

# Gorton District Centre

## Description

Located approximately 4 km to the south-east of Manchester City Centre, Gorton is an accessible district centre largely focussed around Hyde Road, a busy arterial route with connections to the M60 and M67 motorways. The other main commercial frontages are Wellington Street and Garratt Way.

Gorton's daytime economy is underpinned by its convenience sector, which is anchored by the Tesco Extra store and supported by Aldi, the market, and various specialist independent operators. Retail services play a secondary but nonetheless important role in meeting the basic day-to-day needs of Gorton's local residents. Gorton Market contributes to the diversity and vibrancy of the centre, with regular events driving footfall.

Gorton is the focus of ongoing regeneration initiatives. The £22m Gorton Hub opened in November 2022 and contains a library, Jobcentre, adult education services, employment skills training facilities, a medical centre, pharmacy and café. In addition, in January 2023 Manchester City Council approved the Gorton District Centre Development Framework. This document, which is to be a material consideration for future planning applications, will guide future investment in and development of the district centre, with a view to unlocking significant economic growth.

*Table 1 Gorton District Centre Floorspace Composition*

GOAD Category	Floorspace at 2023 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2023 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	3,831	13.9%	30.1%
Convenience	14,168	51.2%	15.5%
Financial	643	2.3%	6.6%
Leisure	2,423	8.8%	26.3%
Retail Service	4,984	18.0%	7.2%
Vacant	1,604	5.8%	13.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,653</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 Gorton District Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2023	Units at 2023 (%)	Units UK Average at 2023 (%)
Comparison	14	15.7%	26.9%
Convenience	19	21.3%	9.3%
Financial	6	6.7%	8.7%
Leisure	16	18.0%	25.4%
Retail Service	24	27.0%	15.8%
Vacant	10	11.2%	13.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>89</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

Gorton chiefly functions as a convenience destination catering for the daily essentials of local residents. Thus, the district centre's proportion of food retail floorspace is more than three times the national average. It is notable, however, that just three outlets account for around 89% of the identified convenience space, these being the Tesco Extra superstore (8,172 sq.m), Gorton Market (2,478 sq.m) and Aldi (1,531 sq.m). Tesco in particular dominates Gorton's retail offer, being the key anchor and busiest part of the centre.

Similarly, in terms of units, the district centre's proportion of convenience units is more than double the national average. The remainder of Gorton's convenience outlets are mostly small in scale (with the majority measuring less than 200 sq.m gross) and independently run. Many of the operators reflect Gorton's ethnically diverse community, with a number of specialist shops selling Eastern European, African and Caribbean foods. These smaller foodstores mainly comprise the ground floors of converted terraces located to the south of Hyde Road and east of Wellington Street, mostly with residential flats at first floor level.

Conversely, Gorton has less representation in the comparison sector than a typical UK centre. The non-food stores that are present generally represent the lower end of the market, including a number of charity, second-hand and discount shops. Most of these retailers are independent, with the only national multiples being Lloyds Pharmacy and Age UK.

Although it primarily hosts food traders, Gorton Market makes an important contribution in supplementing and diversifying the district centre's limited comparison provision, with stalls selling clothes, footwear, electrical goods, greeting cards and pet supplies. In addition to the permanent indoor market, an outdoor pop-up market is held in the district centre every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 8am to 2pm. The outdoor market is not identified in the Experian Goad

figures set out above, but is nonetheless a popular and successful component of the centre's overall retail offer. The Tesco Extra store also stocks a broad range of comparison goods, including clothing.

Leisure uses are also less well represented in Gorton than in the rest of the country, particularly in terms of floorspace. The leisure service traders that are present are generally of moderate scale (with the majority measuring less than 250 sq.m). There are two national multiple bookmakers (Betfred and Coral) and two national multiple fast food outlets (KFC and Subway). The remaining leisure operators are independent food and drink operators, comprising a café, two public houses, three restaurants and six takeaways.

Gorton is somewhat underprovided for in respect of financial and business services compared to a typical centre in the UK. The centre has representation from estate agents and solicitors, but has lacked a bank or building society since the closure of RBS in late 2018.

On the other hand, the district centre far exceeds the national averages in relation to its level of retail service provision. The retail services uses with the largest floorplates are car-focussed, these being the Tesco Extra and Texaco petrol filling stations, the Crystal car wash and the Manchester Car Care vehicle repair shop.

The rest of Gorton's retail services units all measure less than 250 sq.m gross, with most being under 100 sq.m gross, and all but one (Co-operative Funeralcare) is independently operated. The district centre provides for a good range of services to meet the basic daily needs of its residential catchment, including numerous hairdressers, barbers and beauticians; opticians; undertakers; a phone repair shop and a tanning salon. Tesco also offers some retail service functions, such as an in-store optician and photo processing. There is a concentration of retail service uses in the middle of the district centre, focussed around the Tesco petrol station.

## Daytime/Evening Economy

Gorton's daytime economy is underpinned by its convenience sector, which is anchored by the Tesco Extra store and supported by Aldi, the market, and various independent operators. Services play a secondary but nonetheless important role in driving footfall, particularly since the development of the new Hub. As a consequence, there is generally a good level of activity in the centre between the hours of 9am to 5.30pm.

Tesco and Aldi have operating hours that extend into the evening Monday to Friday, with the former being open 24 hours and the latter closing at 10pm. Gorton's two pubs and some of its takeaways also open late.

Nonetheless, retail and service operators are generally closed after normal business hours. Given the size and location of the centre, there is potential for Gorton to improve its existing evening economy, both during the week and at weekends.

Ensuring the district centre is lively 'beyond 9-5' is one of the key objectives of the recently approved Gorton District Centre Development Framework. This document seeks to promote uses that attract visitors to the centre at night-time, particularly food and drink operators and specialist market events.

## Vacancies

Owing to the small size of most of its commercial premises, Gorton district centre's floorspace vacancy rate (5.8%) is less than half the UK average (13.8%). The proportion of vacant units (11.2%) is more in line with the national average (13.8%), but still below.

The largest empty premises is the former Quick Lane Tyre & Autocentre unit located adjacent to the Texaco petrol station on Hyde Road. The negative impact of this vacancy is tempered by the fact that it is set back from the road, partially screened by trees, and well-maintained. Nonetheless, it remains a prominent vacant unit at a key gateway for those entering the centre from the west.

Indeed, there is a cluster of vacancies in the west of the district centre, concentrated on the south side of Hyde Road. Although the individual units are small, they are grouped close together and interspersed with an inactive street frontage (the residential dwellings at 546A to 546D Hyde Road). These factors increase the negative impact that the vacancies have on the look and feel of Gorton, particularly since some of the shopfronts are in a poor and deteriorating condition.

The east of the centre contains far fewer vacancies, with only two empty units that each measure less than 100 sq.m and are surrounded by active uses. These empty units have little adverse impact on the quality of the environment in this part of Gorton district centre.

## Opportunity Sites

The aforementioned Gorton District Centre Development Framework document, approved in January 2023, provides a list of 29 potential 'opportunity sites' within and on the edge of the centre boundary. Pages 42 to 43 of the document provide a schedule and plan of these sites, which, it states '...demonstrate potential for new development to address key issues and contribute to a more coherent and sustainable District Centre'.

The document goes on to identify five ‘catalyst projects’ which have the potential for high-profile development which could deliver significant placemaking benefits and catalyse further development. Three of these projects are considered to be of particular significance, given that they contain the highest concentrations of ‘key driver’ opportunity sites. The three key catalyst projects highlighted in the Development Framework are:

- North of Garratt Way, which the document suggests could become a new high-quality residential neighbourhood;
- Market heart, which is envisaged for a remodelled market building with improved and enlarged external spaces for the outdoor market to spill out, with complementary development to Wellington Street potentially including residential over ground-floor commercial, retail or food and drink uses; and
- Hub loop, which has the potential to become a pedestrian-friendly, connected sequence of public spaces that connect commercial and community uses, driving footfall and easing accessibility.

The interventions and future development opportunities outlined in the approved Development Framework will guide future investment in Gorton, and be a material consideration when determining planning applications within the district centre. Nonetheless, realising the full extent of the opportunities identified in the document can only be achieved in the long term, due to the need for land assembly, planning permissions, etc. In the shorter term, it will remain important to reoccupy or repurpose the existing vacant units in Gorton.

## Market Summary

With reference to CoStar data sourced in June 2023, the average annual market rent per sq.ft currently achieved in Gorton is £19.21, with this figure representing a 5.6% increase on the £18.18 per sq.ft average achieved in the previous 12-month period.

Additionally, the average market sale price per sq.ft has increased very slightly over the past 12-month period, up 0.3% to £217 per sq.ft, the third highest achieved by a district centre in Manchester. Notwithstanding this, Costar currently predicts market rents to remain fairly steady, increasing gradually to just below £20.00 per sq.ft by 2027.

In respect of yields, CoStar find that the current market yield is 6.8%, with this figure remaining the same as the market yield observed in the previous 12-month period. The market yield in Gorton is forecast to rise to just above 7.4% 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, Gorton's yields are below the average recorded for district centres in Manchester of 7.3%. This finding suggests a fairly high level of investor confidence, notwithstanding the forecast rise.

In respect of the probability of leasing vacant premises, 50% of premises can be anticipated to be leased after around 12.8 months on the market.

## Pedestrian Flows

On the day of our visit, footfall in Gorton was strongly concentrated around the Tesco store and new community hub in the middle of the district centre. The vast majority of visitors appeared to arrive by car, and we observed few linked trips between Tesco and the wider centre. The Aldi store was similarly busy, but again most customers appeared to leave immediately after doing their shopping without visiting other parts of the district centre.

Gorton clearly benefits from its location along Hyde Road, which brings most of the activity and footfall that help to sustain it as a district centre. Nonetheless, the downside of the traffic, together with the limited number of crossing points, was that pedestrian flows were inhibited between the area to the north of the road, where the two national multiple supermarkets and the hub are located, and the south. As a consequence, the southern side of Hyde Road has noticeably less footfall, especially at the west end, and Garratt Way is also relatively quiet.

## Accessibility

Hyde Road (A57) is an important arterial trunk road connecting Gorton with Manchester City Centre to the west, and with the M60 and M67 motorways to the east. As a consequence, the district centre is easily accessed by car, although traffic congestion is an issue in Gorton (as outlined below).

Accessibility by public transport is also good, with the district centre being located within walking distance of three railway stations (Belle Vue, Ryder Brow and Gorton). Bus stops along Hyde Road provide regular services to destinations including the City Centre, the Trafford Centre, Stockport, Hattersley, Dane Bank and Gee Cross.

Bicycle parking is provided outside the two supermarkets and the new hub. However, there are no dedicated cycle lanes in the district centre.

The district centre also benefits from an extensive walk-in catchment drawn from the surrounding terraced housing.

With regard to accessibility for people with mobility impairments, the pavements along Gorton's main shopping and service frontages are generally wide, flat and clutter free save for the occasional A-board sign. Double yellow lines throughout the centre, as well as bollards on the south side of Hyde Road, prevent cars from parking in the pedestrian footways. There are benches dotted throughout the centre that provide rest areas for those who need breaks from walking.

The high volume of vehicular traffic that passes through Gorton reflects its proximity to a successful city centre and generates much of the footfall and activity that underpin the strongest aspects of the district centre. Nonetheless, Hyde Road, being a four-lane road with relatively few pedestrian crossing points, can at times act as a barrier for those seeking to traverse the centre from north to south. The Tesco Extra car park can be similarly difficult to navigate, being almost full on the day of our visit and regularly crossed by additional cars which use it as a shortcut between Hyde Road and Garratt Way.

There are, however, opportunities to improve walkability and cycle links in Gorton in a way which takes advantage of the excellent road connections whilst reducing any perception that the centre is car-dominated. The aforementioned District Centre Development Framework details several highway design improvements that could enhance connectivity in and around Gorton.

## Perception of Safety

The linear layout of the southern side of the district centre allows for a reasonable level of natural surveillance in this part of Gorton, which is lacking from the north and particularly from the area around the market hall. The market building itself is windowless and appears uninviting, especially at its quieter Garratt Way façade.

There is potential to encourage new evening uses in Gorton. Currently, there is a general lack of active frontages, aside from the late-opening supermarkets, which has an adverse impact on the overall sense of security at night. The centre would also benefit from improvements to the street lighting along all of its pedestrian footpaths to reduce any perceived threat of crime.

## Environmental Quality

Numerous opportunities exist to improve the environmental quality of Gorton.

As noted above, whilst we recognise that the busyness of the Gorton's roads brings many advantages, the four-lane Hyde Road that bisects the centre and the busy Tesco Extra car park attract high amounts of traffic congestion and the associated noise and air pollution. The highway design improvements set out in the approved District Centre Development Framework, or similar measures, have the potential to ensure that Gorton continues to take advantage of its key arterial location whilst also encouraging sustainable modes of transport with fewer adverse impacts on the centre environment.

There is also potential to reduce the disjointedness of the public realm in Gorton. Despite the concentration of footfall around the Tesco store and new community hub, the district centre would benefit from a clearer focal point. Linkages between different parts could be better, especially for those travelling north to south, and the centre is somewhat lacking in an overall sense of coherence. The Development Framework seeks to address this issue by creating a new market square at the heart of the district centre to act as a central point for the community, which would be a welcome addition. We understand that Gorton Town Square is to be funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Improving the appearance of the public realm and shop frontages is another key objective of the approved Development Framework. Indeed, there exists substantial opportunity to enhance the appearance of Gorton's smaller shopfronts, many of which would benefit from better maintenance and/or the removal of graffiti, in order to improve the overall vitality and viability of the centre.

## Conclusions

Gorton district centre is anchored by Tesco Extra and largely functions as a convenience and retail service destination that meets the basic day-to-day needs of local residents. The proportions of comparison and leisure uses are lower than UK averages, partly as a reflection of the small size of most of Gorton's commercial units. Gorton Market makes up for some of the relative underprovision, but the uninviting appearance of the market hall building prevents it from reaching its full potential.

Although some of Gorton's operators are open late, there is potential to capitalise on the size and location of the centre in order to further develop its evening economy. Indeed, a key objective of the Gorton District Centre Development Framework (approved by Manchester City Council in January 2023) is to promote uses that attract visitors to the centre at night-time, particularly food and drink venues and specialist market events.



The Development Framework also proposes a number of further measures that will enhance aspects of Gorton where there is considerable room for improvement. The proposed interventions include the development of a new market square that will create the focal point and linkages that are presently lacking in the district centre and enhancements to those shopfronts which are inactive and/or in need of maintenance.

The district centre benefits significantly from its location along the busy Hyde Road, a key arterial route to Manchester City Centre, but the high volume of car traffic does present some disadvantages in terms of adverse impacts on environmental quality and accessibility at peak times. The Development Framework details highway design improvements that could enhance connectivity in Gorton by sustainable modes of transport.

In its current state, our overall conclusion regarding the health of Gorton district centre is that there is opportunity for improvement across a number of key areas, especially relating to the comparison and leisure offers (including the evening economy) and the environmental quality of the centre. However, the recent and ongoing regeneration initiatives in the district centre are encouraging. The recently-opened Gorton Hub has already begun to have a positive impact, improving the appearance of this part of Hyde Road and attracting a good level of footfall.

Moreover, the opportunity sites and catalyst projects identified in the approved Gorton District Centre Development Framework have the potential to transform the district centre and drive future economic growth. Thus, we anticipate that forthcoming investments and developments will address many of the issues highlighted above and enhance Gorton's vitality and viability over the medium to long term.

