

Rawtenstall Town Centre Vision

2017

**Introduction**

Rawtenstall is a historic mill town in Pennine Lancashire and the key service centre for the Borough of Rossendale. The Town Centre has a unique identity that makes it stand out from other towns because:

• It has a superb mix of independent local shops;

• It has a diverse employment base with high levels of entrepreneurship;

• It has a cohesive townscape character of traditional stone buildings;

• It has a distinct and convivial High Street; and

• It enjoys a spectacular landscape setting with good accessibility to local countryside and outdoor pursuits.

Notwithstanding this overall attractiveness, the Town Centre presents a poor image at key public interchanges and through routes that impact on its perception to residents and visitors alike. As the largest town in Rossendale and the main Town Centre, the future of Rawtenstall Town Centre is of great significance to the future prosperity of the Borough as a whole. Without intervention the negative image of Rawtenstall could undermine the allure of the area not only to potential migrants and visitors, but could push residents out to shop and visit other towns with better economic opportunities and a stronger lifestyle offer.

The vision is that the distinctive character of Rawtenstall should be preserved and allowed to flourish with the very best new development and other improvements to the Town Centre that enhance its character. Building on the imagination and inventiveness of Rawtenstall’s residents and businesses the vision is to establish Rawtenstall’s as a place that retains its individual character and is distinctive to the people who live and work there, as well as to those who visit.

**Rawtenstall Town Centre Health Check**

Rawtenstall is a traditional market town with a historic role as an important industrial and manufacturing centre during the industrial revolution. It now acts as the key focus for retailing, leisure and commercial activities within the Borough and benefits from Rossendale’s largest defined centre (‘Rawtenstall Town Centre’).

The main focus for retailing in Rawtenstall is concentrated along Bank Street, which can be described as a traditional, linear high-street comprising small terraced units. Much of Bank Street has retained traditional stone cobbles to its vehicular and pedestrian highway and this adds considerably to the centre’s environmental quality, alongside attractive period architecture. Both this road (and much of the wider centre) is covered by the Rawtenstall Town Centre Conservation Area, ensuring a high-design quality is maintained throughout.

At the northern end of Bank Street at its junction with Newchurch Road is Rawtenstall’s market. The town centre benefits from both a permanent indoor covered market and outdoor market stalls which are located alongside one another. The regular market is supplemented a specialist farmers market on the last Sunday of each month. This takes place on Rawtenstall’s town square, and showcases local produce and products.

At the southern end of Bank Street at its junction with Kay Street is a cleared site which currently accommodates temporary public realm (‘Town Square’). The rectangular site, which extends to over one hectare, was formally occupied by the ‘Valley Centre’ a redundant shopping precinct which was demolished in 2012.

The site of the former Valley Centre represents the main development opportunity site within Rawtenstall Town Centre. Planning permission for the first phase of the site’s redevelopment was granted in March 2016 and involves the relocation of the town’s bus station to part of the site alongside retail/café units (154 sq.m), car parking and landscaping (Application Ref. 2015/0476). The consented scheme also includes demolition of the town’s former police station, town hall annex and public toilets, alongside part demolition and works to the old town Hall building.

Rawtenstall town centre perform a vital role for residents in the Borough as the principle retail and service centre. This is evidenced by:

* The strong level of convenience goods units and floorspace which reflects its role as a traditional market town and key service centre for the borough;
* A diverse range of independent retailers and a successful indoor and outdoor market which helps to distinguish the town from other competing destinations and is likely to attract visitors from a wider catchment area;
* The below average level of vacancies in the centre
* The high quality and well maintained environment of the Primary Shopping Area in particular (Bank Street) which is complemented by the centre’s various historic buildings and townscape features; and,

**Movement**

Rawtenstall Town Centre sits at a crossroads roughly central to the Borough of Rossendale and close to the A56 road corridor that provides excellent onward dual carriageway linkages to Greater Manchester and the national road network. St. Mary’s Way (A682) is the main north/ south route and this intersects with the east / west routes of Haslingden Road, Bacup Road and Bocholt Way in the south western corner of the Town Centre. This road infrastructure plays an important role in linking the town to nearby urban areas, facilities and opportunities and as a result the Town Centre had good vehicular accessibility to the main settlements of Rossendale, Pennine Lancashire and the Manchester City Region.

As a consequence of its good road infrastructure, Rawtenstall has good public transport links. In addition to local bus services the Town Centre is currently served by a high quality, high frequency bus service, the ‘Witch Way’.

The town centre’s main car parks comprise Kay Street (101 spaces), Phipps Buildings on Bank Street (69 spaces), Millgate (41 spaces), James Street (35 spaces), Crankshaw Street (26 spaces) and Newchurch Road (24 spaces). Whilst these main Rossendale BC operated car parks provide an estimated 296 long and short stay spaces, smaller scale provision in and around the centre provides an additional 159 spaces, taking the Council’s total provision to some 455. Added to this is the offer provided by Rawtenstall’s Asda foodstore, which is available for use by town centre shoppers (for a time limited period), and adds up to a further 576 spaces. Accordingly, it is clear that Rawtenstall town centre benefits from ample public car parking provision given the size of the centre.

The Town Centre benefits from being of a walkable scale, with the greatest level of pedestrian activity along Bank Street and Kay Street. There are also a relatively high number of ‘linked trips’ to the Primary Shopping Area were also observed by those shopping at the Asda superstore off St. Mary’s Way. However despite providing access to the town centre’s Lidl foodstore and the bus station, a lesser level of footfall is evident along Bacup Road. This area of the Town Centre has the greatest level of vacancies and this combined with the concentration of evening economy uses (pubs, bars and hot food take aways), which are largely closed during the day-time, exacerbates the issue. Additionally the volume of traffic along Bacup Road combined with some relatively tall buildings and narrow footways does not make for a particularly pedestrian friendly environment.

In terms of accessibility on foot, free movement from the west is somewhat hindered by the A682, a dual carriageway which runs north to south. Whilst a number of controlled crossing points are provided, their frequency could be increased in our view to make pedestrian movement more straightforward. Bacup Road is also relatively heavily trafficked and again controlled pedestrian crossing points are limited. However, once in the centre, pedestrian accessibility is relatively strong. For example, whilst Bank Street is not pedestrianised its cobbled surface slows the movement of vehicles feels more like a shared space. Footways surrounding Kay Street and Newchurch Road are also relatively wide and of a good standard, creating an attractive pedestrian environment

Rawtenstall is also served by rail, operated as a leisure route by the East Lancashire Railway Trust. The scope to introduce commuter services is considered to be a significant benefit to the Town Centre and Rossendale as a whole. The pedestrian linkages between the railway station and Bank Street (Rawtenstall’s Primary Shopping Area) are not particularly strong, with the route itself of a relatively weak environmental quality and physical obstacles such as Bury Road and Bocholt Way present. Accordingly, it is considered unlikely that at present a significant number of East Lancashire Railway users make this journey on foot. To minimise the impact of the severance which is currently evidenced within the Town Centre Improvements to pedestrian movement are needed.

**Leisure**

White Young Green have recently carried out an assessment of the current and future leisure and tourism needs within the Borough which estimates an increase in leisure spend across the nine leisure categories of £45.5m between 2017 and 2034.

In respect of Rossendale’s current facilities it is considered that the following additional facilities could be accommodated to address the increase in leisure spend and to clawback the existing leakage of expenditure into neighbouring towns and cities:

**Cinema**: There are no purpose built cinemas present within Rossendale; however, there are several facilities in the borough which provide cinema screenings on a weekly or more occasional basis in theatres, community centres and social clubs, most notably; The Horse & Bamboo Theatre on Bacup Road, Waterfoot and The Whitaker Museum & Art Gallery on Haslingden Road, Rossendale.

Bury attracts the majority of cinema goers from Rossendale. The Reel Cinema on Manchester Road, Burnley is the second most popular destination. The Odeon on Sandbrook Way, Rochdale is also a notable destination for Rossendale residents whilst Manchester’s various cinemas claim part of this trade.

The assessment concludes that it appropriate to plan for a modest multiplex facility to serve the Borough

**Ten Pin Bowling:** Rossendale does not currently accommodate any ten pin bowling facilities. The White Young Green report suggests that the Council could undertake soft market testing to determine the level of operator interest for this type of facility in Rossendale.

**Indoor Sports or Health and Fitness:** White Young Green’s analysis of this type of provision highlighted that the majority of those within the Study Area who visit indoor sports, health and fitness facilities use the provision provided within the Rossendale Authority area. As such it is considered that Rossendale is relatively well provided for in terms of indoor health and fitness facilities.

**Restaurants:** Rawtenstall town centre identified a strong independent restaurant offer however Rossendale does not currently have any representation by national-multiple restaurants (McDonalds is currently under construction). It is not considered that there is an overriding quantitative or qualitative need to plan for additional restaurants to serve Rossendale however, further provision which would diversify the current offer should be supported.

**Pubs, Bars and Night Clubs:** Rawtenstall benefits from a range of pubs, bars and nightclubs perhaps the most famous is Fitzpatrick’s Temperance Bar just south east of St Mary’s Way. Whilst Rossendale is considered to be relatively well served by traditional pubs and, in the case of Rawtenstall and Haslingden in particular, by more modern independent bars which diversify this leisure offer it is not considered that there is any clear quantitative or qualitative justification to plan for additional facilities to serve the borough’s centres. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that further facilities to support the evening leisure economies of Rossendale should be supported. The integration of night-time uses with the wider offer represents an important consideration for the future of Rawtenstall.

**Museums, Art Galleries and Cultural Facilities:** In terms of museums and art galleries, Rossendale benefits from being the home to the Whitaker Museum and Art Gallery. It is considered that Rossendale is relatively well served by museums and art galleries given the offer provided. In terms of the delivery of additional cultural facilities; whilst there is not an acute identified need to improve these further provision which would diversify the current offer should be supported.

**Theatres and Performing Arts:** In terms of the theatre provision in Rossendale, in quantitative terms this is actually very strong given the size of catchment. The Borough benefits from the Royal Court Theatre in Bacup, The Horse and Bamboo Centre (The Boo) in Waterfoot, and the New Millennium Theatre in Waterfoot. Rossendale is particularly well catered for in terms of local theatre, dance and performing arts groups / schools. The importance of performing arts the Rossendale’s future leisure provision is a key consideration given the natural strengths that the borough appears to have in this sector. There is the opportunity for a multi-use performance space with Rawtenstall which would also have a positive effect on Rawtenstall’s evening economy, and may stimulate growth in the town’s restaurant and pub/bar provision.

**Outdoor Active Sports:** Examples of the borough’s offer in this leisure sector include Ski Rossendale in Rawtenstall, the Lee Quarry Mountain Bike Trails in Bacup, the ‘Grip and Go’ climbing facility and ‘Laser Tag’ at the Adrenaline Centre in Haslingden, theRossendale Valley Sailing Club in Clowbridge. In addition, the Rossendale valley offers straightforward access to a wide expanse of surrounding countryside which provide significant opportunities to undertake outdoor health and fitness activities

The population of Rossendale is considered to be relatively well served by outdoor active sports facilities and it is not considered that there is any clear quantitative or qualitative justification to plan for additional facilities to serve the borough’s centres. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that further facilities to enhance the outdoor active sports offer of Rossendale should be supported.

**Tourism**

Rossendale benefitted from a total of 1.3 million visitors in 2015 which is a growth of 2% on the figure recorded in 2014 (1.28m). Day visitors accounted for 1.17m (90%) of the total tourist visits recorded in Rossendale in 2015, whilst staying visitors accounted for the remaining 0.13m (10%). The proportional split between ‘day’ and ‘staying’ visitors contrasts to that recorded at county level, were a higher 12.5% stay overnight and lower 87.5% are day visitors. This is considered to be reflective of the availability of accommodation in the Rossendale area.

Rossendale’s tourist economy currently is seemingly weighted more towards the day visitor than it is those wishing to stay overnight. In 2015 there were a total of 268 ‘beds’ within Rossendale’s stock of visitor accommodation and it is considered that Rossendale’s provision of visitor accommodation is particularly weak. Rossendale’s accommodation provision would falls well short of current and future requirements.

Whilst the tourist economy in Rossendale appears to be on the rise, the borough is undoubtedly missing out on more valuable ‘overnight visitors’ who spent on average three times more per person (per day) than ‘day visitors’ to the area in 2015. This provides further evidence that a lack of overnight tourist accommodation in Rossendale may be a barrier to growth in this sector over the long term.

It is considered that there is a significant opportunity for Rossendale to grow its economy through the promotion of the tourism sector. From a land use planning perspective, one important contribution that could be made is the promotion of supporting uses, such as overnight accommodation.

**Residential**

Rossendale currently does not a 5 year housing land supply and it is considered that the development of Rawtenstall Town Centre could accommodate an element of residential accommodation to enhance activity within the area particularly the night time economy.

Rawtenstall is conveniently located for access onto the M66 which provides excellent linkages to Manchester, Oldham and Rochdale which ensures that it is a convenient and appealing location for commuters. Generally there is good demand for apartments and the development of Rawtenstall Town Centre can accommodate apartments targeted at young professionals in the main.

**Rawtenstall Vision and Masterplan**

Rawtenstall Town Centre is a vibrant and prosperous market town, that despite the economic downturn has continued to provide a good range of facilities in the town centre for both residents and visitors. Town Centre has its own distinctive character and several strengths which include:

* The emerging Spinning Point town centre redevelopment scheme which, as part of its first phase, will bring a larger, more modern bus station closer to Rawtenstall’s retail core.
* A compact centre with all facilities within walking distance.
* High quality public realm quality and design along Bank Street
* Spectacular landscape setting and long range views of surrounding countryside.
* Attractive hard and soft open spaces.
* Exposed areas of river bank.
* High quality bus link from the Town Centre to Manchester City Centre.
* Good accessibility to the main road network.
* Tourist assets: East Lancashire Railway, England’s last temperance bar, the market, independent shops, surrounding countryside and outdoor pursuits

However, like many similar sized market towns, there is a need for new investment, a new impetus and a continuing evolution of the town centre. Rossendale Borough Council want to expand upon and enhance the offer of the Town Centre as although the Town Centre is a healthy centre there are a number of identified weaknesses which include:

* There are a very limited number of national multiples in Rawtenstall’s retail core, and such retailers can play an important role as anchors and drivers of footfall.
* Whilst vacancy rates are lower than the national average, their focus on Bacup Road and in the southern third of the town centre boundary more generally is of some cause for concern.
* There are also issues with environmental quality along Bacup Road and at its junction with Bury Road.
* Pedestrian severance
* Poor public realm quality on most streets with the exception of Bank Street.
* A lack of a performance/community/cultural venue in the town centre.
* Lack of leisure facilities to stimulate the night time economy
* Lack of overnight accommodation to support the Borough leisure and tourism facilities

It is considered that the next stage of the Spinning Point town centre redevelopment scheme will have a tangible impact on both the number of people visiting the centre and how people make their way around the centre. The development of the former Valley Centre represents the greatest opportunity to enhance and develop the retail and leisure offer within Rawtenstall. It will deliver anchor retail and / or leisure uses which drive a greater amount of pedestrian traffic to the south of the centre. The relative resilience of the town centre can be largely attributed to the strength of Rawtenstall’s independent sector. This offer needs to be further nurtured with a drive to increase the quality of this important sector.

The vision for this development is to create a predominantly cultural and creative place which does not reflect any other town centre and results in the creation of a ‘destination’ with:

* Leisure facilities;
* Small and unique ‘destination’ retail and food and drink function;
* Residential/ overnight accommodation;
* High quality public realm works to enhance the space and introduce landscaping to form a wider piazza space that creates an open area of public space at the heart of the development and will cater for events;
* The Introduction of appropriately sized modern retail units to enhance the offer of the town centre;
* Enhancement of the night time economy;
* Enhanced pedestrian movement along Bank Street  with ‘pop-up’ markets and cultural events within the piazza space and craft, goods, services, arts, and business incubator space at existing market location;
* Enhanced pedestrian linkages to the ELR, New Hall Hey and Bacup Road;
* Improvements to Bacup Road.

***Key Actions***

1. Establish a key Project Delivery team led by Rossendale Council- This group should include the wider stakeholder group including the local shop owners, representatives from the local community,……
2. The Project Delivery team will open up discussions with potential cinema operators, potential hotel operators, potential leisure operators and identify the types of uses that will be accommodated in the scheme
3. Engage with a design team to produce detailed scheme proposal and costing. The team should produce options for the site and a detailed scheme for the agreed design and implementation plan.