

EASTHAM LOCAL CENTRE

RETAIL ACTION PLAN



By 2017, Eastham will be thriving like never before. An improved shopping area, providing choice and convenience in retail and services, will be at the heart of the unique Eastham offer. Local residents and communities will have contributed to this success, and will be proud to play their part in sustaining improvements and in promoting Eastham to increasing numbers of visitors.

INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of the action plan?

This action plan provides a framework for the Council, businesses and the local community in Eastham to work together towards the shared vision for the centre. It belongs to everyone who has a stake in the future of the area.

The plan sets out activities and potential improvements which will build on the significant assets of Eastham (New Chester Rd & Mill Park Drive) to shape the regeneration and management of this local centre.

The plan shows how the Council, businesses and the local community will come together to deliver these activities and potential improvements. The many active traders and community and voluntary groups in Eastham have a vital role to play in championing the vision and gathering local support.

Part 1 of the action plan sets out what Eastham is like now.

Part 2 of the action plan sets out the vision for Eastham.

Part 3 of the action plan sets out the work programme which will make the vision for Eastham, as a local centre a reality.

Part 4 of the action plan provides contact details and further information about those organisations involved in delivering the plan.

How has the plan been developed?

The Eastham Retail Action Plan builds on the Wirral Town, District and Local Centres Study and Delivery Framework 2011 ("2011 Town Centre Study") which is a broader strategy for the regeneration and growth of the Borough's 23 local, district and town centres outside Birkenhead. This in turn updated the Wirral Strategy for Town Centres, Retail and Commercial Leisure produced for the Council by Roger Tym & Partners ("the RTP report") in 2009. Detailed analysis and consultation work was undertaken in producing the 2011 Town Centre Study, including wider consultation at a strategic level (Core Strategy) and more focused consultation with key stakeholders and traders.

The findings and conclusions of this work form the starting point for the Eastham Action Plan.

In producing the latest version of the plan further consultation work has been undertaken with key stakeholders and traders in the area, providing the opportunity for their input into the plan. The consultation responses and feedback have been captured within the Action Plan and have informed the key issues identified.

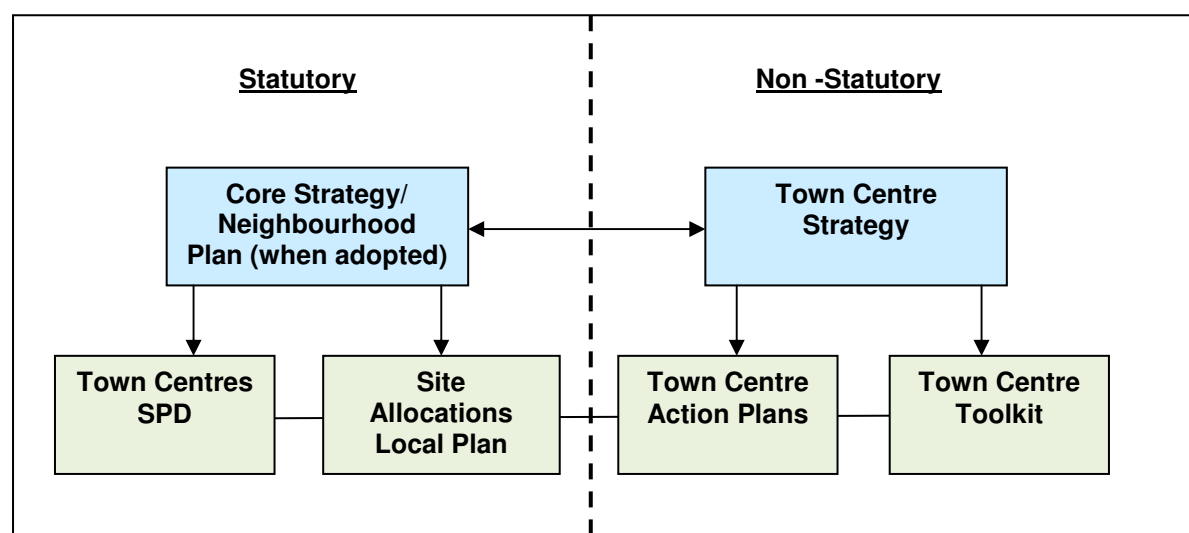
How does this document link to other plans and strategies?

The Action Plan is related to and should be read in parallel with a number of other strategic planning documents, including the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and the emerging Core Strategy. It will also provide an evidence base to inform more detailed aspects of the Local Plan for Wirral, including the proposed Site Allocations DPD and a potential 'Town Centre SPD'. The Action Plan for Eastham will not be adopted as a Development Plan Document and will remain non-statutory, but it will be used to shape the future of the area

and inform the key priorities emerging from the development of the Constituency Plan for Wirral South.

Further information regarding these documents can be found via the following link:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/environment-and-planning/planning/local-development-framework/evidence-base>



The Eastham Local Centre Action Plan sits alongside the Traders Toolkit which provides helpful information to town centre businesses on a range of issues such as planning and licensing. This publication can be viewed at:

www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/business/investment-strategy/investing-places/town-centres

1. WHAT IS EASTHAM LOCAL CENTRE LIKE NOW?

This section sets out what Eastham is like now in terms of:

- Identity, sense of place and the streetscene
- Retail and services offer
- Accessibility and transport links
- Local events and marketing activities

Theme 1: Identity, sense of place and the streetscene

Eastham local centre comprises two compact retail frontages (Mill Park Drive and New Chester Rd) that are separated by Eastham Rake. Although there are little visual and physical connections between each, they do complement each other in terms of the retail and service offer. Eastham is a proposed new addition in the hierarchy of retail areas. (The centre was not one of those assessed in the original RTP report in 2009). Although it is only a relatively small local centre, it appears to be functioning well nonetheless, operating within a clean and pleasant environment.

Though the centre appears to function well, there are clearly opportunities for improvement, not least improved connectivity and signage between these two clusters of businesses. The two parades of shops are linear in nature, providing a broad range of retail and service uses which offer a reasonable choice for shoppers. This area of Eastham is easily accessible and the current offer generally satisfies the day to day requirements of shoppers.

Whilst the streetscene is of a reasonable quality, there are areas that clearly could benefit from some environmental enhancements and renewals to the public realm. There are below average vacancy levels and hence few areas of inactive frontage. A small number of shop frontages however are of poor quality and would benefit from improved maintenance.

Eastham has a strong sense of 'community spirit' and 'civic pride' and this is testament to the sterling work of the respective groups and organisations that make up the Eastham Community Forum.

Theme 2: Retail and services offer

The retail and services offer is located on New Chester Rd to the north and Mill Park Drive to the south. There are a couple of businesses (car dealership, taxi rank and a hair and beauty salon) located on the opposite side of the A41, but these fall outside the scope of the likely centre boundary (in planning terms) for Eastham, to be included in a future site-specific local plan.

The 2011 Town Centre Study identified the centre as having a significant service offer (42% of the total number of units), the comparison offer running at 23% and convenience provision at 27%. The percentage of units given over to convenience retailing was far in excess of the study average of 10%, whilst the percentage of comparison retailers slightly above the study average of 19% at the time. Vacancy rates (8%) were below the 12% study average across the borough. In relation to upper floor uses, the predominant use was residential (61%), followed by offices related to the ground floor business (17%) and unknown uses (11%).

A resurvey in March 2015 suggests that there have been some minor changes to these uses in the intervening period – an increase in service uses (44%), an increase in the comparison offer (28%) and a decrease in the convenience offer (16%). Whilst the proportion of units given over to convenience retailing is slightly above average, it does though serve to reinforce Eastham's role as that of a service centre.

Convenience retailing is centred on a Tesco Express supermarket on Mill Park Drive and the range of services in the village includes amongst others a bookmaker, cycle shop, chemists, hair & beauty salons, pet store and the busy medical centre. On the opposite side of Mill Park Drive sits the library which incorporates a One Stop Shop facility and along with the health clinic acts as a focal point for the area. These are complemented by a mix of hot food takeaways all of which help support the night-time economy. Whilst the majority of these businesses are independently owned, they do include some high street multiples. Unlike a number of other areas in the borough, Eastham is fortunate in that it still manages to retain a nucleus of financial institutions, with one major high street bank (NatWest) still in existence on New Chester Rd, along with a small post office presence within the former Thrifty's Discount shop on Mill Park Drive.

The 2011 Town Centre Study highlighted that the percentage of vacant units in the area at 8%, which was below the average for the time. A resurvey in 2015 has identified that vacancy rates have remained static at 8% overall, which serves to re-inforce the relatively healthy condition of the retail area.

Whilst some upper floor uses include residential and offices, no ground floor units have been converted exclusively into residential uses to date.

Theme 3: Accessibility and transport links

Eastham is very accessible by public transport and has a large residential catchment of circa 5,100 people within a 10 minute walk of the centre's services. During the day (Monday to Friday 9.00-5.00pm), the village is accessible within 30 minutes by 60,000 (19%) of the borough's population, and by 57,000 (18%) on Saturdays.

Eastham lies on one of the main arterial routes in the borough – the A41 corridor. With a number of main bus routes serving the centre, they provide excellent links to Birkenhead, Ellesmere Port, Chester, Liverpool and Broughton. The A41 forms part of the Quality Bus Network which means more frequent bus services and enables passengers to use tickets from Arriva or Stagecoach on either operator's services.

The nearest rail station at Eastham Rake is ½ a mile away providing frequent rail services to Birkenhead and Liverpool City Centre to the north and Ellesmere Port and Chester to the south. As part of the Merseyrail network, it provides valuable connections to North Wales and other parts of the network as far as Southport. The station is one of a growing number on the Merseyrail network providing dedicated "Go Cycle" storage facilities.

Eastham is also well served by the motorway network with the nearest junction of the M53 (junction 5) less than a two minute drive away. Highways England have recently announced that a section of M53 from junction 5 to 11 will be upgraded to become a 'Smart Motorway'. ('Smart Motorways' are an innovative approach to ease congestion). These improvements are expected to be in place by 2020. Similarly by 2024 there are areas of the local highway network that are likely to exhibit noticeable increases in traffic and available capacity without any demand management or mitigation measures being put in place, which could include key junctions on the A41, such as New Chester Rd/Bridle Rd, New Chester Rd/Stanley Lane and New Chester Rd/Eastham Village Rd.

Mill Park Drive and New Chester Rd comprises a linear parade of shops both of which benefit from free on road parking provision. Ample free parking is also available at the rear of the health centre and there is a large car park adjacent to the library. Parking on New Chester Rd is limited to 1 hour, with 2 hour restrictions in force on Mill Park Drive and at the library. Proposals to introduce *No Waiting At Any Time* restrictions on both sides of Eastham

Rake between Mill Park Drive and the car park to the health centre have recently been approved and are expected to be introduced shortly. At the same time an *Ambulance Only* parking bay will be created within the existing lay by at the front of the health centre. These measures once implemented will mitigate obstructive and inconsiderate parking in this area and ensure appropriate access for ambulances to the health centre in the event of a medical emergency.

Current cycle links include signing from the station to Eastham Centre and Eastham Rake forms part of the Wirral Circular Trail, which provides excellent links to leisure routes at Eastham Ferry and the Wirral Way. Cycle routes along New Chester Rd are currently being developed, which will provide an off road link for cyclists along the busy A41. Cycle racks on the footway in the centre are plentiful, which demonstrates a desire by the community to cycle to the centre.

Theme 4: Local events and marketing activities

The library provides a focal point for a wide variety of events and activities during the year, facilitating a number of popular and well supported initiatives i.e. Babybounce & Rhyme, Get into Reading and Children's Storytime. It also hosts a Work Club run by Reachout, providing advice guidance and support on job search skills, training and employment opportunities etc.

The Eastham Community Forum also plays a valuable role in bringing the communities of Eastham together. As the "voice" for community groups, youth organisations, schools, churches and other voluntary groups within Eastham, its role in respect of promoting various events and activities that improve the quality of life for residents and encourage community cohesion cannot be underestimated.

Due to the physical layout of the area and the close proximity of the retail offer to the busy New Chester Rd thoroughfare, there are very few natural open or green spaces available to support significant high street events or activities.

2. WHAT IS THE VISION FOR EASTHAM LOCAL CENTRE?

Eastham continues to function well as a retail centre serving the local community. The socio-economic profile of the catchment area provides reasonably strong support for the centre as a whole and its role for convenience food shopping, lifestyle shopping and services.

The general environmental quality in the centre is good with open landscaped areas, civic buildings and a number of character buildings that help create a strong sense of place. The frontages to a number of shops though are in poor condition and would benefit from increased maintenance and investment. There is some concern from businesses and local residents that the collection regime for the numerous on street litter bins is inadequate, and this can detract from the overall "feel" of the area.

The area though continues to have a feel of functioning in two parts and the need to provide greater connectivity between the businesses on Mill Park Drive and New Chester Rd remains. This could be addressed through the introduction of an improved pedestrian link on Eastham Rake, which would have the added benefit of improving road safety in general at this junction.

Directional signage to the shops from the busy A41 corridor is non-existent with new visitors discovering the area more by luck than judgement. The provision of a monolith or totem style sign promoting the range of services and businesses could also help draw new customers to the area.

Given the constraints of the layout of the centre in terms of the built environment there is very little opportunity for major additional physical works within the centre. Consequently Eastham is not in need of transformational change, moreover it needs to build on its many positive features to continue to be self-sustaining and prosperous in its own right.

Eastham is currently designated as a part of the Primarily Residential Area in the UDP. The emerging Core Strategy lists Eastham as a “Local Centre” in the new hierarchy of retail centres proposed in Policy CS25. The boundary of the centre will be designated through a site-specific local plan.

Eastham is well served by public transport and benefits from a large residential catchment within easy walking distance of the centre. Free on or off road car parking provision is readily available, albeit with limited waiting restrictions in force.

There are a number of established community groups working for the greater good of the area, but no formal trader led organisation in existence taking ownership for helping improve business and economic prospects. The establishment of a formal traders association could act as a catalyst for this, if deemed necessary.

The Eastham Community Forum through its website provides an effective forum to promote a wide and diverse range of activities in the area during the course of the year. The innovative Churches Together initiative continues to raise the profile of the area and helps stimulate community cohesion in Eastham and in neighbouring Bromborough.

There are therefore some opportunities to improve the identity of Eastham and to introduce an improved and more balanced offer, by attracting new retailers and users to the village, in order to secure its sustainable future. Local traders/businesses, community groups and residents will all be expected to play a key role in this.

Taking all this into account the vision for Eastham is that:

By 2017, Eastham will be thriving like never before. An improved shopping area providing choice and convenience in retail and services, will be at the heart of the unique Eastham offer. Local residents and communities will have contributed to this success, and will be proud to play their part in sustaining improvements and in promoting Eastham to increasing numbers of visitors.

3. HOW WILL THE VISION BE DELIVERED?

The detailed analysis undertaken as part of the Town Centre Study for Eastham and the work involved in developing the Action Plan have helped identify key issues, objectives and potential interventions, which if implemented can help the area maximise its potential.

These are summarised within the delivery plan overleaf:

Theme 1: Identity, Sense of Place and the Streetscene

AIM	WHAT WE COULD ACHIEVE TOGETHER.....	HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE IT.....	BY WHEN & BY WHOM
<p>Improving the environmental quality and provide an interesting and active streetscene</p>	<p>A cleaner, greener and more attractive Eastham</p> <p>High quality shop fronts, signage and conversions throughout the centre</p> <p>Encourage locals to make short trips to the centre on foot or by bike to reduce traffic congestion</p>	<p>Increase frequency of waste collection in respect of the numerous on street litter bins</p> <p>Encourage owners/landlords to ensure shop frontages are well maintained and “fit for purpose”</p> <p>Promote the Council’s Trader’s Toolkit to help preserve the character of the area</p> <p>Improved walking and cycling routes and better signage to the shopping area</p>	<p>Wirral Council/Biffa (by July 2015)</p> <p>Local traders/landlords (ongoing)</p> <p>Wirral Council/ traders/landlords (ongoing)</p> <p>Wirral Council (by March 2016)</p>

Theme 2: Retail and Services Offer

AIM	WHAT WE COULD ACHIEVE TOGETHER.....	HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE IT.....	BY WHEN & BY WHOM
A more vibrant and sustainable village	A diverse retail offer that can attract and retain customers all year round and resist loss to other areas	Consider the formation of a traders association/lead group to work together on improving the scope and attractiveness of Eastham	Traders/lead body (by Sept 2015)
	A more vibrant and visually attractive high street where people choose to shop	Existing and new businesses to be more responsive in identifying and meeting the retail/service needs of the local community i.e. need to attract niche businesses as necessary	Traders/lead body (ongoing)
		Encourage property owners/landlords to actively encourage new and appropriate businesses into empty units including temporary or “pop up” uses as necessary	Traders/lead body (ongoing)

Theme 3: Accessibility and Transport Links

AIM	WHAT WE COULD ACHIEVE TOGETHER.....	HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE IT.....	BY WHEN & BY WHOM
Improve visitors experience of the shopping area	Improve connectivity and accessibility for pedestrians between New Chester Rd and Mill Park Drive businesses	Review existing refuges/crossing points and investigate potential for the introduction of a pedestrian crossing on Eastham Rake	Wirral Council (by Dec 2016)
	Improve signage to shopping area from A41 corridor	Introduce directional signage to local shops from New Chester Rd	Wirral Council (by Dec 2015)

Theme 4: Local Events and Marketing Activities

AIM	WHAT WE COULD ACHIEVE TOGETHER.....	HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE IT.....	BY WHEN & BY WHOM
Increase visitors and spend to Eastham	A lively, interesting and useable retail area with improved vitality and providing a better visitor experience for shoppers	<p>In conjunction with new traders association/lead group consider the introduction of a range of incentives to promote the retail offer- 'shop local', loyalty cards etc.</p> <p>Introduce totem or monolith signage to promote the range of businesses and services on offer</p> <p>Proactive use of existing websites and social media to promote community events and activities to encourage linked trips</p>	<p>Traders/lead body (by Dec 2015)</p> <p>Traders/lead body (by March 2016)</p> <p>Traders/Eastham Community Forum (ongoing)</p>

4. KEY CONTACTS AND SUPPORT

Wirral Council

Neil Mitchell (Regeneration Team) – 0151 691 8423 / neilmitchell@wirral.gov.uk

Fergus Adams (Constituency Manager – Wirral South) - 0151 691 8428 / fergusadams@wirral.gov.uk

The Wirral Events Advisory Group acts as a one stop shop to provide organizers of public events in Wirral with appropriate advice and guidance to enable events to take place safely. Tel 0151 691 8269 or e-mail events@wirral.gov.uk for advice and a free copy of the guide *Organising Public Events in Wirral*.

Useful websites

Association of Town Centre Management - www.atcm.org

100 Ways - www.100ways.org.uk/

British Retail Consortium – www.brc.org.uk

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills - www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-innovation-skills

Department for Communities and Local Government - www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government

Design Council www.designcouncil.org.uk/

Sustrans – www.sustrans.org.uk

All Council services (including lists of Ward Councillors) – www.wirral.gov.uk

Other local websites and contacts of interest:

Eastham Community Forum – www.easthamcommunityforum.net

Delamere Community Centre – www.delamerecentre.org.uk