



Formby District Centre Health Check Assessment

Centre Overview: The district centre of Formby is located centrally within the Sefton administrative area, approximately 12km to the south of Southport and 9.5km north of Crosby District Centre. The A565 passes to the east of Formby, approximately one kilometre from the centre. The centre is principally focused around the junction of Chapel Lane, Halsall Lane and Three Tuns Lane. The Waitrose supermarket provides a key anchor store which is located towards the eastern side of the centre. The majority of the district centre's retailers occupy units along Chapel Lane. Further commercial premises are located along Halsall Lane which incorporates the Cloisters Shopping Centre as well as along Three Tuns Lane and School Lane. Formby Pool which provides a public swimming pool and fitness suite is located on the edge of the centre, directly to the west of the district centre's boundary.

Formby offers a varied range of goods and services primarily catering for the needs of the resident population from the surrounding local area. A healthy mix of both national retailers and independent businesses are present. The centre has a particularly strong representation of national operators, with 39 recorded at the time of WYG's visit to the centre. Despite Formby being the second smallest of the four district centres within Sefton, in terms of its total number of retail and service outlets it has the highest number of national multiples of any of the district centres. This provides an indication of the strong popularity the centre has with operators. The two largest car parks are the facility at the Waitrose store (approximately 250 spaces) and the privately operated facility behind the Cloisters Shopping Centre (200 spaces). Further parking is available at two smaller Council operated facilities which together provide approximately 110 parking spaces.

The Local Plan Publication Draft (January 2015)¹ incorporates minor changes to the district centre boundary from that adopted within the Unitary Development Plan, widening the boundary to include a number of buildings and grounds associated to the Our Lady of Compassion Church and the Formby Holy Trinity Church at the eastern and western edges of the centre respectively. The changes to the district centre boundary proposed do not impact on the total number of commercial units within the centre. Formby and Little Altcar Parish Council are currently in the process of producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the whole of the Formby and Little Altcar parish areas. Once adopted the Neighbourhood Development Plan will form part of the Development Plan and as such will influence the determination of planning applications within Formby.

¹ No material changes of relevance have been made to the Local Plan between the Publication Draft (January 2015) document and the Local Plan Submission (July 2015) document.



Diversity of Uses, Table 1: Units in Formby District Centre at 31st July 2015

	Number of Units			Floorspace Figures		
	No.	Formby	UK	Sq.m	Formby	UK
Convenience	11	10.3%	8.5%	6,225	35.1%	15.1%
Comparison	39	36.4%	32.5%	4,956	27.9%	36.1%
Retail Service	18	16.8%	14.2%	1,184	6.7%	7.4%
Leisure Service	22	20.6%	22.5%	2,820	15.9%	23.3%
Financial and Business Service	14	13.1%	10.8%	2,269	12.8%	8.2%
Vacant	3	2.8%	11.3%	279	1.6%	9.2%
Total	107	100.0%	100.0%	17,733	100.0%	100.0%

Source: WYG site visit based on town centre boundary, (Local Plan Publication Draft January 2015).¹

UK average from the Experian Goad Category Report (June 2015)

Table 2: District Centre Facilities

National Operators	Total
Key Anchor Store: Waitrose Other National Retailers: Holland & Barrett, M&S Simply Food, Timpsons, Iceland, M Local, Age UK, Card Factory, New Look, Dorothy Perkins, Barnardos, Boots Pharmacy, British Heart Foundation, Oxfam, Savers, Hallmark, Superdrug, YMCA, Cancer Research, Thomson Travel, Thomas Cook, Specsavers, Vision Express, The Co-operative Funeral Care, Post Office, Costa, Cafe Nero, Ladbrokes, David Pluck, William Hill, Dominos, Prezzo, NatWest, HSBC, Barclays Bank, Santander, Reeds Rains, RBS, Lloyds.	39
Community Facilities	
Formby Pool (edge of centre), Doctors Surgery, Dental Surgery	3

The Waitrose supermarket (3,682 sq.m gross) occupies a prominent position within the centre and serves an important role in providing a large format supermarket to attract food shopping trips into the centre. The store's car park is well located to enable good connectivity with the main shopping activity found on Chapel Lane. An M&S Simply Food (995 sq.m gross) at the Cloisters Shopping Centre and an Iceland store (479 sq.m) provide further food shopping offer. In total 11 convenience outlets are present within the centre, with other businesses including an M Local convenience store, a greengrocers and a butcher's shop. Since WYG's last health check of the centre in August 2011 there has been a net loss of one convenience retailer, although the amount of convenience floorspace within the centre has increased by 354 sq.m, largely as a result of the M Local store opening on Chapel Lane. Overall Formby is very well represented with respect to convenience shopping, with convenience retail floorspace comprising 35.1% of the total commercial floorspace within the centre which proportionally is more than double the national average.



The representation of comparison retailers within Formby is higher than the national average, accounting for 36.4% of units, compared to the national average figure of 32.5%. Formby is the only one of the four district centre within Sefton where this is the case. The majority of the comparison retail units are relatively small in size, which results in the total amount of comparison floorspace within the centre proportionally being less than the national average. Of the comparison retailers present, a high proportion sell lower-order goods, with 14 of the 39 comparison units being charity shops. The high number of charity shops that are present in Formby together limit the variety of the shopping offer within the comparison goods sector.

Within the financial and business service sector, Formby has six national retail bank branches alongside six estate agent offices. The number of businesses within this sector is unchanged when compared to WYG's last survey of the centre in August 2011, with 14 businesses. Financial and business services account for 13.1% of the centre's outlets meaning provision in this sector remains above the national average figure of 10.8%. Retail and leisure services have both experienced an increase in provision since 2011, with a further three retail service units and a further six leisure service units recorded than in 2011. The leisure services category incorporates food and beverage businesses such as restaurants, cafes, public houses and fast food take-aways as well as other service provisions such as betting shops and sports facilities. Although Formby's leisure service offer has expanded since the last survey of the centre was undertaken, the provision in this sector remains below the national average both in terms of the number of outlets and the proportion of the centre's floorspace in use by leisure service businesses. In total, 20.6% of the centre's outlets provide leisure services compared to the national average of 22.5%. With respect to floorspace, 15.9% of Formby's total floorspace is occupied by leisure service uses compared against the average found nationally of 23.3%.

Formby Pool on the edge of the centre provides an important leisure draw. This facility is located outside of the district centre boundary and therefore is not represented within the diversity of use data illustrated in Table 1. However, taking Formby Pool into account, the proportion of leisure service floorspace within the centre would rise to 24.2%, slightly above the national average of 23.3%.

Vacancies:

Formby has a very low vacancy rate, a clear indication of the centre's health and viability, with only three vacant units recorded. These units represent just 2.8% of the stock which is well below the national average vacancy rate of 11.3%. Furthermore, none of the vacant units are particularly large in size, with the largest being 141 sq.m (gross). Vacant floorspace therefore accounts for just 1.6% of the total within the district centre. In 2011 a similarly healthy situation was recorded with seven vacant units identified, which shows a further improvement in this area over recent years. Each of the seven units recorded as vacant in 2011 were found to be tenanted at the time of the latest survey, demonstrating no issues with long term vacant premises.



Retail units on Chapel Lane.



Roundabout at junction of Chapel Lane and Halsall Lane



Open outdoor space at the rear of Formby Pool

Accessibility

The A565 provides an important access point to the wider area, both to the north and south of the borough. Access to the M57 and M58 motorways is available approximately 13km to the south east of the centre. Southport town centre can be reached in less than a 20 minute drive-time. The neighbouring settlement of Ainsdale is approximately a 10 minute drive away to the north. Formby does not suffer from prevalent traffic congestion issues within the centre itself, with the geography of the conurbation and road network meaning that traffic travelling through the wider area does not generally pass directly through the centre. Vehicle traffic was observed to be relatively slow moving through the centre to the benefit of pedestrian movement.

There are a number of parking options available for visitors to the centre. The largest car parks are at the Waitrose store (approximately 250 spaces) which is limited to customers of the store for a maximum of two hours free of charge, and the privately managed car park at the rear of the Cloisters Shopping Centre (200 spaces) which charges £0.50 for 1 hour, £1.00 for two hours, £2.00 for four hours and £3.00 for over four hours.

The Council operate a very popular free car park on Sumner Road (approximately 55 spaces) which offers two hours free parking and is free all day on Sunday.² A further car park at Formby Pool (approximately 55 spaces) charges £1.00 for one hour, £2.00 for two hours and £4.00 for four hours. Charges of up to £2.00 are refundable for users of the leisure centre. Further limited on-street parking, including disabled parking bays, are available along Chapel Lane. Parking charges are

² At the time of writing, the Council were progressing with a proposal to introduce parking charges at the Sumner Road car park. The proposed charges would be enforced seven days a week between the hours of 8.00am and 6.00pm, with charges being £0.20 for 30 minutes and £0.90 for the maximum permitted stay of two hours.



comparable to those in place at the other district centres within the borough. An adequate provision of cycle parking stands are found at appropriate locations across the centre.

Accessibility to public transport services is considered to be a relative weakness for Formby. Formby Railway Station is not ideally located for easy access, being approximately 0.7km to the west of the centre. The railway station does however provide a point of access for direct train services to important neighbouring destinations such as Liverpool, Southport and Bootle.

The bus services which operate within the local area do not travel along either Chapel Lane or Three Tuns Lane. This means that to access bus services users must walk some distance from the main shopping activity. Bus services offering routes to many of the surrounding communities can be accessed from Church Road to the east of the centre and from Duke Street south of the centre.

Environmental Quality:

The environmental quality of the centre is considered to be very good, with a strong sense of character present. Shop fronts within the centre are generally well maintained and of a suitably complementary design to their host building. A sense of unity is provided across the centre through shared canopies above shop units on Hallsall Lane and the pedestrian friendly environment along Chapel Lane which has expansive pavements.

The district centre provides a leafy and pleasant environment, supported by the presence of mature trees, landscaping and planting. Benches located across the main shopping environment provide adequate seating opportunities. Open outdoor space with tables and benches are in place within the curtilage of Crosby Pool which offers a location for extended periods of stay. Formby Pool itself is of a high quality design which is beneficial to the quality of the centre's visual character.

Each of the car parks was found to be suitably well maintained and signposted. The locations of the car parks also enable good pedestrian connectivity with the primary shopping area. Perceptions of safety are considered to be good, supported by a well maintained physical environment and good levels of pedestrian movement across the centre as a whole.

Pedestrian Flows:

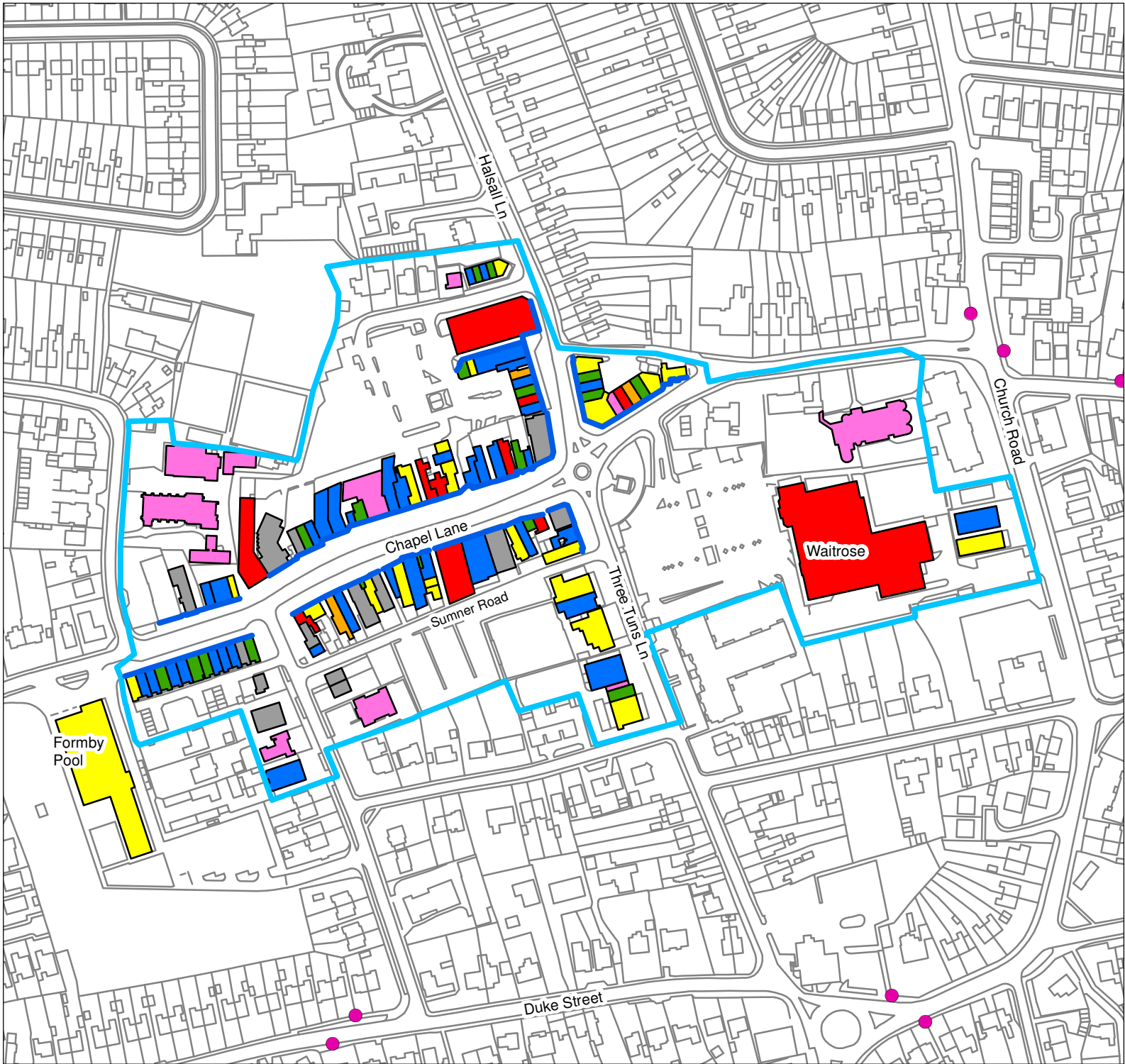
WYG observed Formby to be a popular destination, with healthy levels of pedestrian activity across all parts of the centre. The highest levels of pedestrian activity were found to be at the eastern end of Chapel Street and around the Waitrose Store, with the store's car park found to be particularly popular. The form of the shopping environment, primarily centred around Chapel Street, encourages visitors to naturally gravitate along the length of this street when visiting the centre. With key draws located at the edges of the centre in the form of the Waitrose and M&S Simply food stores and Formby Pool, footfall remains strong even at the more peripheral fringes of the centre.

**Summary:**

Formby serves an important role as a key shopping and service destination within Sefton. The indicators of health examined point to Formby being a vital and viable district centre, popular with both shoppers and retailers alike. This is illustrated by a very low vacancy rate and a strong representation of national operators.

Leisure service businesses are recorded as the only sector with a representation proportionally below that of the national average in terms of the number of outlets. However, this sector has recorded growth since WYG's last health check survey in 2011, with a net increase of six leisure service businesses. A high proportion of the centre's comparison goods outlets are in use as charity shops (14 of 39 outlets). This over representation serves to restrict the variety of the shopping offer within the comparison goods sector. Despite this, overall the centre is considered to be providing a suitably diverse shopping and service offering which is considered to appropriately meet the needs of the local resident population.

The physical environment was found to be generally clean and well maintained, offering a pleasant shopping experience for visitors. Accessibility for users of public transport is an issue for the centre. This could be improved to encourage a greater number of visitor trips and to improve the visitor experience.



Client: Sefton Council
A092546
Formby District Centre

Diversity of Uses Plan

Key

- Primary Retail Frontage (Local Plan Publication Draft 2015)
- District Centres Boundary (Local Plan Publication Draft 2015)
- Convenience
- Comparison
- Leisure Service
- Retail Service
- Financial & Business Services
- Other Main Town Centre Use
- Vacant
- Bus Stops



Scale 1:3,000 @ A4

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