

Rusholme District Centre

Description

Rusholme district centre is a linear centre focused around Oxford Road, leading into Wilmslow Road. The centre's composition is dominated heavily by its leisure offer and is known as the 'Curry Mile' to both locals and those visiting from further afield.

There are a total of 198 commercial units in the centre, or 28,514 sq.m of floorspace, with the average unit size measuring approximately 140 sq.m, with 164 or 83% of units measuring less than 200 sq.m.

The district centre is busy both during the day and into the evening and draws trade from the local population, which comprises a mix of residents and students, and the wider area.

The retail offer is focused on providing for the local demographics, including a large Worldwide Foods store to the north, a range of convenience and comparison operators along Wilmslow Road and Manchester Superstore to the south, heavily focused on Asian cuisine.

The centre benefits from dedicated cycle routes which link up to Oxford Road and further afield, with on street parking often dominating the centre.

Table 1 Rusholme District Centre Floorspace Composition

GOAD Category	Floorspace at 2023 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2023 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	4,570	16.0%	30.1%
Convenience	5,208	18.3%	15.5%
Financial	999	3.5%	6.6%
Leisure	13,668	47.9%	26.3%
Retail Service	2,559	9.0%	7.2%
Vacant	1,510	5.3%	13.8%
TOTAL	28,514	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 Rusholme District Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2023	Units at 2023 (%)	Units UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	36	18.2%	26.9%
Convenience	19	9.6%	9.3%
Financial	12	6.1%	8.7%
Leisure	98	49.5%	25.4%
Retail Service	21	10.6%	15.8%
Vacant	12	6.1%	13.8%
TOTAL	198	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

Rusholme's mix of uses very much reflects the local population and its demographics, and the focus is on providing a specific retail and food and drink offer to meet local demands. Indeed, leisure uses – particularly restaurants, cafes and takeaways – dominate the centre with approximately 50% of the total of units and floorspace. Whilst they contribute to the vibrancy of the night-time economy, the proliferation of food and drink uses has led to a lack of diversity in the remainder of the district centre's offer, particularly with regard to comparison retailing.

In terms of the comparison offer, Rusholme's proportions of both floorspace and units fall below the national averages. The largest comparison unit is the Charlie Wilson car showroom, followed by the Poundland discount store. Other comparison operators include Asian specialist jewellers and clothing operators focused on Asian attire.

The convenience goods offer comprises a total of 5,208 sq.m or 16.0% of the total floorspace and a total of 19 units or 9.6% of the total commercial stock, which is broadly comparable to the national average terms of units but above the national average in terms of floorspace. There are a range of speciality convenience operators focusing on the Asian market, including the Manchester Superstore measuring 1,231 sq.m (gross) and the Worldwide store measuring 1,102 sq.m. There is also a Lidl, Co-op foodstore and a Tesco Express.

The percentage of floorspace used for financial and business services falls below the UK average. The financial and business offer within the district centre is focused around solicitors which comprise 50% of the units, with additional pawn brokers, currency exchange services and estate agents. The largest of the financial and business units is the Finanspan measuring 172 sq.m (gross).

The percentage of floorspace and units in Rusholme occupied by leisure operators is significantly above the national averages. These figures indicate that the leisure offer is plentiful but also that the units sizes occupied by leisure operators is mixed, with the largest occupied by the Huqqa Lounge (1,069 sq.m gross) followed by Oodles n Oodles (634 sq.m gross). A total of 17 of the leisure units measure more than 200 sq.m.

Most of these operators are independent, although there is representation from national multiples including Caffè Nero and a Tim Horton's.

The district centre's provision of retail services is higher than the national average in terms of floorspace. However, the number of units falls below the UK average, indicating that there are a number of retail service providers within smaller units.

Daytime/Evening Economy

The diverse offer within Rusholme provides for a good mix of both daytime and evening economy. The daytime economy is focused around the convenience, comparison, financial and service offer, along with the leisure offer including cafes.

The evening offer of Rusholme is very strong, with the 'Curry Mile' attracting a mixed catchment from both the surrounding streets but also the wider area. A number of restaurants and bars open until the early hours of the morning, also serving the local student population.

Vacancies

The vacancy rate in Rusholme is well below the national average. Only 5.3% of the centre's floorspace is unoccupied, whereas the rate in a typical centre is 13.8%. There are 12 vacant units identified, which translates to 6.1% of units against a UK average of 13.8%.

The vacant units identified are scattered throughout the centre, with no one prevalent area attracting a higher proportion of vacancies.

The largest vacant unit recorded measures 314 sq.m, with the smallest being 14 sq.m. One key vacant unit is situated on the southern edge of the district centre boundary, this being the former Hardy's Well pub which was demolished following a fire. This site therefore represents a development opportunity and should be considered in the boundary recommendations.

Opportunity Sites

Due to Rusholme's relatively tight constraints from surrounding uses, along with the adjacent greenspaces and residential uses, opportunity sites are limited. Encouraging the reoccupation of the vacant properties should be key, which could also encourage additional commercial uses to further diversify the offer of the centre.

We note that an application was withdrawn in June 2021 for the redevelopment of the former Hardy's Well pub site for a part two, three, four and five-storey building to create commercial uses at ground floor and residential uses above. No subsequent applications have been made for the redevelopment of the site, but it remains a key development opportunity within the district centre boundary.

Market Summary

With reference to CoStar data sourced in June 2023, the average annual market rent per sq.ft currently achieved in Rusholme is £19.62. This is the fifth highest market rent achieved by Manchester's district centres, and represents a 4.5% increase on the £18.78 per sq.ft average achieved in the previous 12-month period. Notwithstanding this, Costar currently predicts market rents to remain fairly steady, increasing gradually to around £19.90 per sq.ft by 2027.

Additionally, the average market sale price per sq.ft has increased slightly over the past 12-month period, up 0.7% to £207 per sq.ft. This is the fifth highest market sale price achieved by a district centre in Manchester.

In respect of yields, CoStar find that the current market yield is 7.4%, with this figure remaining consistent with 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, Rusholme's yields are roughly in line with the average for the district centres in Manchester (7.3%), which is a sign that investor confidence is reasonably good. The market yield in Rusholme is forecast to rise again, however, to just over 8.0% in the period to 2027, suggesting that other areas are considered a safer investment in the medium to long term.

No data is available relating to the probability of leasing vacant premises, which reflects the centre's low vacancy rate and the fact that it has been some time since property became available.

Pedestrian Flows

Pedestrian flows were observed to be very good at the time of our visit, with a general constant flow throughout the centre and to the surrounding car parks and other public transport modes. Congregations of pedestrians were observed particularly around public transport interchanges, including the significant number of bus stops located along Wilmslow Road.

The district centre's wide range of goods and services provides excellent opportunities for linked trips, observed through the healthy footfall experienced along the length of centre.

Footfall was observed to be busiest around the retail parade fronting Whitworth Park at the north of the district centre, with levels of pedestrian activity being fairly constant throughout the district centre, but generally reducing towards the southern end of Rusholme.

Pedestrian flows were generally well spread out through the centre, but with some areas which did seem slightly busier at the time of our visit. Key areas where there were higher concentrations of footfall were outside the Lidl, Tesco Express and Tim Horton's units, which will be in part due to the high numbers of student accommodation above in the seven-storey building.

The specialist Asian convenience operators also attract higher concentrations of footfall, further enhanced visibly through the expanse of outdoor sales areas to the front. The footfall is then seen to travel throughout the centre, with key indications of linked trips between operators in the centre.

Accessibility

Rusholme is located to the immediate south of the Oxford Road Corridor part of the City Centre, and also has good road connections to the main A57(M) ring road to the north.

There are regular and frequent bus services that run along Wilmslow Road and Oxford Road, linking the district centre to: the city centre to the north and West Didsbury and the Airport to the south. The bus stops are served by bus services 41, 43, 143 and 147.

Dedicated cycle lanes are provided throughout the district centre, save for some of the quieter side streets, and there are numerous Sheffield stands dotted along Wilmslow Road.

The heavy traffic throughout the district centre creates accessibility issues for those visiting the centre by cycle and on foot but the bicycle lanes do provide for safe cycle routes at important busy junctions of the centre.

With regard to the accessibility of the centre for people with mobility issues, we observed that the pavements were mostly even, with tactile paving provided at the main pedestrian crossing points along Oxford Road and Wilmslow Road.

Perception of Safety

At the time of our visit, there was a good feeling of safety within the centre, with a healthy level of pedestrian and vehicle activity occurring throughout the day and during the evening hours. The high levels of activity provide a degree of surveillance which is beneficial to levels of personal security. The designated parking areas similarly benefit from healthy levels of activity in their surrounds and are well illuminated. However, the number of closed roller shutters during the day do reduce the perception of vibrancy, and consequently the overall perception of safety, in parts of the district centre along Wilmslow Road.

Areas to the southern end of the district centre are the furthest removed from surrounding residential streets and the activity occurring at the heart of the centre, as such perceptions of safety are weakest at this point.

We are also aware of recent reports relating to increased instances of anti-social behaviour, and more serious crimes, occurring in and around Rusholme and the impact that these have had upon traders and other operators in the district centre (see, for example, the article at: <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/food-drink-news/it-used-beautiful-curry-mile-26270264>). Whilst at the time of our visit, limited instances of criminality and loitering were observed, during the evening the perception of safety may be different due to lower levels of vibrancy, concealed corners and areas with lower levels of surveillance may combine to significantly reduce the overall perception of safety.

In the evenings, Rusholme's role as a late-night food and drink destination means that it can attract antisocial behaviour, noise and littering from a minority of users. The district centre does have street lighting and CCTV to promote safety at night, but would benefit from additional measures aimed at ensuring that visitors behave in a way which is respectful to the local community.

Environmental Quality

The overarching environmental quality is mixed throughout the district centre, with a range of qualities of shopfronts, some mixed street furniture and some degree of littering and graffiti. The bollards, although required and practical, do detract to some degree from the environmental quality in the centre.

Some operators benefit from wider pedestrian footpaths in front of their units, which they have used to provide outdoor seating, further enhancing the offer and providing additional space and activity at ground floor level.

The vacant units, although limited in number overall, do detract from the overall quality, with particularly poor shopfronts and in some cases a feeling of dereliction.

However, there are particular areas of higher quality within the centre including the newer development focused around the iQ Wilmslow Park student accommodation, which includes a number of modern retail units at ground floor, including both retail and leisure uses. This area also fronts onto Whitworth Park which, although it does not lie within the district centre boundary, does provide for welcome green space for residents and visitors.

The high number of passing cars and busy bus route at its centre do benefit Rusholme in terms of bringing trade, activity and footfall, but they can also at times have a negative impact on the aesthetics of the centre and detract to some degree from the overarching environmental quality. Moreover, noise and air pollution from congested and idling traffic, and shortages of parking leading to numerous parked vehicles in the centre's side streets, sometimes detract from the otherwise relatively pleasant environment. We understand that a resident parking scheme is currently being introduced across the Rusholme area, which will ease these issues.

Conclusions

Our overall conclusion with regard to the health of Rusholme 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 does also have a wider catchment in light of its nickname as the 'Curry Mile' which attracts visitors from further afield, further assisting with the overarching economy and is likely to be directly related to the low vacancy rate.

The centre's daytime economy is underpinned by a strong convenience and service offer, with a number of national multiples balanced by a diverse range of mainly speciality independent convenience and comparison operators. The evening economy is also a significant draw, with the centre being renowned for its eclectic mix of restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars, some of which open until the early hours of the morning. This further supports the adjacent student population.

Vacancy rates are 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 well-maintained, with few barriers to accessibility for those with mobility impairments but some improvements to shopfronts would benefit the centre.

While the centre benefits significantly from its location along Wilmslow Road, high volumes of car traffic and associated parking pressures can at times detract somewhat from the overall quality of the environment. A new resident parking scheme is currently introduced across Rusholme and will ease these issues. Nonetheless, in general the district centre is attractive and busy.



Rusholme district centre

Manchester Retail and Leisure Study

Survey Date - February 2023

Key

Comparison	Leisure Service
Convenience	Retail Service
Financial & Business Services	Vacant