a bustling leisure scene. Didsbury is renowned for its eclectic food and drink offer, with its award-winning restaurants and lively nightlife drawing visitors from across Greater Manchester. Numerous community events held throughout the year (including arts, beer and food festivals) contribute to the centre's overall vitality and viability.

Vacancy rates are low compared to the national averages. Moreover, the district centre's environment is generally pleasant, with attractive historic buildings and greenspaces helping to create a 'village' atmosphere.

Table 1 Didsbury District Centre Floorspace Composition

GOAD Category	Floorspace at 2023 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2023 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	2,489	15.3%	30.1%
Convenience	3,186	19.5%	15.5%
Financial	1,788	11.0%	6.6%
Leisure	5,984	36.7%	26.3%
Retail Service	1,845	11.3%	7.2%
Vacant	1,023	6.3%	13.8%
TOTAL	16,315	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 Didsbury District Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2023	Units at 2023 (%)	Units UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	26	19.5%	26.9%
Convenience	14	10.5%	9.3%
Financial	15	11.3%	8.7%
Leisure	48	36.1%	25.4%
Retail Service	24	18.0%	15.8%
Vacant	6	4.5%	13.8%
TOTAL	133	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

Didsbury district centre benefits from a strong convenience offer, with its level of food retail provision exceeding the national average in terms of both floorspace and units. The largest foodstore is the Aldi supermarket (1,269 sq.m), which is on the edge of the district centre as defined on the adopted Policies Map, but within the centre as defined by Goad. There is further national multiple representation from Co-op, M&S Food, Tesco Express, Holland & Barrett and Greggs. This is complemented by a range of small independent food retailers, with the offer including butchers, health foods, fishmonger, cheesemonger, and bakery/confectioner shops.

Conversely, the district centre's of comparison floorspace is around half the UK average. There is a similar, but less pronounced, relative shortfall in the proportion of non-food retail units. The only national multiple comparison representation in the centre is from Boots and a number of charity shop operators, most likely as a result of the relatively small size of most of Didsbury's commercial premises. There is, however, an excellent variety of independent non-food traders, including four clothing/fashion stores, two jewellers, a florist, a shop selling musical instruments, a shoe store, and a toy shop. This offer is supplemented by the range of comparison goods sold at the centre's larger supermarkets.

Didsbury is home to a thriving leisure scene. The offer is almost entirely food and drink focussed, with 45 of the centre's 48 leisure units being occupied by restaurants (21), cafés (19), pubs (9) and takeaways (5).

A key strength of the centre is its range of high-quality national multiple and independent food and drink traders, with chain operators like Caffè Nero, The Botanist and Domino's sitting alongside a diverse mix of locally-owned eateries and drinking establishments. The variety of cuisines on offer includes British, Indian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Palestinian, Spanish, Thai and Turkish. Most of Didsbury's leisure units are small, with the largest (Slug & Lettuce) measuring 322 sq.m and with 79.1% of the premises being under 200 sq.m.

The district centre is also performing well with regard to financial and business services and retail services. There is a good choice of estate/letting agents and retail banks helping to meet local needs. All of Didsbury's retail service premises are small in scale, with the largest measuring just 119 sq.m. They are dispersed throughout the centre, but with a small concentration on the south side of Barlow Moor Road, in the western part of the centre. Again, the range is good for a centre of this size, with provision including hairdressers and barbers; beauty parlours and nail bars; opticians; dry cleaners; a petrol station; post office; travel agents; tanning salon and tailor.

Daytime/Evening Economy

Didsbury's daytime economic offer is predicated on its role as a hub for convenience retail, retail services, and financial & business services. As would be expected for such uses, the smaller outlets operate for the most part within daylight hours. The larger national multiples, on the other hand – including Aldi, Tesco Express and Co-op – all have opening hours that extend late into the evening (excluding Sundays).

The district centre also boasts a vibrant evening economy, underpinned by the excellent mix of food and drink uses which attract leisure visitors from a broad and largely affluent catchment. The locally-renowned 'Didsbury Dozen' pub circuit passes through the centre, and this traditional pub offer is complemented by a range of wine/cocktail bars and specialist restaurants. These operators act to drive footfall and activity into the town centre during the evening and provide a point of differentiation with other centres.

Vacancies

Didsbury enjoys a low vacancy rate of just 4.5%, equating to six units, which is less than a third of the national average of 13.8%.

All of these empty premises measure less than 300 sq.m. The two largest were both under alteration on the day of our site visit, these being:

- the former Cau restaurant at the corner of Wilmslow Road and Barlow Moor Road (272 sq.m), which, according to local press reports, are to reopen in summer 2023 as a new bar (to be operated by the owner of One Eight Six in Manchester City Centre); and
- the former Didsbury Police Station at 742-744 Wilmslow Road (256 sq.m), which is being converted into six apartments (under planning permission ref: 128136/FO/2020).

The remaining vacancies, in addition to being small, are dispersed throughout the centre and the premises are generally well-maintained. As a consequence, they do not have an unduly negative impact on the look or feel of Didsbury district centre.

Opportunity Sites

Given the format of most of the commercial stock in Didsbury, together with its low vacancy rate, potential redevelopment sites are scarce and generally limited in scale. As far as we are aware, there

are no significant opportunity sites identified in any development plan document or subject to any pending application for planning permission.

Market Summary

With reference to CoStar data sourced in June 2023, the average annual market rent per sq.ft currently achieved in Didsbury is £24.22, with this figure representing a 1.4% increase on the £23.87 per sq.ft average achieved in the previous 12-month period. Of all of Manchester's 17 district centres, Didsbury achieves the highest level of market rents per sq.ft.

Additionally, the average market sale price per sq.ft has increased slightly over the past 12-month period, up 1.6% to £217 per sq.ft. This is the third highest market sale price recorded by Costar for the 17 district centres. Notwithstanding, Costar currently predicts that market rents will remain steady, staying at around the £24.00 mark by 2027.

In respect of yields, CoStar find that the current market yield is 7.3%, with this figure remaining the same as the market yield observed in the previous 12-month period. The market yield in Didsbury is forecast to rise again, to just below 8.0% over the period to 2027.

Increases in rents and decreases in yields are generally considered positive signs in respect of investor confidence in a given location. In this instance, Didsbury's yields are exactly in line with the average recorded for the district centres in Manchester, suggesting a reasonable level of investor confidence.

In respect of the probability of leasing vacant premises, 50% of premises can be anticipated to be leased after around 9 months on the market, with approximately 80% of premises being let within 12 months.

Pedestrian Flows

At the time of our fieldwork visit, pedestrian activity was reasonably high and consistent across all parts of the district centre. This is unsurprising, given the attraction of the centre's distinct retail and service offer, its compactness and its accessibility; multiple people were observed arriving by bus and Metrolink. We also observed a high number of linked trips between the district centre and the Aldi supermarket just outside its defined boundary.

Accessibility

Wilmslow Road, Didsbury's main retail thoroughfare, is approximately 25 minutes drive away from Manchester City Centre via Princess Road (A5103). The district centre also benefits from good road connections with the motorway network (M60/M56) and Manchester Airport.

East Didsbury Rail and Metrolink stations lie within walking distance of the district centre, connecting it with destinations across Greater Manchester. In addition, there are numerous bus stops along Wilmslow Road which provide regular services to Piccadilly Gardens, the Trafford Centre, Altrincham, Handforth Dean, Stockport, and North Reddish.

There are dedicated cycle lanes along the length of Wilmslow Road, which were well-used on the day of our site visit, and numerous Sheffield stands dotted throughout the centre. The side streets lacked dedicated cycle infrastructure and their narrowness may inhibit this form of transport.

The pavements along Wilmslow Road are wide and even, with tactile paving around the numerous controlled and uncontrolled pedestrian crossing points helping visitors with mobility issues to traverse the centre with ease. While there was some street clutter in the form of A-board signs and outdoor café seating, this was generally kept to one side and did not obstruct the public footpaths.

Perception of Safety

Didsbury has a general sense of safety and security, which is reinforced by the good levels of foot traffic throughout the centre, the fact that the pedestrian frontages contain uses that are active day and night, and the well-maintained shopping and leisure environment. Indeed, the Didsbury East ward, which contains the district centre, has one of the lowest crime rates in Greater Manchester.

Environmental Quality

Didsbury is a generally attractive district centre which provides a pleasant retail and leisure environment. The streets are clean and litter free, with mature trees and flowers in planters adding to the attractiveness.

The centre accommodates a number of high-quality historic buildings, including the Grade II listed Rhodes Memorial Clock Tower, War Memorial, Public Library Church of Emmanuel, and Saints & Scholars pub – all of which are sited in the north of the centre at the corner of Wilmslow Road and Barlow Moor Road. These buildings, and the surrounding trees and other soft landscaping, make a positive contribution towards the centre's overall environmental quality.

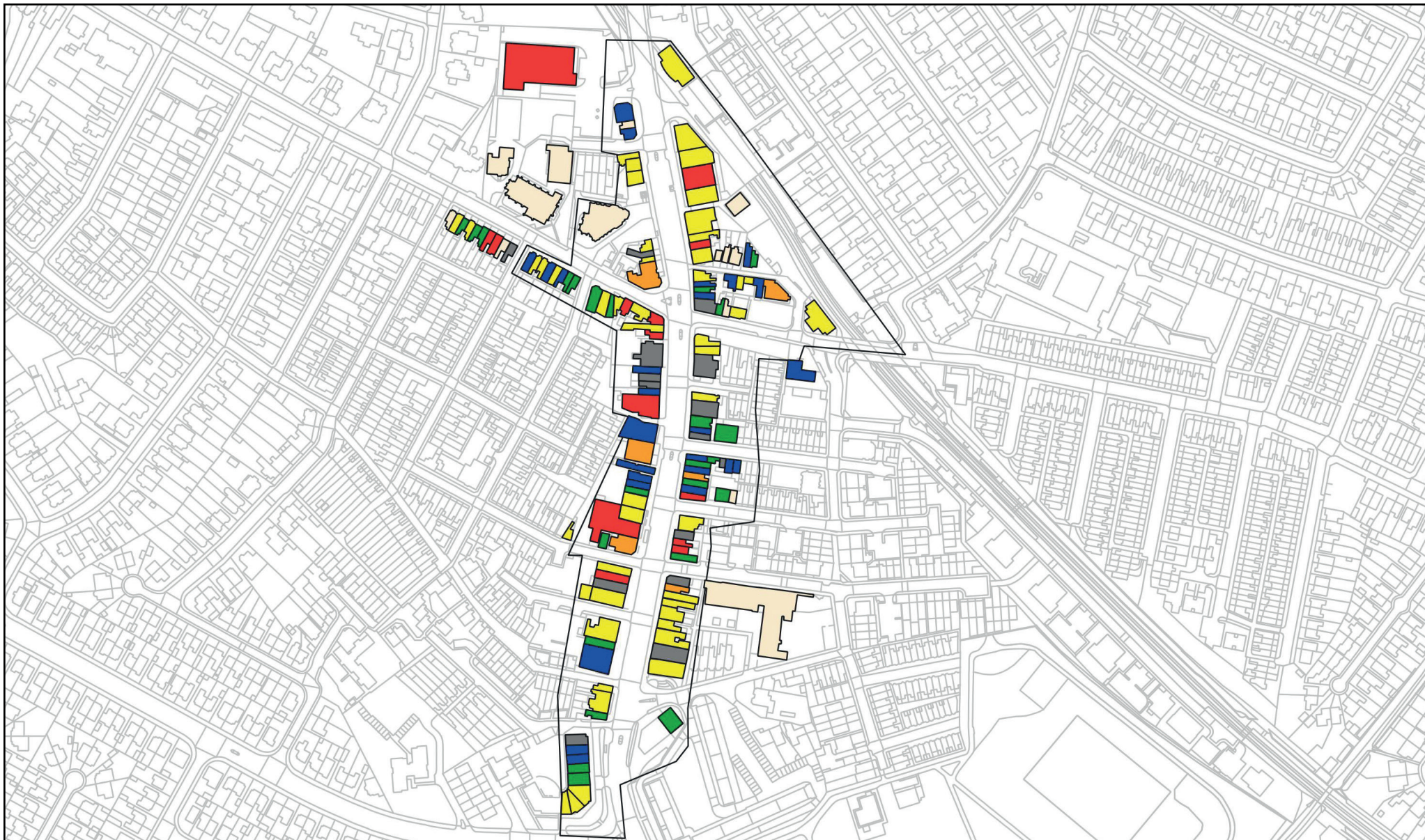
Whilst we recognise that Didsbury's location at the nexus of two busy roads brings much of the footfall and activity that helps sustain its success as a district centre, noise and air pollution from congested and idling traffic can at times detract from the otherwise pleasant environment. The centre also suffers from a shortage of parking at busy times, leading to numerous parked vehicles its side streets. Given the narrowness of these side streets, the proliferation of cars is a potential barrier to accessibility and could cause pedestrian/vehicular conflicts, particularly where drivers seek to turn onto Wilmslow Road.

Conclusions

Our overall conclusion with regard to the health of Didsbury is that it is a vital and viable district centre which is performing well in meeting the day-to-day needs of its catchment.

The centre's daytime economy is underpinned by a strong convenience and service offer, with a number of national multiples (including the Aldi store located just outside the defined boundary) balanced by a diverse range of high-quality independent butchers, bakeries and other specialist food retailers. The evening economy is also a significant draw, with the centre being renowned for its eclectic mix of restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars. Numerous community events held throughout the year (including arts, beer and food festivals) contribute to Didsbury's success as a leisure destination.

Vacancy rates are very low compared to the national average, with empty units generally being small in scale and not concentrated in any particular part of the centre. The streetscape is generally pleasant and well-maintained, with few barriers to accessibility for those with mobility impairments. At peak times, the high volumes of car traffic and associated parking pressures can detract somewhat from the overall quality of the environment, but in general the district centre is still attractive and busy.



Didsbury district centre

Manchester Retail and Leisure Study

Survey Date - February 2023

Key

Comparison	Leisure Service
Convenience	Retail Service
Financial & Business Services	Vacant