# Ribble Valley
# Borough Council

Ribble Valley
Borough Council
www.ribblevalley.gov.uk

## Ribble Valley Service Centre Health Checks 2018

## AUGUST 2018



# Contents

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report provides a review of the three main retail service centres (town centres) within the Borough of Ribble Valley, and has been produced to provide evidence to underpin and inform the Council's Local Plan. The report assesses the vitality and viability of each of the three centres in the form of a 'health check' exercise in line with national policy, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.2 NPPF states that Local planning authorities should plan positively, to support town centres to generate local employment, promote beneficial competition within and between town centres, and create attractive, diverse places where people want to live, visit and work.

1.3 It is recognised that local planning authorities should assess and plan to meet the needs of main town centre uses in full, in broadly the same way as for their housing and economic needs, adopting a 'town centre first' approach and taking account of specific town centre policy. In doing so, local planning authorities need to be mindful of the different rates of development in town centres compared with out of centre.

1.4 Recent experience and research highlights that the future context for retailing in town centres will be very different and that centres must therefore adapt to the changing policy and economic landscape. Along with the growth of out-of-centre retail development, in recent years the economic climate has had an impact on consumer spending which in turn has had a negative impact on the vitality of the high street nationally which has led to an increase in vacancy rates within many town centres, as retailers attempt to compete in this challenging market and property owners struggle to let their shops to retailers.

**Clitheroe, Longridge & Whalley**

1.5 The Borough of Ribble Valley contains 3 key retail and service centres serving the local community and the surrounding settlements within Ribble Valley with a total population of approximately 59,000, the catchment areas to these destinations in the wider region are limited by the catchments of the regional centres in neighbouring districts such as Blackburn and Preston predominantly.

1.6 Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley, like other centres nationally, need to play an important role in serving the requirements of the local community on a day-to-day basis. They form a focal point for the surrounding area and provide a wide range of services that are accessible to the population, including retail, employment, leisure along with such things as financial and health services. Vital and viable town centres help to foster local pride, promote identity and contribute towards the aims of sustainable development.

1.7 Due to their historic street layouts and development density, the three centres themselves are constrained to some extent, however recent developments have occurred on some edge-of-centre sites in recent years, which either added to or have complimented the development mix.

1.8 Although monitoring of Ribble Valley's Key Service Centres takes place on an ongoing basis, as part of the Local Plan process the last comprehensive health check took place in 2013 and this report reviews and refreshes those elements undertaken within that study also, and in particular, taking account of national planning policy in connection with the NPPF and the changing economic situation since then.

1.9 This Health Check assessment forms part of the evidence base for policies and proposals in the Ribble Valley Local Plan. As part of the plan process, the Council is required to review and assess the vitality and viability of its service centres (town centres) to help ensure an adequate supply of services and facilities to meet the requirements of the local population both currently and in the future.

**References**

1.10 It should be noted also that other publications have been produced in relation to the vitality and viability of town centres which have been taken into consideration prior to conducting this assessment of the Key Service Centres.

1.11 In 2010 the Government produced a document entitled 'Healthy High Street?' 'A health check for high streets and town centres', which contains guidance to help identify early warning signs of potential decline in high streets and town centres, and provides advice on how to avert it. The guide was compiled by the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills with the help of public and private sector organisations, businesses and individuals with wide experience of identifying and successfully tackling high street problems.

1.12 Most recently in July 2018 The Grimsey Review 2 was launched. The first Grimsey Review "An Alternative Future for the High Street" was originally published in 2013. The aim of revisiting the Grimsey Review will be to establish what impact it had, which recommendations worked and which did not, what has changed since, and what should be done now in order to better prepare our High Streets and Town Centres for the 21st Century.

## 2.0 Overview & Methodology

2.1 Ribble Valley is a largely rural area covering 226 square miles in the east of Lancashire. To the south it is bounded by the M65 and the conurbations of Blackburn, Burnley and Central Lancashire towns. It comprises numerous picturesque villages, but the key settlements are Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. The north of Ribble Valley reaches as far north as Lancaster to the west and Yorkshire to the east.

2.2 The Health Check process defines 'vitality' as a measure of how lively and busy a retail centre is. 'Viability' is defined as a measure of capacity to attract ongoing investment for maintenance, improvement and adaptation to changing needs. Together these measures give an indication of the health of a retail centre and, when used consistently over a period of time as part of a retail centre health check, can demonstrate changes in performance that can inform future decision making. A health check measures the strengths and weaknesses of a town centre and analyses the factors, which contribute to its vitality and viability. A brief description of key Vitality and Viability Indicators assessed in this report are provided below.

2.3 Vitality indicators qualitatively assess retail performance, and as such are largely based on shopper and retailer perceptions. Viability indicators are more quantitative and are based on an analysis of retail composition, floor space use and retail rents. Information has been drawn from town centre audits, a review of marketed and vacant properties, national retail statistics and trends.

2.4 The types of evidence and indicators Local Authorities should collect still provide a relevant and useful basis to measure both the health of the centres and the potential future impact of proposed retail and other centre floor space uses in the borough. The NPPG suggests ten indicators of relevance that local planning authorities can use to assess the health of town centres. The ten NPPG indicators are:

- Diversity of uses
- Proportion of vacant street level property
- Commercial yields on non-domestic property
- Customer’s views and behaviour
- Retailer representation and intentions to change representation
- Commercial rents
- Pedestrian flows
- Accessibility
- Perception of safety / occurrence of crime
- Environmental quality of the centre

2.5 Modern consumer behaviour in the UK has become far more complex in recent decades. People are increasingly shopping in different ways, buying from a variety of different channels and locations dependent on where we are in the day and what we are doing. Buying patterns are also driven by convenience (does it fulfil the need at the time, and does it save some time?).

2.6 There are now a diversity of shopping opportunities – local, out-of-town, town centre, service station, online, travel locations, TV shopping, mobile shopping, airport retailing – the choices are increasing all the time. However having such a choice with retail growth slowing, or in the case of non-food declining, means that not all these locations and channels are necessarily profitable. The challenge for the retailer is to provide the choice of multi channel shopping, but to make sure that overall it is a profitable model. So there is fragmentation of shopping – people go out-of-town infrequently for major shopping, top-up locally and in fill on the move as well as order online.

2.7 Technology has been a key driver of this change. The internet has become far more accessible, and more user friendly. New technology is also providing a diversity of payment methods, which will expand so we will have cash, credit, cards, online, mobile touch, and more.

2.8 Retailers will have to compete harder in order to counter the increase in online shopping. Town centres in particular will need to market themselves as convenient hubs for picking up products ordered online if they are to thrive in the future, whilst at the same time, they must cater for an ageing population, it adds, calling for them to focus on face-to-face service and opportunities for socialising and leisure activities.

2.9 Town centres have a careful balancing act to play, and must fulfil the modern need for convenience and value of those with increasingly limited resources and incomes, but not to the detriment of quality and service sought by older and more affluent consumers. At the same time they will need to embrace technology to enrich the shopping experience by combining online shopping with the often more convenient option of collecting goods in the town centre.

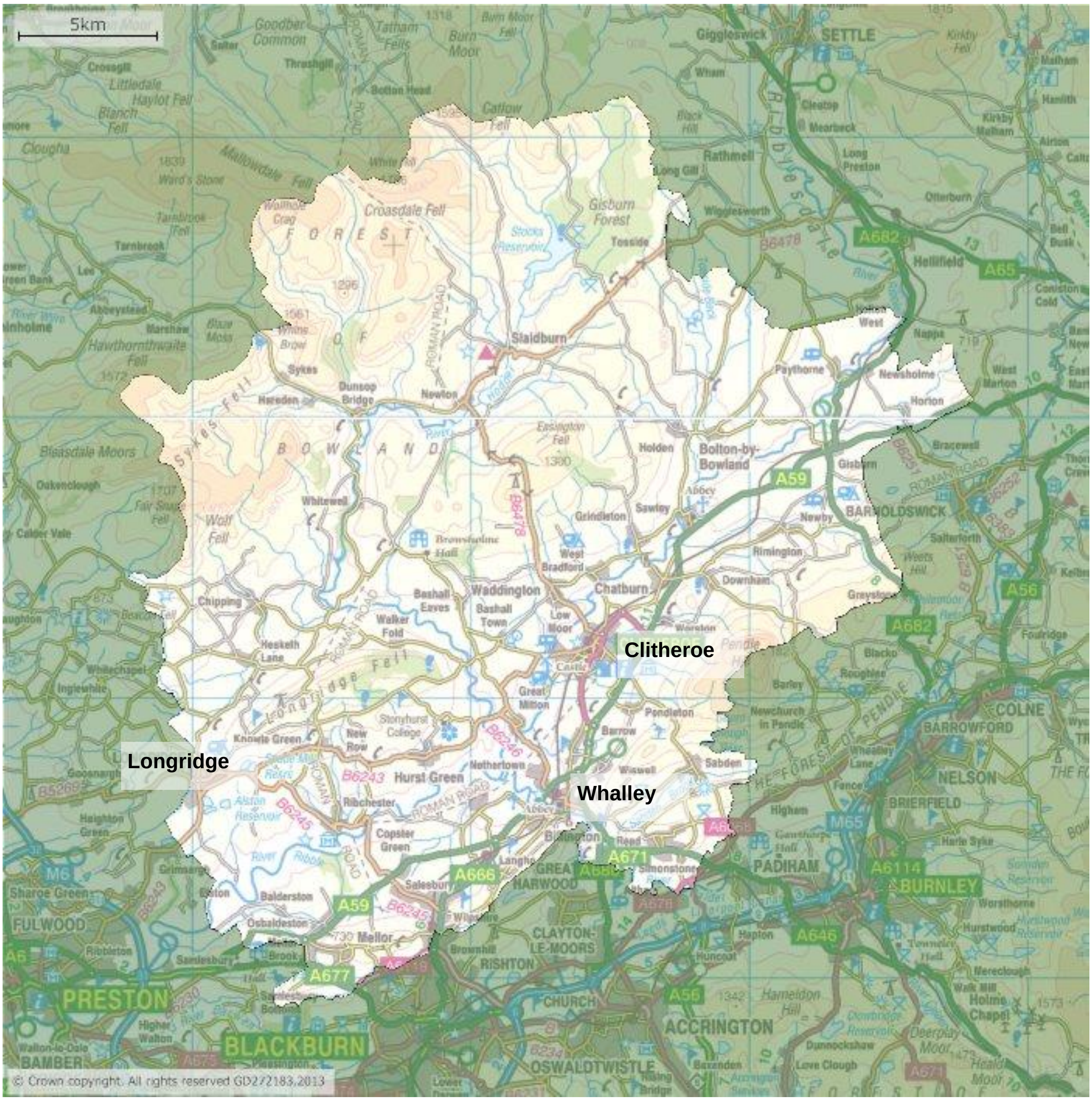
2.10 Many shops have adopted 'click and collect' services and retailers are embracing mobile commerce and social media to develop their online presence as the increase in technology and social media will have an impact everywhere. The report also highlighted that in many cases, these shoppers are from hard-pressed and rural consumer groups that are looking for both the choice and value that online offers and heavily influencing the health of town centres.

2.11 The vitality and viability of any town or service centre is dependent not only on its shopping offer but also on the mix of uses which add to the experience and make the centre more attractive to those who live, work and visit there. Offices can generate lunchtime and top-up shopping trips whilst leisure and entertainment facilities, cafes, bars and restaurants add variety and can assist in promoting the evening economy. Educational establishments can also add to the number of young people in the centre during the week contributing to vibrancy.

2.12 As well as outlet information, this health check monitors the outlet mix of each centre by category (Convenience, Comparison, Service, Vacant and Miscellaneous). In future, these can be benchmarked wherever possible to measure the performance of each town centre against other town centres of similar size and in characteristics.

## 3.0 Service Centre Profiles

3.1 The Map below shows the location of Ribble Valleys' 3 Service Centres. As the map shows each of the centres are located nearby the more urban locations of Preston, Blackburn and Burnley, which each have significantly larger town centres with a greater share of national multiple retailers.




3.2 As the main market town within Ribble Valley, Clitheroe is identified as a key service centre. It is the largest town in the Ribble Valley with a population of nearly 15,000 people (14,765) and located approximately 10 miles north of Blackburn and 20 miles north east of Preston. The town centre also serves a wide catchment population from its rural hinterlands. The nearest motorway, the M65, is eight miles away. The train station has regular services to and from Blackburn and Manchester.

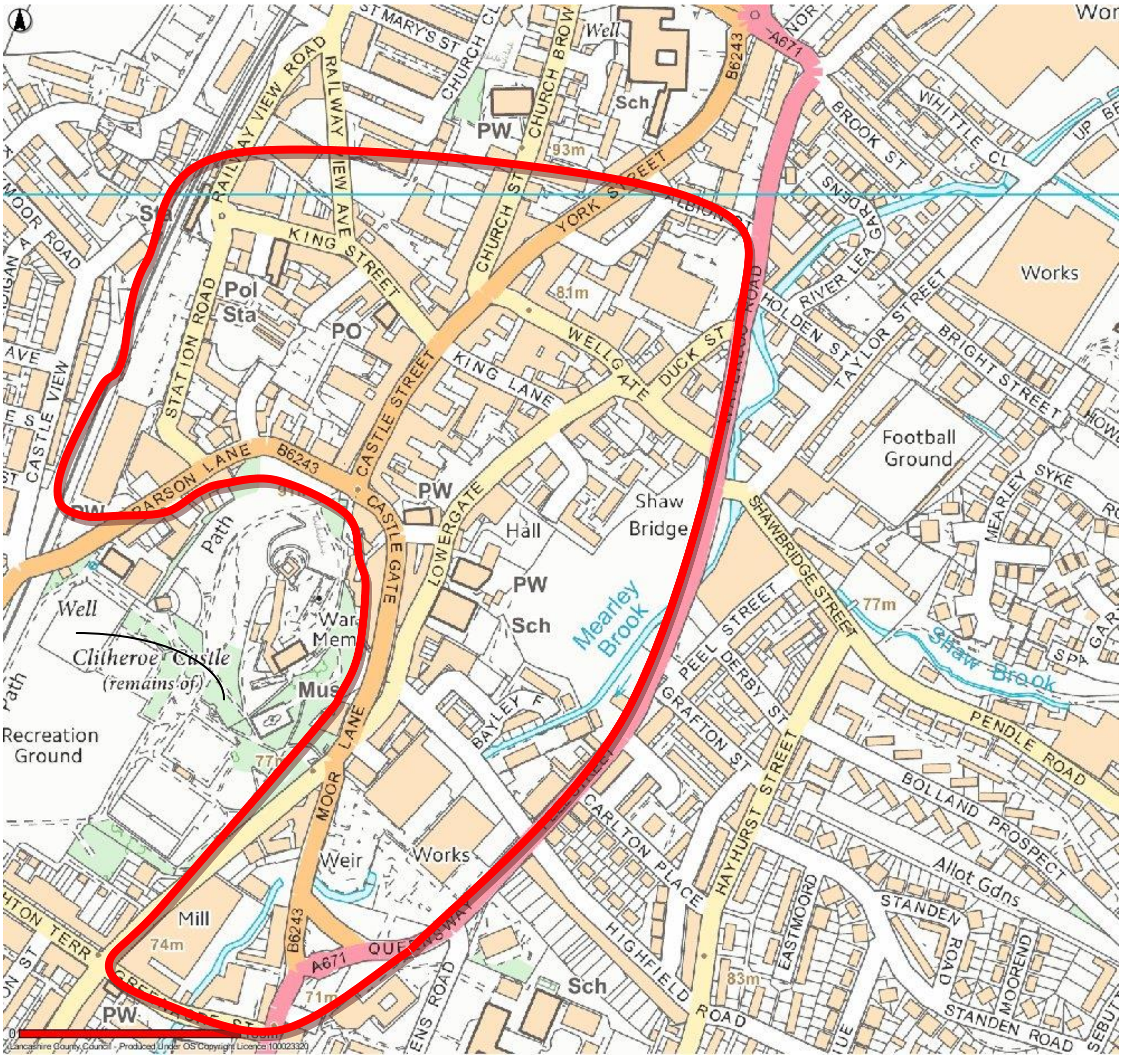
3.3 The town is a traditional market town, built around a 12th century Norman Castle, and expanded upon the cotton industry in the 18th and 19th centuries, which has since disappeared and local industry is now largely based on cement, clothing and chemical manufacturing. Retailing in Clitheroe town centre is focused on Castle Street, King Street, Moor Lane and Wellgate. There are no covered shopping parades in the town. The market is located off New Market Street and is held three times a week - Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays - but also smaller general goods market is sometimes held on Fridays. The key features and attractions include a higher than average selection of independent and specialist retailers, along with the Castle and surrounding grounds, the Market, cafes, bars and restaurants, Holmes Mill leisure and hotel facility and also Grand theatre venue.

3.4 Many local residents commute out of the town for work, and as such are more likely to shop and use services at more modern and more convenient destinations in and around Preston, Blackburn, Burnley and Accrington. Due to its location and catchment population however, Clitheroe town centre should be able to sustain a good diversity of uses to complement the retail function. In the service sector, uses already present in the town include banks and building societies, hairdressers, dry cleaners, travel agents and estate agents. There are also a number of smaller professional offices and the administrative office of the Borough Council, but Clitheroe Town Centre is not traditionally a major office location.

3.5 Clitheroe has a range of leisure and tourist facilities, although some of are located out-of-centre. Within the town centre are The Grand Theatre and Arts Venue (that hosts events including theatre, music, film as well as other community and cultural activities) and Clitheroe Castle and Museum (which houses both permanent collections and special exhibitions) and more recently, the Holmes Mill leisure complex, featuring a beer hall, brewery, hotel, food hall and other facilities, also the smaller Platform Art Gallery and Tourist Information Centre adjacent to the train station and public transport interchange provide additional services.

3.6 The Clitheroe Market site is used for events such as the Clitheroe Food Festival and other activities. The evening economy within Clitheroe has been limited although has improved since the development of Holmes Mill and as well as the popular shows held at The Grand Venue also in the centre, there are a number of restaurants, pubs, bars and a nightclub in the centre also. In summary, excluding retail and business services there is a range of other uses in Clitheroe Town Centre that contribute to the vitality and viability of the town, however, this expansion and diversity has been limited to edge of centre sites due to the historic built character within the identified retail core.

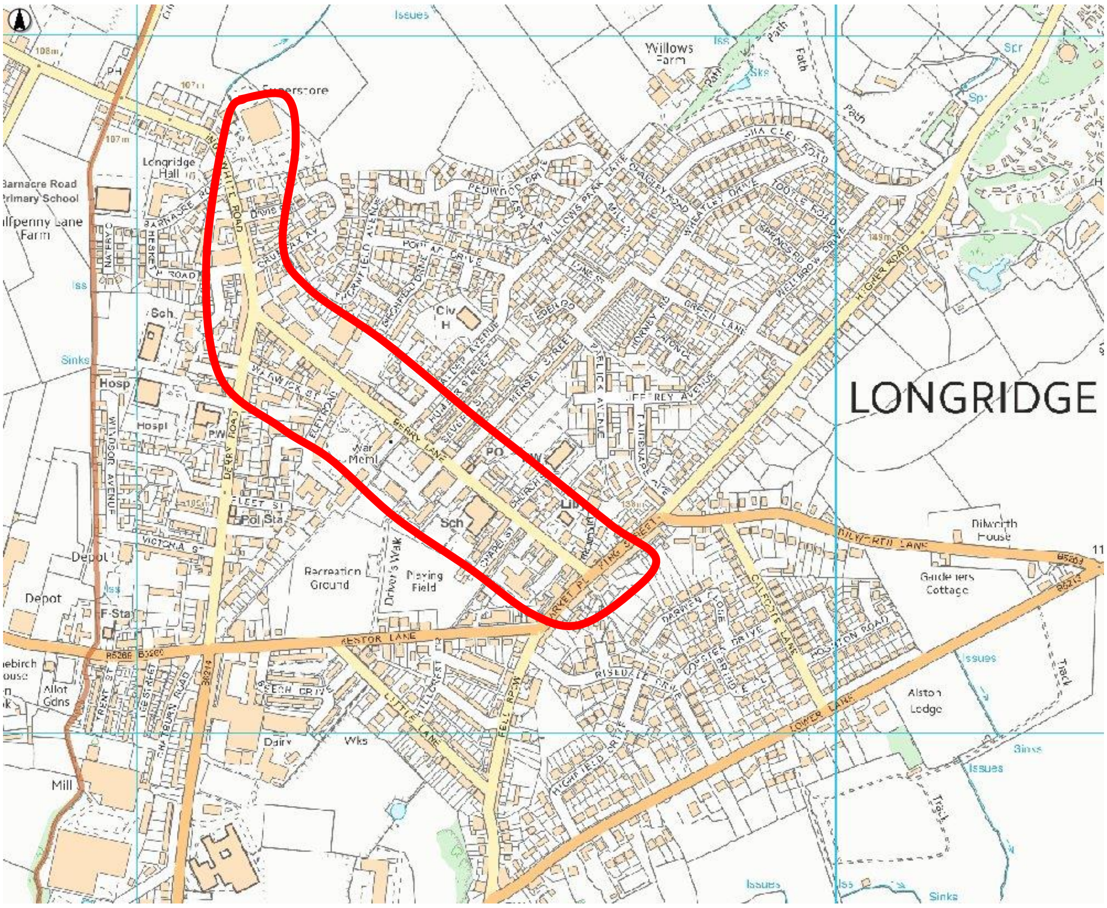
3.7 In recent years Clitheroe has regularly appeared in the media following surveys as one of the best places to live, such research takes into account transport links, quality of schools and natural beauty, low crime rates, property prices, cultural life and low unemployment figures. A map of the Clitheroe study area is outlined below: -




3.8 Longridge is the second largest town in the Ribble Valley, after Clitheroe with a population of approximately 8000; however, recent new housing developments in the wider area are resulting in the town having a larger catchment population than this figure. The town’s population expanded rapidly in the 18th and 19th centuries around agriculture, cotton weaving and quarrying and continues to be an important service centre for surrounding villages.

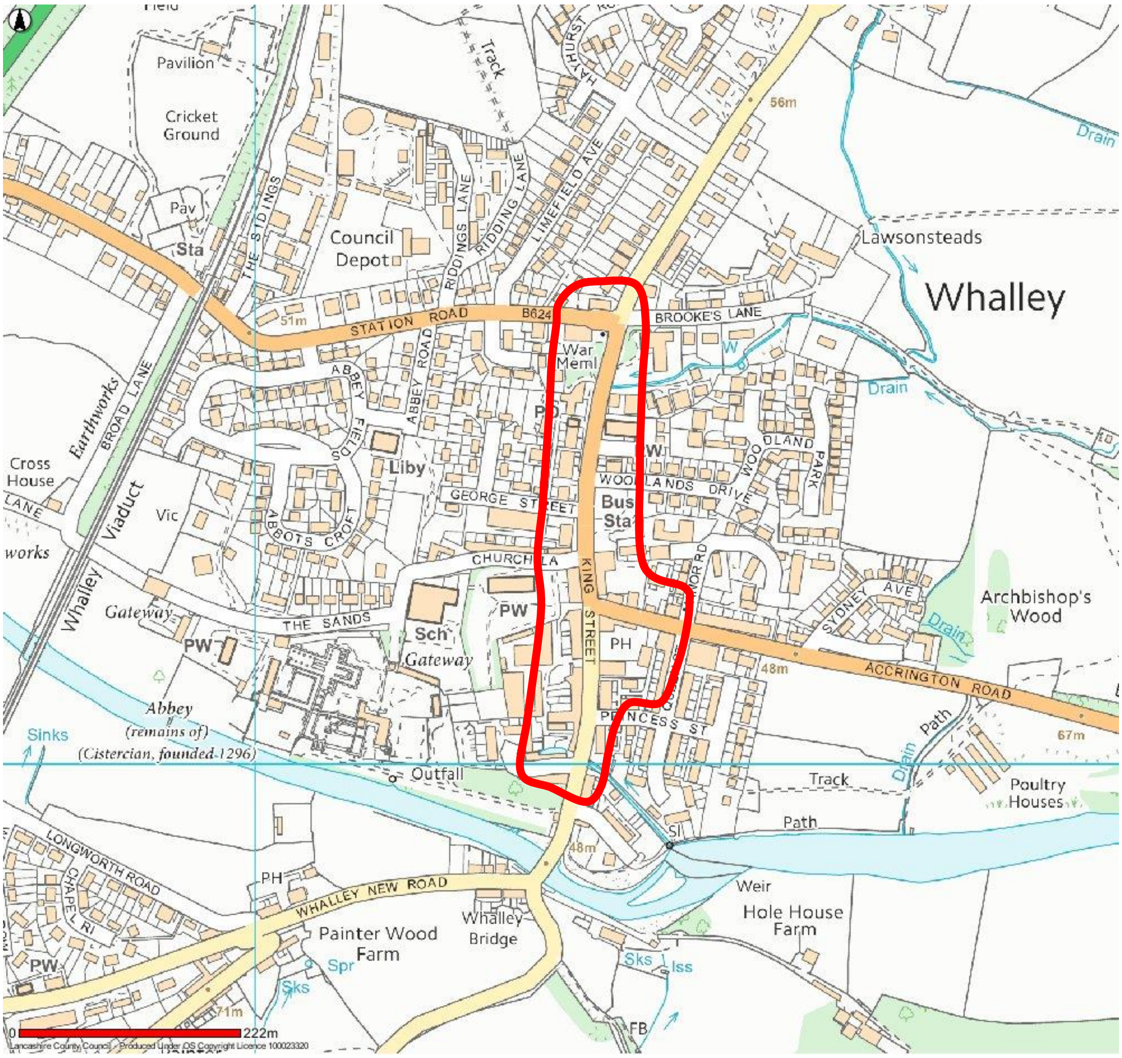
3.9 The town centre is less than five miles from the M6, and approximately eight miles north of Preston. Many residents commute to Preston and the main towns of Lancashire to work and as with Clitheroe, they are more likely to shop at modern and more convenient destinations. The town once had a train station with connections through to Preston but was closed in 1967. However, the Old Station Buildings still remain and now acts as a tourism and heritage information centre and café.

3.10 Retailing in Longridge is focused on Berry Lane and to a lesser extent, Derby Road and Inglewhite Road. Longridge is the shopping and social centre of the local rural area and farming district and has an interesting mixture of independent shops and services, which attract customers from the wider area. Key attractions include independent shops, pubs and café’s and also is home to the independent Palace Cinema based in Market Place. Longridge is also well used as a stop-off point for visitors to the Forest of Bowland and Beacon Fell Country Park. A map of the Longridge study area is below: -



3.11 Historic Whalley has a population of approximately 4000 which is also growing as a result of new housing developments in the locality. Being just less than five miles from Clitheroe, it depends very much on its larger neighbour for a number of key services, however for its current size does contain some services and retail provision.

3.12 As with Clitheroe and Longridge, many of Whalley's residents commute to other towns in Lancashire to work, and again as such most residents are likely to shop at more modern, convenient destinations. Retailing in Whalley is focused on King Street, and key attractions include the 14th century Abbey, pubs and cafes. The town has held occasional farmers markets but has no permanent market. The train station has regular trains to Manchester, Blackburn and Clitheroe. A map of the Whalley study area is below: -



## 4.0 Health Check Analysis

### Diversity of Uses

4.1 The following section provides a breakdown of retail uses by goods type for each of the town centres. Comparison (non-food) goods and convenience (food) goods are considered along with other street level uses (services etc.). The primary purpose of this indicator is to monitor amount and type of uses in town centre areas to inform planning policies relating to specifically protecting the amount of A1 retail in primary shopping areas in accordance with Paragraph 23 of the NPPF. The table below highlights the diversity across different uses within each of the centres.

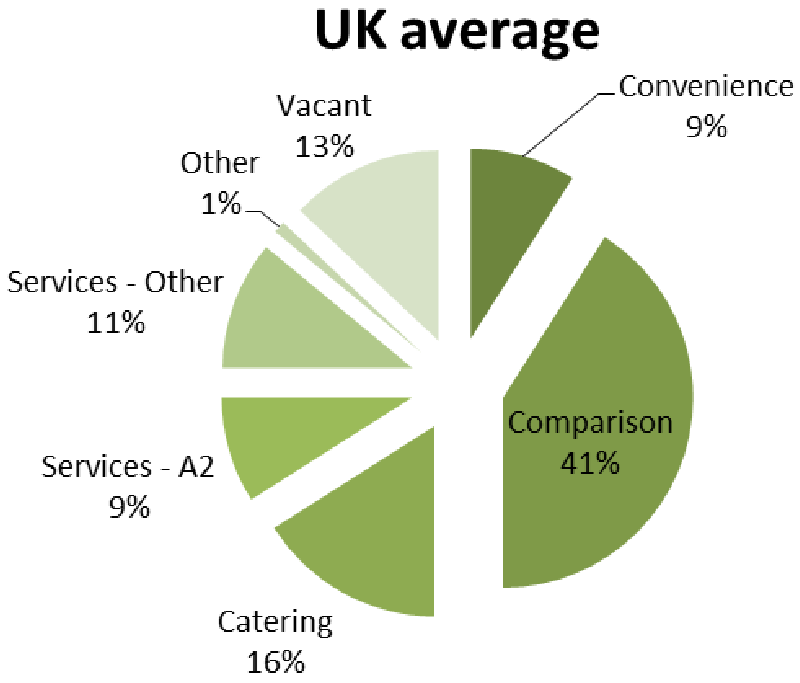
**Proportion of retail units by type:-**

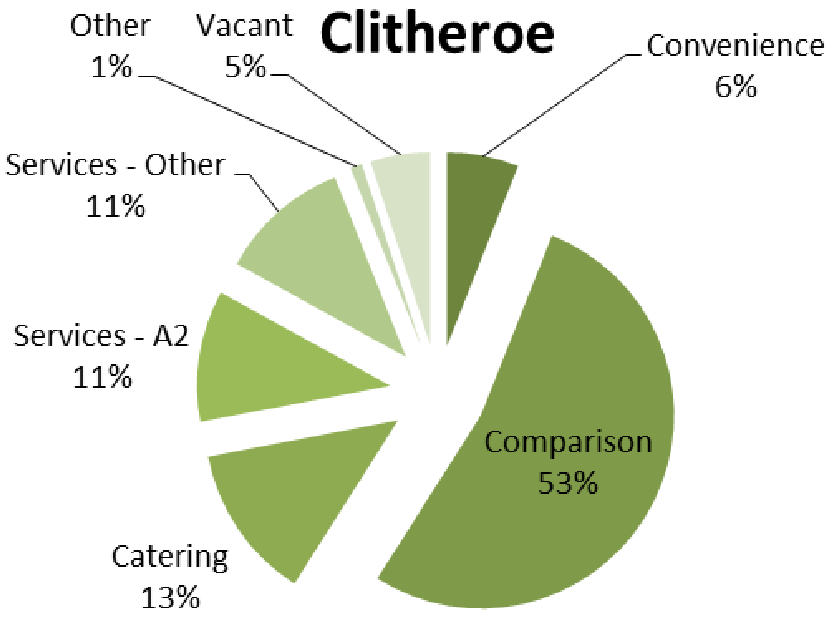
| **NOTES:** | |
|---|---|
| **Sector** | **Types of unit included** |
| Convenience | Food shops - butchers, bakers, fruit & veg, fish, supermarkets. |
| Comparison | Clothing, chemists, furniture, DIY, Books/news, electrical, jewellery. |
| Catering | Restaurants, cafés, takeaways, pubs. |
| Services – A2 | Banks and building societies, finance, insurance, estate agents. |
| Services - Other | Repairers, taxi, travel agents, hairdressing, funeral, dry cleaning. |
| Other | Employment services, careers. |

| **Sector** | **Clitheroe** | | **Longridge** | | **Whalley** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unit Count | Approx % | Unit Count | Approx % | Unit Count | Approx % | UK average (%) |
| Convenience | **11** | **6** | **12** | **12** | **3** | **7** | **9** |
| Comparison | **101** | **53** | **32** | **32** | **18** | **42** | **41** |
| Catering | **24** | **13** | **19** | **19** | **8** | **19** | **16** |
| Services - A2 | **21** | **11** | **12** | **12** | **9** | **21** | **9** |
| Services - Other | **21** | **11** | **22** | **22** | **3** | **7** | **11** |
| Other | **2** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **2** | **1** |
| Vacant | **9** | **5** | **2** | **2** | **1** | **2** | **13** |
| TOTAL | **189** | **100** | **100** | **100** | **43** | **100** | **100** |

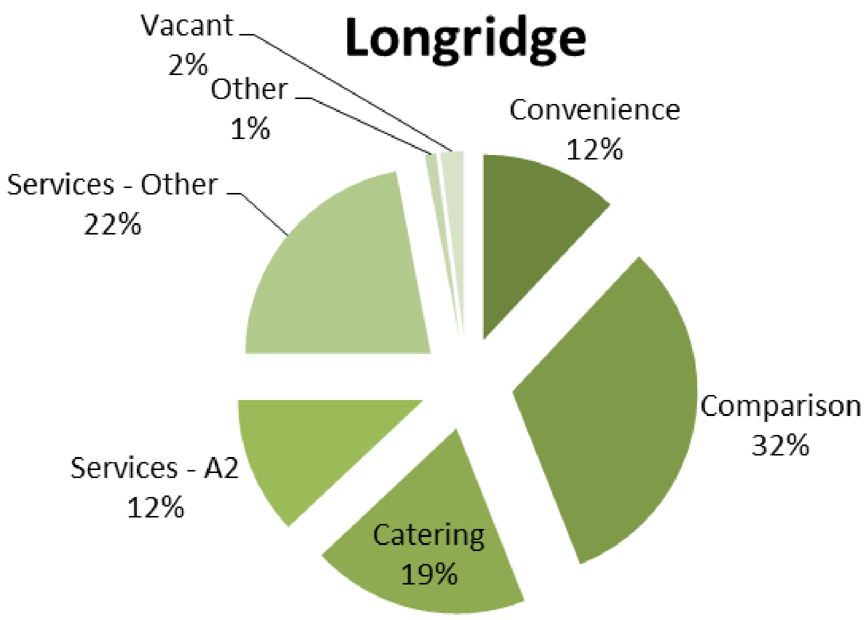
**Percentage of units in retail categories:-**

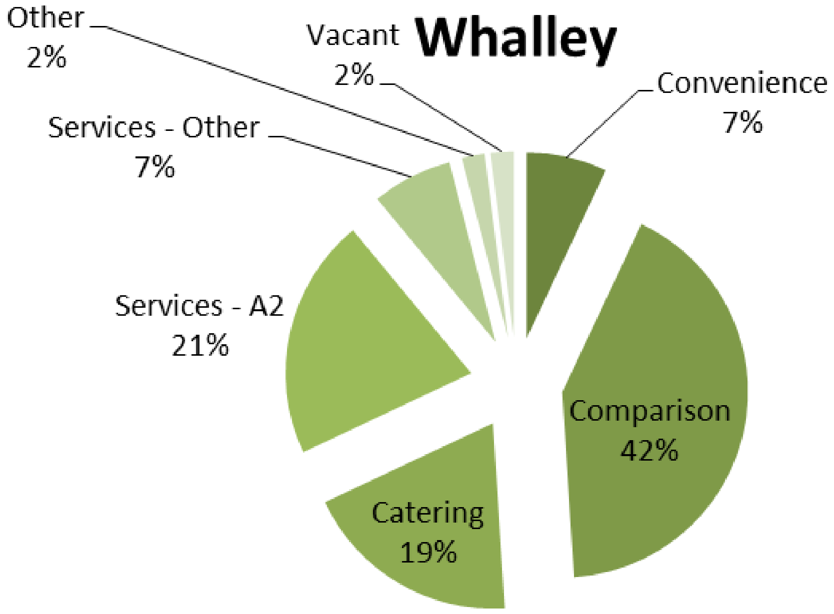
4.2 A breakdown of units by sector for each of the centres of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley is provided in the charts below, although some changes have occurred in recent years, this has been minimal.




**NB: The Clitheroe Market Site significantly increases the proportion of convenience sector in Clitheroe town centre. Also, Aldi & Lidl as edge of centre sites fall outside the monitoring zone**




4.3 Clitheroe is the only town centre to have a permanent market site which operates on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, which consists of 41 outdoor cabins that are all reportedly currently fully occupied. There are also covered further stalls, which are occupied on a less frequent basis. Plans are currently underway to upgrade and expand the site as identified within the Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan study.

4.4 Clitheroe accommodates just over twice the amount of shops dedicated to retail goods than in Longridge, and seven times the amount in Whalley. Convenience retail in Clitheroe has overall increased significantly following new retail developments in recent years, particularly on edge of centre sites, but not in the town centre itself and in consideration are in convenient locations. Clitheroe also has the highest percentage of premises and floor space dedicated to comparison retail.

4.5 Longridge appears to have a slightly higher percentage of premises dedicated to professional and financial services. In Longridge, retail is dominated by convenience goods, which comprises three supermarkets – Booths, Sainsbury's and the Coop as well as other small retailers. Floor space dedicated to comparison goods.

4.6 Whalley has the highest proportion of premises dedicated to more 'lifestyle' or leisure uses such as restaurants, cafes and pubs, which have created a thriving evening economy. Whalley is by far dominated by shops dedicated to non-bulky comparison goods. The proportion of convenience floor space has now improved significantly with the recent opening of the Coop food store, housed within the former Whalley Arms public house.

**Retail, leisure and office uses in edge and out-of-centre locations**

4.7 This section provides an update of uses in 2018 in and around the town centre and the edge of centre. It is important to monitor this indicator in order to gauge how the changes occurring within a centre and in its periphery can either affect the health of the centre itself or be complimentary to it.

4.8 To some extent, the amount of retail, leisure and office floorspace either on the edge or on out of centre locations can have an impact on town centres in general. This has been more prevalent in urban town centre locations in particular in recent years due to accessibility factors, which will be explained later in this study.

4.9 In Clitheroe, recent years also have seen the introduction of new retail developments around the Town Centre. Firstly Lidl supermarkets opened in August 2011 on Shawbridge Street in Clitheroe and Aldi's new 5,635 sq. ft. store in Clitheroe opened in late 2015 located on Whalley Road alongside a Pets at Home outlet. These developments in have further assisted the provision of employment opportunities and consumer choices within the town and helping to retain and enhance retail spend and strengthening the local economy.

4.10 In terms of recent leisure developments, the new Holmes Mill complex is set on a grade II listed site adjacent to Clitheroe Town Centre was bought by James' Places group in 2015 to redevelop the former derelict textile mill. The £10million redevelopment of the Holmes Mill complex also includes the Bowland Brewery and Beer Hall, a food hall celebrating local produce from the area, a new 40-bedroom boutique hotel, offices and multi-use function rooms, Bistro and Boiler House Café and Bowland Food Hall on the site helping further the local leisure and visitor economy.

4.11 The only development in Longridge in recent years has appeared on the northern edge of the centre with the introduction of the now Sainsbury's supermarket store and more recently expansion to the existing Booths Supermarket in the town centre. There are other sites potentially available for further expansion in the town centre area.

4.12 In Whalley, this year saw the opening of the new Coop store in what was previously the Whalley Arms public house which was closed and at risk of running into disrepair. This will significantly help retain more spend in the convenience categories locally. Apart from this, no other new retail development has taken place recently.

**The potential capacity for growth or change**

4.13 This section provides an update of uses in 2018 in town centre and the edge of centre locations. It is important to monitor this indicator in order to gauge how the changes occurring within a centre and in its periphery can affect the health of the centre itself.

4.14 The ability of a town centre to grow in terms of regeneration, consolidation or expansion is imperative in maintaining the health and diversity of uses in a centre. The National Planning Policy Framework emphasises the need where necessary for local authorities to maintain a supply of suitable sites to cater for the needs of town centre expansion to 'allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres'.

4.15 It is important that needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability. Local planning authorities should therefore undertake an assessment of the need to expand town centres to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable sites.

4.16 The market site in Clitheroe has been identified as a site for retail growth within the town. Apart from the market site, no other sites have been identified currently. Most recent development in Longridge has appeared on the northern edge of the centre with the Sainsbury's supermarket store and whilst there is limited scope for expansion. Apart from the new Coop, no other retail developments have occurred in Whalley in recent years.

**Retailer Representation**

4.17 This section assesses the presence of national retail multiples in the town centre area. This gives a good indication of how the centre is performing in relation to attracting national retail outlets and its current performance in the retail hierarchy. For the purposes of the health check process, national multiple retailers are defined as being part of a network of nine or more outlets, whose presence in a town centre is recognised as enhancing the retail attractiveness to local consumers.

4.18 There are a number of national multiple retailers in Clitheroe, and a high proportion of these are in the financial sector, banks and building societies, although the Yorkshire Bank recently closed as part of a national programme of closures. There are only two national clothing comparison stores in Clitheroe, M&Co, which specialises in both adult and children's clothing, and Fat Face, which is an adult clothing and accessories retailer. The Original Factory Shop, which is located on an edge of centre site across the road from Lidl, also sells a range of clothing, shoes and household goods. However, there are a number of independent clothing retailers.

4.19 Whilst Clitheroe has a number of national multiple retailers present it has a strong mix of independent retailers, including an independent department store (Dawsons) which sells a broad range of goods. The fact that Clitheroe also has a reasonable range of independent traders adds to the shopping offer and countering the so-called 'clone town' effect. The independents are also quite evenly distributed throughout the town's main shopping streets mainly as well as the additional Market days of local independent traders, of which all units are currently let. Longridge and Whalley are mostly independents however the Booths Supermarket chain in Longridge is considered a significant regional company.

4.20 It is likely that neither Longridge nor Whalley are large enough to support any other national retailer brands. Large retailers have enough market influence to be able to have a store in a small town should they wish to. Usually, the reason they are not present is either because there are no suitable retail premises (modern, with a large floorplate) available or it is not economically viable to do so because the retail catchment population would not support a store.

4.21 Recognised retail brands can be a significant attraction and can influence market shares captured by towns to make them more viable. This is of course, influenced by a wide variety of factors – accessibility, perception of crime and environmental quality that together create a retail experience. However some centres are recognising that independent shops offer more individual character and attractiveness helping them to remain as successful centres on their own.

| National Retailer Brands | Clitheroe | Longridge | Whalley |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sainsbury | Yes | Yes | |
| Tesco | Yes | | |
| Coop | | Yes | Yes |
| Aldi | Yes | | |
| Lidl | Yes | | |
| Argos | Yes | | |
| Boots the Chemist | Yes | | |
| W H Smith | Yes | | |
| Lloyds Pharmacy | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| M&Co | Yes | | |
| Bodycare | Yes | | |
| Café Nero | Yes | | |
| Costa Coffee | Yes | | |

**Shop rents**

4.22 Rental levels are affected by numerous factors including economic factors, turnover performance and floorspace supply. Across all three centres recent monitoring of vacant marketed property shows that rents are slightly higher with those in other town centre locations outside Ribble Valley, but these other locations can be where there is an oversupply of vacant premises.

4.23 Rental costs across all three centres can vary between £15 to £20 per square foot per annum depending on their location, size and prominence. Also Whalley, which has consistently low vacant retail property rates as reported earlier tends to have slightly higher rental costs than Clitheroe and Longridge. Retail rents are therefore considered comparable with, and in some cases favourable to, other centres of similar size and characteristics. On average rental levels compare very favourably with rentals in other centres in the region.

**Proportion of vacant street level property**

4.24 The proportion of vacant street level property and length of time vacant in a town centre is the most demonstrative indicator of reflecting the current health and performance of a town centre along with measuring the length of time premises have remained vacant. Vacancy rates peaked in Clitheroe around 2010 following the recession but in recent years there has been a decrease in the number of vacant units and long-term vacancies remain low.

4.25 The proportion of vacant street level properties across all three centres is comfortably below the national average. The vacancy rate in Clitheroe in August 2018 was 8 which is 5-6 percent by premises (national average is approximately 14 percent), and 3-5 percent by floorspace (national average is approximately 10 percent). There is 2 vacant premises in Longridge (former Lloyds bank and Spar store) and only 1 vacant premise in Whalley (former Barclays bank). Compared to other rural centres this appears to be a healthy figure and whilst in relation to the 3 centres in Ribble Valley, whilst vacant units do exist, retail changes, often referred to as churn rates of this nature occur regularly within many market town centres across the country. Neither are there signs of change to lower value retail.

4.26 A significant proportion of retailers in Clitheroe own their premises, also in Longridge and Whalley. Overall, this suggests that due to the local nature of the retail property market in Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley (i.e. largely local, independent retailers with some freehold premises) the town centre is more immune to national changes in rents and yields i.e. the low representation of national brands protects local retail rents to changes in the national economy. However, the benefits of this need to be weighed against the lack of trade associated with weak national retailer representation.

4.27 Based on property enquiries made to the Council, in Longridge demand for shop premises is slightly lower than the other two centres, which can also be reflected in its slightly lower rents. Convenience stores, professional and financial services are most important to the town centre in terms of attracting shoppers. The town centre is also spread out along Berry Lane, which reduces mobility, particularly up the steep hill, and results in the town centre lacking a retail core. A previous household survey showed that shoppers on the whole, are attracted to the town centre out of necessity, rather than for leisure.

4.28 Clitheroe, by far accommodates the largest goods-based retail economy in the Ribble Valley. However, retailers have reported a fall in shopper numbers in recent years, which could be compounded as nationally in recent years, consumer spending habits have changed.

4.29 For their size, all 3 centres whilst benefiting from some proportion of retail spend from the catchment will by nature and location continue to be overshadowed by the larger retail economies of Preston, Blackburn, Burnley, Accrington and Nelson. Whilst the retail economy appears to be dominated by spend on convenience goods in nearby supermarkets. More people appear to be visiting the town centre out of necessity rather than for leisure.

4.30 Regarding retail, previously there has been some concern that an increasing number of Clitheroe town centre retailers are moving to edge-of-town and out-of-town business park and industrial estate locations to continue their trade. Such locations are felt to offer better accessibility and cheaper rents.

**Pedestrian flows**

4.31 Pedestrian flows are a useful indicator of movement density within town centres, affording relevant information for determining or reviewing primary and secondary frontages and identifying changes in pedestrian accessibility.

4.32 Although specific pedestrian flow counts have not been recorded for any of the three centres, however, the monitoring of all 3 locations reveals that naturally footfall is heaviest to and from public transport and car parking locations. Higher pedestrian flows in each of the centres are visible as follows: Clitheroe: Castle Street between Moor Lane and King Street, Longridge: Berry Lane generally and Whalley: King Street generally. Naturally, these represent the primary shopping frontages in all three centres and it is generally secondary locations within the centres where vacancy rates appear to be more frequent reflecting lower footfall counts.

**Accessibility**

4.33 When considering the ease and convenience of travel, by different means, to and within the town centres, it is notable that the nature of Clitheroe and Whalley results in some through traffic being directed through the centre and can lead to a sense that the car is dominant, footpaths are narrow in all 3 locations, however, they are all essentially walkable with the centre the natural focus for residents. Information is also drawn from previous surveys and discussions.

4.34 Firstly in Clitheroe, access to the Town Centre for cars is reasonably good, with the main road network facilitating access from all directions. However, traffic congestion can sometimes be a problem, in particular at peak hours and on Saturdays. Car parks are relatively convenient and well distributed around the Town Centre. Town centre bus stops are located at the train station.

4.35 Some of the other town centre car parks are owned and operated by retailers such as Booths, Sainsbury's and Tesco, and whilst these are intended for store customers' use, offer up to 2 hours free parking where there is evidence of people using these facilities to make combined trips to other shops. Some people can also make trips on foot from more peripheral car parks on the edge of centre. There is a 'shopmobility' scheme in place to assist disabled people in the Town Centre, located on Railway View.

4.36 Car parking is identified by businesses as a priority issue which should be addressed in the town centre by making it more accessible and better priced for both staff and customers (e.g. cheaper or free parking). Residential areas are within easy walking distance of the town centre. However, some busy roads around the town centre and roundabout junctions on the approach from many directions may discourage some pedestrians and cyclists making trips to the centre.

4.37 The Clitheroe Interchange was originally developed in year 2000 to improve usability of public transport within the town. The facility is located next to the railway station and there is a nearby taxi rank creating a public transport hub. In terms of rail access, Clitheroe Interchange provides a number of services to the wider area. There is also a direct local service to Blackburn and through to Manchester from here. The town centre therefore has fairly good rail links to the strategic network but local services are insufficiently frequent, limiting the opportunity to generate increases to business and shopping trips by rail.

4.38 Bus provision is well served Monday to Saturday with routes radiating from the Town Centre and many routes operating at 10-15 minute frequencies. Some services operate during the evenings, although less frequently, whilst Sunday services are more limited with no services on Sunday evenings, but is better than in many rural towns of similar size. In addition there are bus services to neighbouring towns including routes to Accrington, Blackburn and Burnley. Bus stops are also located around the periphery of the Town Centre facilitating good access to the Town Centre.

4.39 Longridge town centre is easy to access, however the centre is on a slope, which could be potentially challenging for some disabled or elderly users or those with young children. Street traffic does not appear to impede pedestrians from crossing the road with a pedestrian crossing located in the middle of Berry Lane; however it can be awkward in other areas. There are no defined pedestrian covered areas in the centre and pavements seem adequately maintained, unobstructed and pedestrians are able to move about freely. There was a steady flow and presence of pedestrians at the time of survey. There is restricted on street parking. E H Booth & Co operates a large supermarket premises on Berry Lane adjacent to a petrol filling station and includes a large car park behind Townley Terrace. There is also a good bus route to Preston and is within 20 mins drive to the M6 motorway.

4.40 In Whalley, access to the Town Centre for cars is reasonably good, with the main road network facilitating access from all directions. However, traffic congestion can sometimes be a problem, in particular at peak hours and on Saturdays. Car parking has identified by businesses as a major issue in Whalley that needs to be addressed in the centre by making it more accessible and better priced for both staff and customers (e.g cheaper or free parking). There is on street car parking but this can easily become fully occupied early in the day making shoppers use neighbouring streets. The provision of more and parking and a wider variety of retail provision could help towards improving the town centre. A suitable site for additional parking or shops could be located at the bus station site.

**Safety and Crime**

4.41 In relation to safety and crime in the borough, Ribble Valley has relatively low levels of recorded crime. Town centres are usually high on the list of reported incidents in any Local Authority area. In the past, surveys found generally good perceptions of personal safety amongst residents and visitors.

**Environmental Quality**

4.42 Generally, the street conditions across all three centres seem to be reasonably well maintained and no significant problems appear with regards to the general environment quality within the centres. All three centres contain a variety of traditional buildings, with some quality frontages and attractive historic buildings. In general, the standard of cleanliness is high also, with very little evidence of litter, fly-posting or graffiti helping to provide a pleasant environment for shoppers and visitors and enhancing the townscape quality of the centre, however, some traffic movements can diminish the visitor experience. Whilst specific areas can be detected where some improvements could be made to walkways, on the whole the environmental quality of all three centres is generally good.

## 5.0 Summary & Conclusions

**Clitheroe**

5.1 Clitheroe by far accommodates the largest retail economy in the Ribble Valley. Although some empty properties exist the 'churn' means many are not vacant for considerable amounts of time and rents and demand for shop units remain relatively high. Any retailers witnessing a fall in shopper numbers and a decline in trade is being compounded as nationally consumer spending is affected by changing consumer buying habits as well as the competing retail economies of nearby larger town centre destinations. Despite a relative lack of national retailer representation. Demand is high for retail units from local, independent retailers and a significant proportion of retailers own their shop premises. Most recently has seen the development of the Lidl supermarket located on the old Stonebridge Mill site. As well as Clitheroe having a good spread in terms of diversity and mixture of uses, new store development in particular (Homebase & Lidl) has added to the convenience and choice factors in the local area.

**Longridge**

5.2 Longridge also appears to be doing well, with only 2 vacant units in the centre. It has the lowest rents of the three towns, despite being the second largest in Ribble Valley. It is an important service centre particularly for professional and financial services (in terms of the proportion of floorspace dedicated to this use) and business confidence is high. The convenience goods market is also important to the town centre in terms of turnover generated and attracting shoppers. Factors impacting upon the town's vitality include the perception that there is a lack of affordable parking (although there does seem to be adequate parking available), which could be affecting retail trade. The town centre is also spread out by the linear nature of Berry Lane, which reduces mobility, particularly up the steep hill, and results in the town centre lacking a retail core (although it is clear that trade is focused towards the bottom end of Berry Lane).

**Whalley**

5.3 Whalley performs the best of the three town centres in terms of vitality and viability but is comparably smaller in size to Clitheroe and Longridge. It has a consistently low vacant shop rate, currently only 1 vacant unit following the closure of Barclays Bank as part of a national programme of closures by the organisation. The bank said customers were increasingly using 'alternative' ways to do their everyday banking as people use online, telephone and mobile devices. On the positive side, retailer confidence remains high and footfall and trade seem to have been constant in recent years, if not increasing. However, Whalley has a low market share of retail in convenience goods categories. Retailers report that shoppers from across all parts of the Borough visit the town centre (albeit mostly by car) and rate it the best town centre in terms of being able to walk around. However, availability of parking and traffic congestion are key concerns, however this has since improved with the opening of the Coop providing limited stay free parking for shoppers. The town centre has an emerging pub and restaurant scene, which has developed a thriving evening economy. The introduction of the Coop has improved convenience choice, and as explained earlier, local residents will still need to travel further (Clitheroe) for a broader choice of necessity items.

**Recommendations**

5.4 Seek a wider range of uses including leisure, employment, food/catering and residential uses, in addition to A1 shops across the three centres.

5.5 Monitor and improve where necessary the public realm and public spaces (including better signposting and provision of outdoor space and seating areas.

5.6 Consider the requirements of businesses/retailers to ensure that policies work to meet their demands, and that the town centres meet these requirements.

5.7 Encourage uses that offer maximum viability for future investors and that increase local footfall and spending.

**Conclusion**

5.8 These Service Centre Health Check assessments draw some positive conclusions in such that the vitality and viability of all three centres - Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley appear to be continuing in their own individual roles and function in the wider Borough in terms of healthy functioning centres. It is recognised that they all play an important role in serving the requirements of the local community on a day-to-day basis.

5.9 Given the renewed emphasis on the pressures facing many continued monitoring may be required in some areas, it is encouraging that they continue to form a focal point for the surrounding area and provide a wide range of services that are accessible to the population, and contribute towards the aims of sustainable development.

Ribble Valley
Borough Council

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