Ribble Valley Borough Council

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RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

SERVICE CENTRE HEALTH CHECKS

SEPTEMBER 2021

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1 Introduction

1.1 This report provides a review of the three main retail service centres (town centres) within the Borough of Ribble Valley, undertaken to provide evidence to underpin and inform the Council's upcoming Local Plan review. 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 This report serves to update the position of the previous health check published in 2018 to provide up-to-date, relevant data and analysis to inform decision-making. This is especially important given the changing landscape of retailing within the town centre, which since the last review has been impacted by 3 primary factors which are considered in section 2.0. These include:

- Impacts arising from the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and ongoing recovery
- Changes to Use Classes and national policy on town centre uses
- Continuing wider trends regarding retailing and consumer habits

1.3 The NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should plan positively as part of a responsibility *to 'support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities'*[1]. This includes recognising opportunities 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. 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 towards growth, management and adaptation.

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. This 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.

1.5 These issues are especially pertinent amidst the ongoing recovery from the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. Ongoing monitoring within the Council has provided some insight as to the impacts of several 'lockdowns', as well as how the high street appears to be recovering and

[1] National Planning Policy Framework, 2021. *'7. Ensuring the vitality of town centres',* available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

any lasting impacts. Therefore, this timely review of the service centres within the Ribble Valley not only provides information on the current landscape of our town centres but also adds to the datasets held which help to track the recovery of the high street within the Ribble Valley.

1.6 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 62,000[2]. The catchment areas to these destinations in the wider region are limited by the catchments of regional centres in neighbouring districts such as Blackburn and Preston.

1.7 Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley, like other centres nationally, 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 easily accessible to the population, including retail, employment, leisure as well 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.

1.8 This Health Check assessment of the three primary service centres within the borough forms part of the evidence base for policies and proposals in the upcoming 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.

[2] ONS, 2021. *'Mid-year Population Estimates, June 2020'*, Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2020

2 Overview & Methodology

2.1 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 The NPPG suggests thirteen indicators of relevance that local planning authorities can use to assess the health of town centres. These NPPG indicators include:

- *Diversity of uses*
- *Proportion of vacant street level property*
- *Commercial yields on non-domestic property*[3]
- *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*
- *Balance between independent and multiple stores*
- *Extent to which there is evidence of barriers to new businesses opening and existing businesses expanding*
- *Opening hours/availability/extent to which there is an evening and night-time economy offer*[4]

[3] *At the time of publication, no data was available to accurately assess this indicator. Future monitoring will look to assess this indicator as and when it becomes possible.*
[4] National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG), 2021. *‘Town Centres and Retail’*, Available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-the-vitality-of-town-centres

These indicators provide a relevant and useful basis to measure both the health of the centres and the potential future impact of proposed retail and other commercial development in the borough.

2.4 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 time?).

2.5 There is 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, 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 a 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.

2.6 Technology has been a key driver of this change. The internet has become far more accessible and user friendly, providing a diverse choice in terms of goods, brands and even payment methods, all of which are likely to continue expanding. Retailers will have to compete harder in order to counter the increase in online shopping by marketing 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, which means maintaining a focus on face-to-face service and opportunities for socialising.

2.7 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.

2.8 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 a centre. 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.

2.9 On vitality and viability, the NPPF states that planning policies should:

"Promote their (town centres) long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters" [1]

2.10 A further circumstance to which town centres have had to adapt to has been presented through the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to contain the virus attempts were made to prevent as much interaction between individuals as possible, which meant actively discouraging high street shopping through the closure of all non-essential shops. This, combined with the more persistent changes to shopping habits has led some to fear that the long-term shift away from town centre shopping and retailing has been accelerated[5]. As a result, this study is set in the background of several steps taken to encourage shoppers to return to the town centre, as well as re-imagining the use of town centres as they recover.

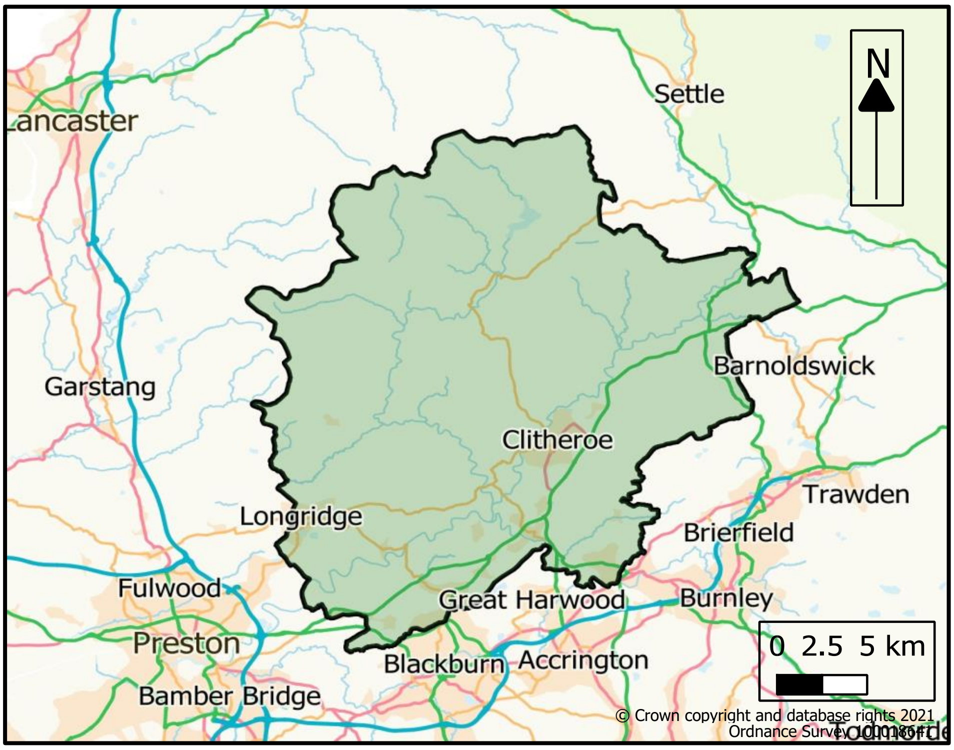
2.11 As well as outlet data, this health check will monitor the 'diversity mix' of each centre by number of units under the 'health balance' categories: Convenience, Comparison, Catering, Services, Vacancies and Miscellaneous. In future, these can be benchmarked wherever possible to measure the performance of each town centre against other town centres of similar size and characteristics as well as data from previous studies.

[5] Local Government Association (LGA), 2020. '*The future of the High Street, House of Commons, 10 December 2020'.* Available at: https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/future-high-street-house-commons-10-december-2020

3 Service Centre Profiles

3.1 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 other Central Lancashire towns. It comprises numerous picturesque villages, but has three primary settlements which are Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. The north of Ribble Valley reaches as far north as Lancaster, with Yorkshire to the east, though features no major built up areas.

3.2 Map 1 below shows the location of Ribble Valleys' three service centres. 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.



Map 1: Map outlining the extent of the Ribble Valley and its geographical context.

3.3 As the main market town within Ribble Valley, Clitheroe is identified as a key service centre. Situated 10 miles north of Blackburn and 20 miles northeast of Preston, it is the largest town in the borough with an estimated population of over 16,000 people[6]. The town centre also serves a wide catchment population from its rural hinterlands, drawing residents from nearby Chatburn, Sabden and Waddington.

[6] ONS, 2019. *'Parish population estimates for mid-2001 to mid-2019 based on best-fitting of output areas to parishes',* Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/12324parishpopulationestimatesformid2001tomid2019basedonbestfittingofoutputareastoparishes

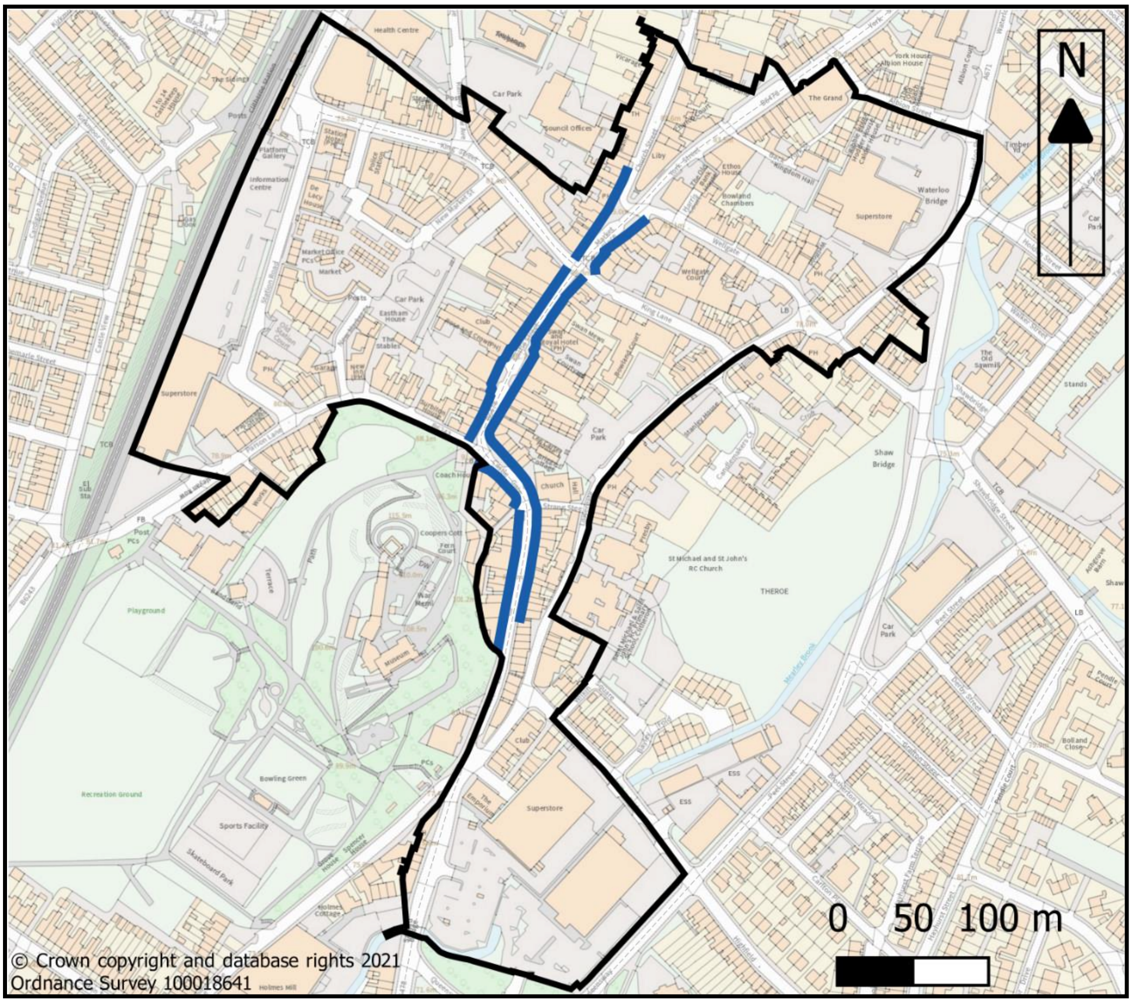
3.4 Clitheroe is a traditional market town, originally built around a 12th century Norman Castle. The town expanded rapidly amidst the growth of the cotton industry in the 18th and 19th centuries, however, local industry is now largely based on cement, clothing, and advanced manufacturing.

3.5 Retailing in Clitheroe town centre is mainly centred around Castle Street, King Street, Moor Lane and Wellgate, though has expanded to more peripheral areas of the town in recent years. The market is located off New Market Street and is generally held three times a week - Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Other features and attractions include a higher-than-average selection of independent and specialist retailers, a good variety of food and drink establishments, as well as the Castle and surrounding grounds.

3.6 Clitheroe has a range of leisure and tourist facilities, although some of which are located out-of-centre. Within the town centre are The Grand Theatre and Arts Venue (which hosts events including theatre, music, film as well as other community and cultural activities) as well as Clitheroe Castle and Museum (which houses both permanent collections and special exhibitions). More recently the Holmes Mill leisure complex, featuring a beer hall, brewery, hotel, food hall and other facilities, and the smaller Platform Art Gallery have provided additional services.

3.7 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. This particular consumer behaviour is encouraged by the area's close proximity to the M65 motorway and direct rail links extending as far as Manchester. Due to its location and catchment population however, Clitheroe town centre has so far been 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, despite the centre not traditionally being a major office location.

3.8 Map 2 opposite outlines the Clitheroe study area, showing the town centre boundary as well as the designation of principal shopping frontage as determined in the adopted HED-DPD: -

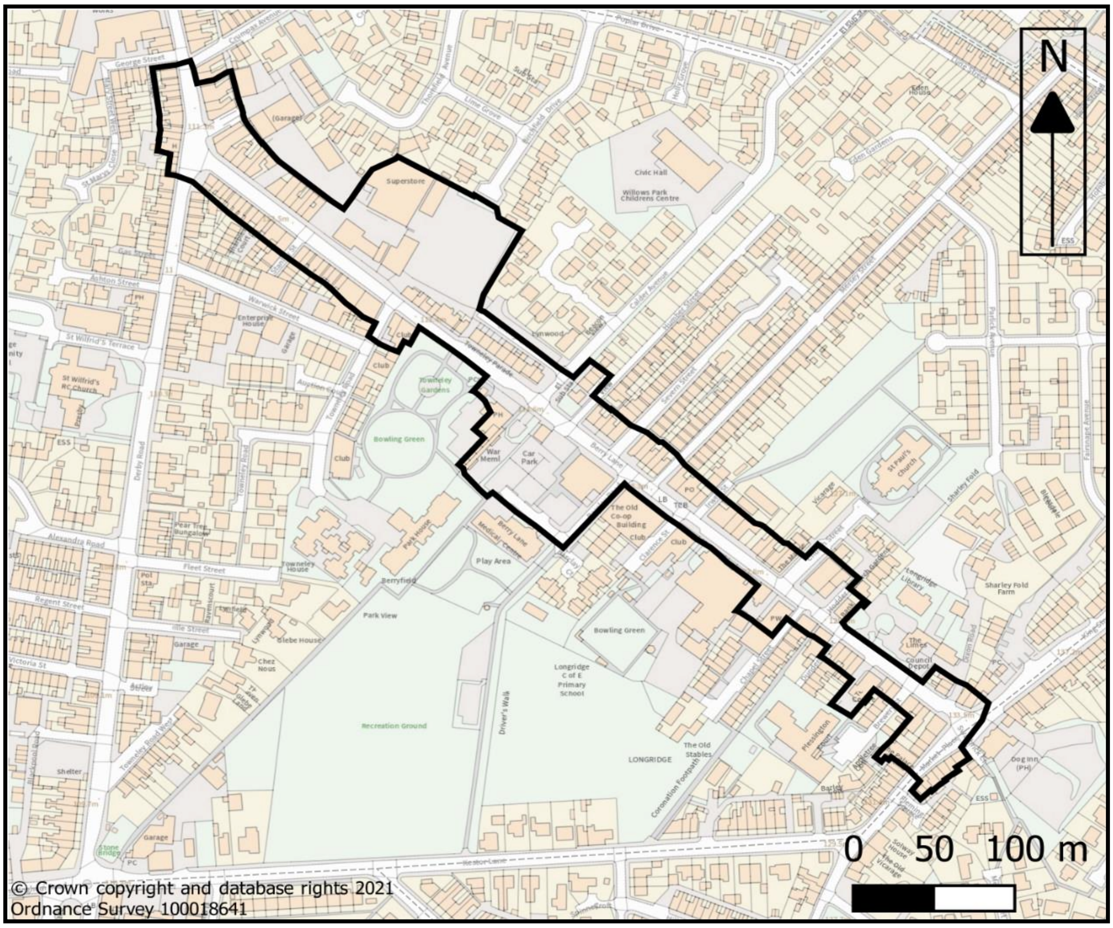


Map 2: A Map demonstrating the town centre boundary of Clitheroe, and extent of the area of principal shopping frontage (blue).

3.9 Longridge is the second largest town in the Ribble Valley with a population of approximately 8,200. 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 including Ribchester and Chipping. Additionally, recent new housing developments in the nearby area are resulting in the town having a larger catchment population than the settlement itself.

3.10 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.

3.11 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 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 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: -

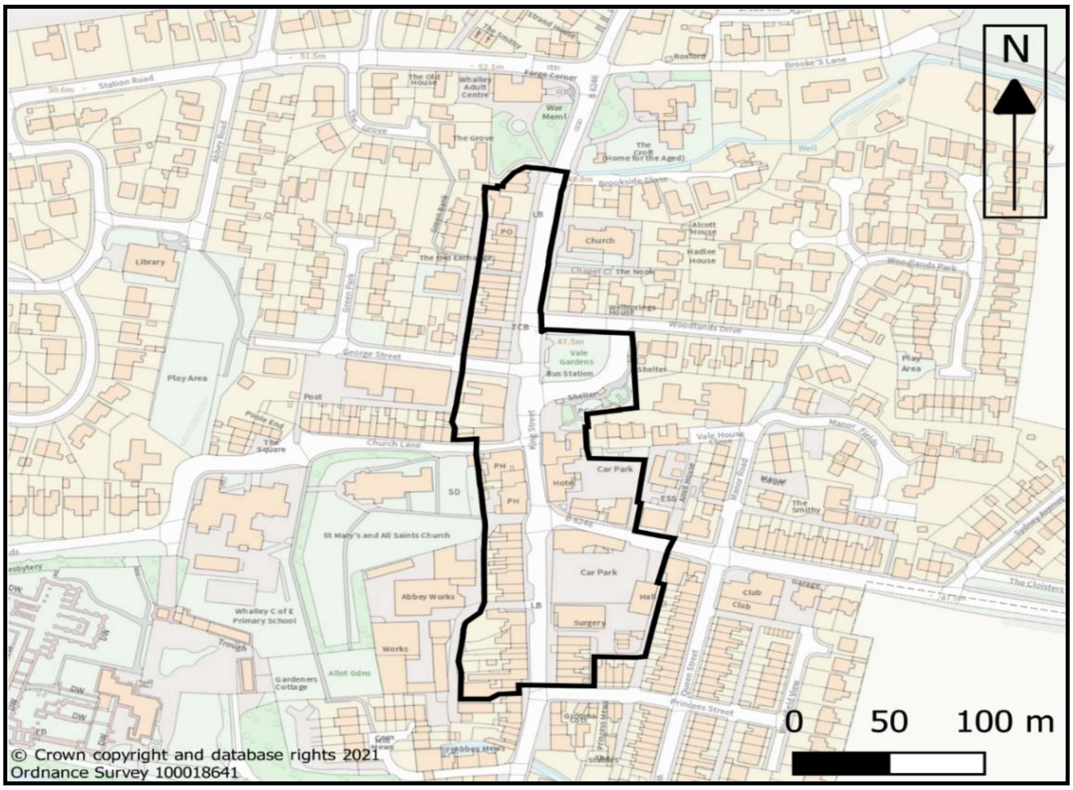


Map 3: Outline of Longridge town centre and study area.

3.12 As the remaining service centre, Whalley has a population of approximately 4000 which is also growing as a result of new housing developments in the area. 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 a good level of retail and service provision.

3.13 Whalley grew significantly around the Abbey and expanded to nearly 12,000 people in the 19th century. The population has since declined following the demise of the weaving and quarrying industries in the surrounding area, and more recently agriculture. As with 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 convenient destinations. Despite this, Whalley maintains a distinctive, historic character with a particularly vibrant local high street which remains an attraction to local residents and tourists. Retailing in Whalley is focused on King Street, with key attractions including 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.

3.14 Map 4 below presents a map of Whalley, outlining the extent of the town centre boundary within the context of its surroundings: -



Map 4: Whalley town centre boundary and area of study.

4. Health Check Analysis

4.1 Diversity of Uses

4.1.1 The following section provides a breakdown of retail uses by goods or service type for each of the town centres. The primary purpose of this indicator is to monitor amount and type of uses in town centre areas to inform planning policies relating to meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office, and other town centre uses in accordance with Paragraph 86 of the NPPF. The table below highlights the diversity across different uses within each of the centres.

Categories of Retail Use	
Sector	**Types of units included**
Convenience	Food shops - butchers, bakers, fruit & veg, fish, supermarkets.
Comparison	Clothing, chemists, furniture, DIY, Books/news, electrical, jewellery, Post Office
Catering	Restaurants, cafés, takeaways, pubs.
Services – A2	Banks and building societies, finance, insurance, estate agents, solicitors
Services - Other	Repairers, taxi, travel agents, hairdressing, funeral, dental care, health
Other	Employment services, careers, community facilities,

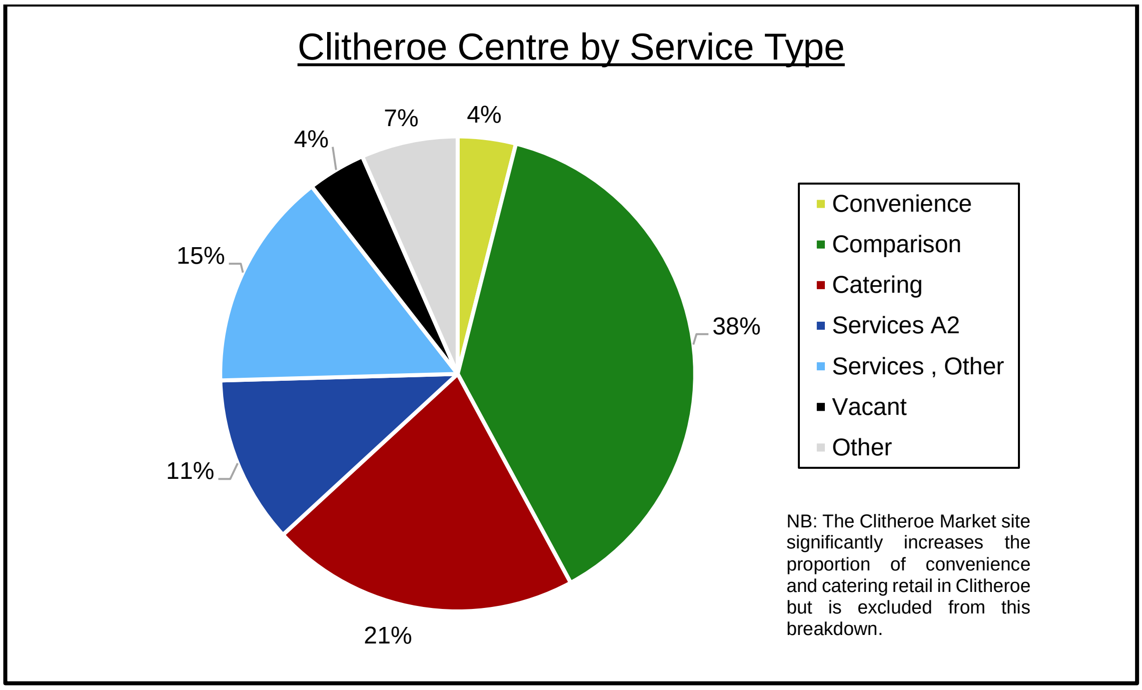
Table 1: Breakdown of categories used for the analysis of retail diversity within Ribble Valley service centres.

	Clitheroe		**Longridge**		**Whalley**	
	Unit Count	Percentage	Unit Count	Percentage	Unit Count	Percentage
Convenience	9	**4**	8	**8**	4	**7**
Comparison	87	**38**	36	**34**	17	**31**
Catering	48	**21**	25	**24**	16	**29**
Services - A2	26	**11**	9	**8**	3	**5**
Services - Other	34	**15**	22	**21**	12	**22**
Other	15	**7**	5	**5**	2	**4**
Vacant	9	**4**	0	**0**	1	**2**
TOTAL	228	**100**	105	**100**	55	**100**

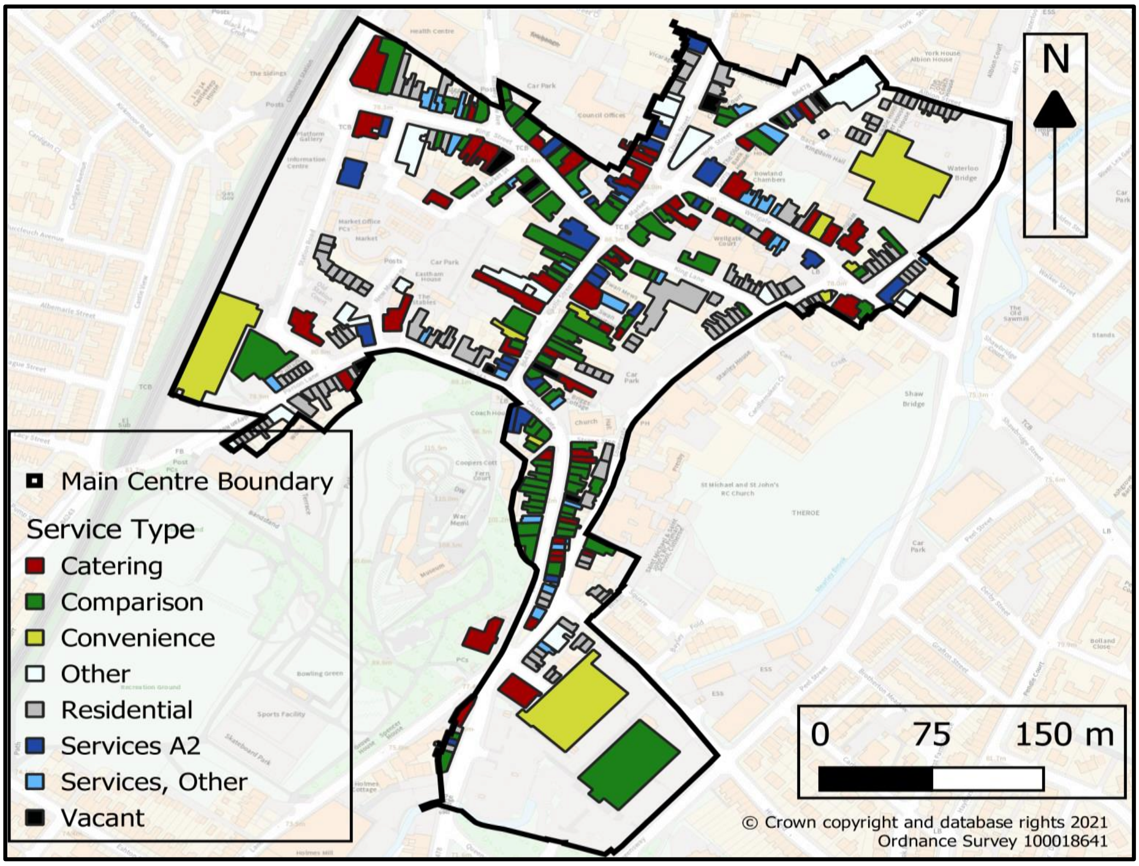
Table 2: Outcome of retail use surveys for the three service centres within the Ribble Valley.

4.1.2 A breakdown of units by sector for each of the centres of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley is provided below:

4.1.3 Clitheroe



Graph 1: Pie Chart visualising the retail use split for Clitheroe.



Map 5: Retail units within Clitheroe categorised by use.

4.1.4 As the largest service centre within Ribble Valley, Table 2 shows that the number of town centre retail units within Clitheroe are more than double the number found in Longridge, and four times the number of units found in Whalley. Despite this, the mix of retail uses found within the centre still reflects a well-balanced and diverse local service centre.

4.1.5 Clitheroe offers the largest opportunity for comparison retail shopping within the borough both by unit count and as a proportion of total units within the centre. Comprising 38% of all retail uses within the town centre boundary, Clitheroe's comparison-shopping offer is higher than the national average but appears to be sustainable given the very low percentage of vacant retail units. A high provision of any service type can create issues where multiple shops compete to sell similar goods and services, but in Clitheroe the comparison retail offer is diverse and as such businesses are able to compete positively within the town.

4.1.6 Perhaps as a result of this large comparison retail offer, Clitheroe has proportionately lower levels of Convenience, Catering and 'Services – Other' units than in Longridge and Whalley centres. Despite comprising just 4% of retail uses within the centre, Convenience retail here is supported by the Clitheroe Market on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On market days the convenience offer within Clitheroe is significantly increased, with 41 outdoor cabins offering high quality, local produce which accommodates for the lower proportionate convenience retail offer. Notwithstanding the role of Clitheroe market, the floorspace provided through the 9 units in Clitheroe is still far larger than in other centres and underlines the importance of floorspace as a consideration alongside the raw number of units.

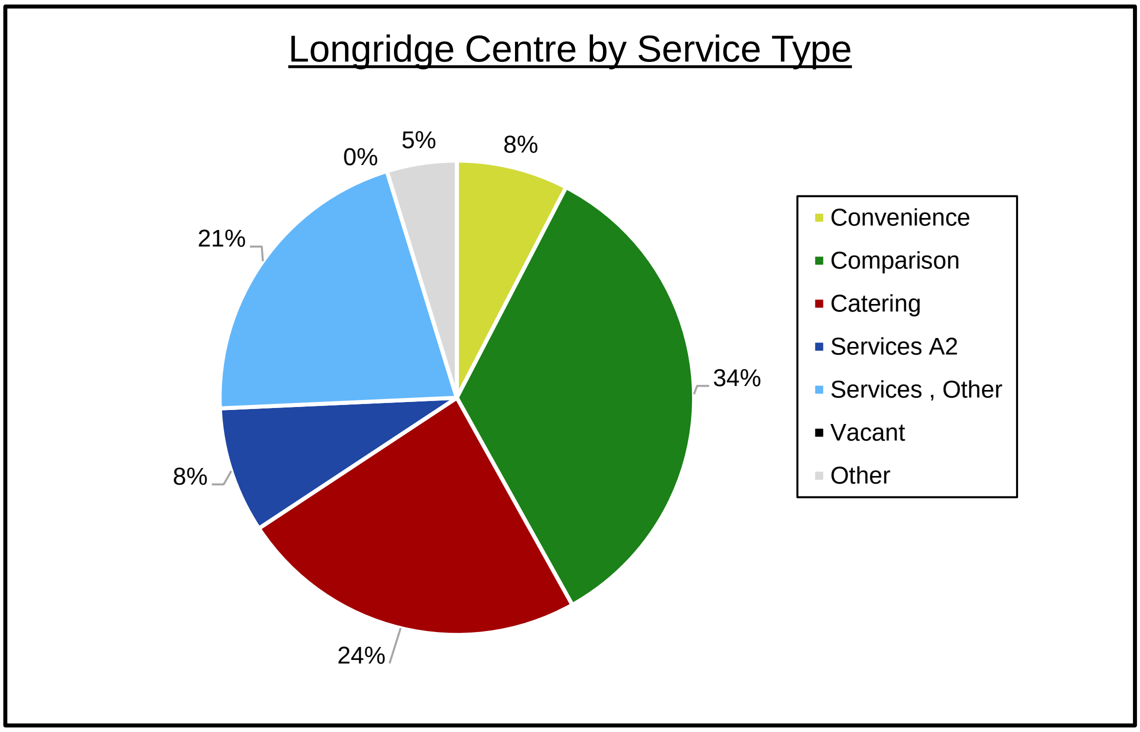
4.1.7 In addition, recent years also have seen the introduction of new retail developments around the town centre focussed on convenience and catering retail. Firstly, Lidl supermarkets opened in August 2011 on Shawbridge Street in Clitheroe and Aldi's new 5,635 sq. ft. store in Clitheroe opened in late 2015, complimented by a Pets at Home store on the same site. In addition, the Holmes Mill complex is set on a grade II listed site adjacent to Clitheroe Town Centre which was bought by James' Places group in 2015 to redevelop the former derelict textile mill. The redevelopment of the Holmes Mill complex includes the Bowland Brewery and Beer Hall, a new 40-bedroom boutique hotel, offices and multi-use function rooms, Bistro and Cinema, contributing to the local leisure and visitor economy.

4.1.8 These developments have further assisted the provision of retail opportunities within Clitheroe, helping to retain and enhance retail spend whilst strengthening the local economy. Edge-of-centre retail sites can sometimes be of detriment to local centres if they are at the wrong scale or poorly integrated alongside other local services, however, the Council has not seen any such effects within Clitheroe.

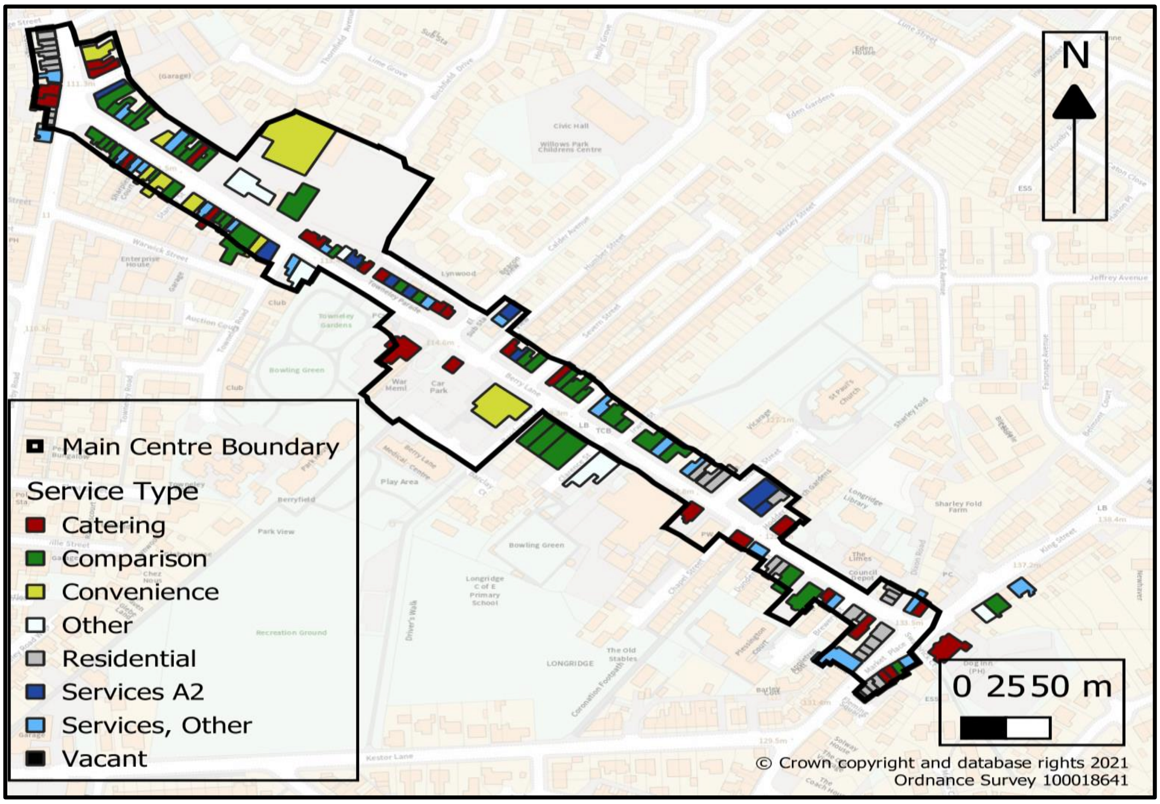
4.1.9 Longridge

4.1.10 Despite having a much smaller centre, Longridge maintains a similar diversity mix of retail units which is most closely aligned to the national average. Comparison retail uses are again most predominant, with catering, hairdressers, and other health-related services also well represented.

4.1.11 Longridge is the largest provider of convenience retail outlets as a proportion of total units within the centre, comprising 8% of retail use within the town. This is just 1 percent below the national average, however, an observation of the 8 convenience units within the centre shows that floorspace may still be minimal. Though this includes a Booths supermarket and smaller co-op store, other units are small and provide few lines of produce. The Sainsburys store to the north of the town centre has provided a significant increase to this, though is outside of the town centre and therefore not within the scope of this analysis. Though outside of the Ribble Valley borough, an Aldi store has opened adjacent to Longridge settlement and borough boundary but its close proximity to the town centre may have consequences for workforce flows as well as local shopping habits.



Graph 2: Chart demonstrating the proportionate split of retail uses within Longridge.



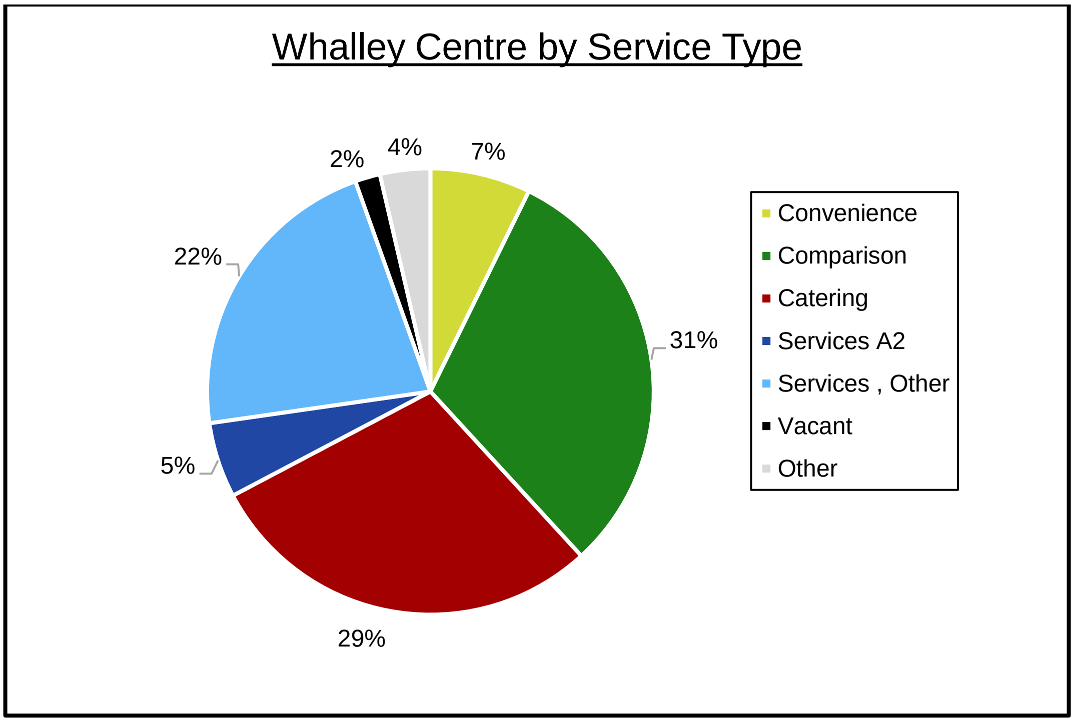
Map 6: Map demonstrating the spatial layout of retail uses within Longridge.

4.1.12 Whalley

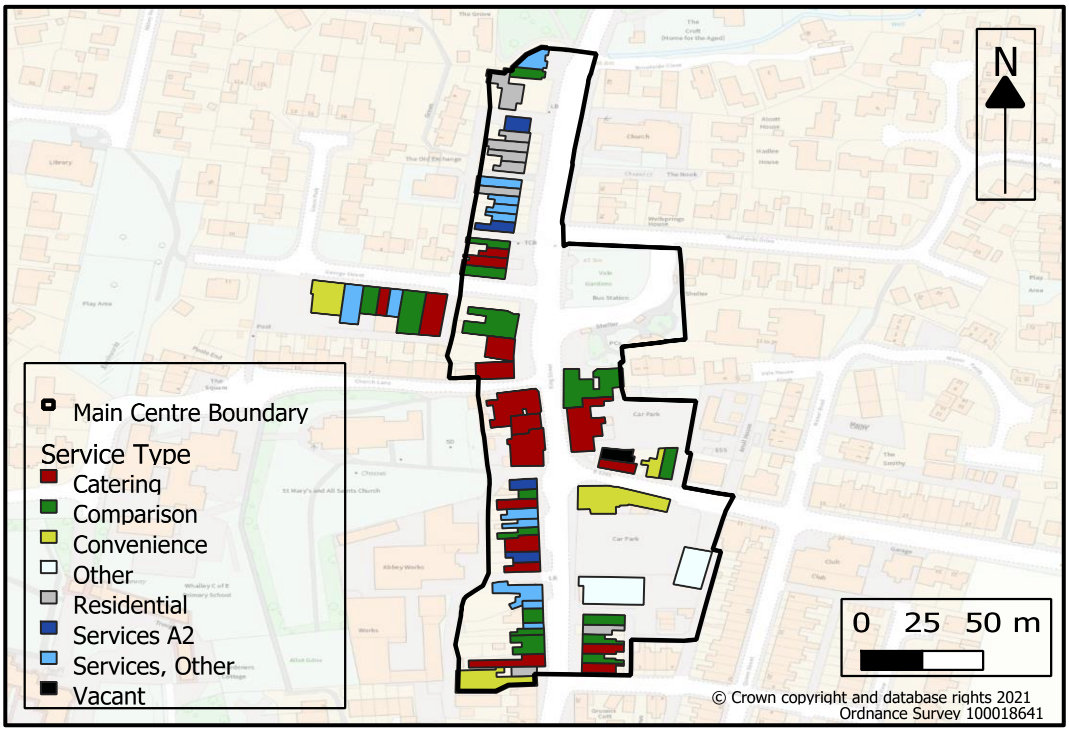
4.1.13 With just 55 units, Whalley was recorded as the smallest service centre of the three in this study. This makes it more susceptible to smaller changes in representation affecting the proportionate share of a particular retail use, but despite this maintains a diversity mix closely aligned to the national average. Again comparison retail is most well represented with catering retail services occupying 29 percent, which comes as no surprise given its reputation for a high quality, diverse offering of pubs, bars and restaurants.

4.1.14 Whalley also offers a wide range of hair and beauty salons, as well as other health and miscellaneous services which make up 22% of the retail units within the centre. The map opposite shows that the centre has naturally evolved to offer services within a number of retail categories beyond the town centre boundary and may be an indication of the increase in demand for services within Whalley as the village and its catchment expands.

4.1.15 An important outcome of this analysis for Whalley is the level of convenience retail shown within the centre. This was found to be low at the time of the publication of the Core Strategy, and 250 sq. metres was allocated within the centre for convenience retail use. This has been met with the opening of the co-op store, however, the catchment area of this service centre has continued to grow due to housing development in the area. Extant permissions within the settlement and parish amount to an extra 276 dwellings to be delivered as at March 2021, which may put some pressure on local services. The impacts of this must be monitored and mitigated where necessary and possible. Notwithstanding this consideration, convenience retail uses as a proportion of total retail units remains close to the national average.



Graph 3: Breakdown of proportionate retail use within Whalley.



Map 7: Whalley town centre retail units categorised by use.

4.2 Retailer Representation and Balance

4.2.1 A key component of ensuring service centre vitality is a good balance between independent and chain stores. Multi-store, national retailers can attract people to town centres with a reliable and high-quality retail offer, but the success of these brands is often to the detriment of local business. Independent stores can offer local produce at competitive prices, and their growth often better supports the local economy. The table below shows the outcome of monitoring for the three main service centres in regard to their occupier balance.

Balance between Independent and Chain Stores within Ribble Valley Service Centres						
Service Centre	Clitheroe		Longridge		Whalley	
Occupier Type	Chain	Independent	Chain	Independent	Chain	Independent
Number of Premises	28	191	9	96	6	48
Percentage	13%	**87%**	9%	**91%**	11%	**89%**

Table 3: Balance of independent and chain stores within service centres across all retail use types.

4.2.2 This data shows that the service centre with the highest number of national multiple retailers is in Clitheroe, which should be no surprise given it is the largest service centre within the borough. These retailers are predominantly within comparison retail and financial service sectors, but also include Tesco, Booths and Sainsburys supermarkets which provide goods across the spectrum of retail uses.

4.2.3 Whilst Clitheroe has a number of national multiple retailers present, it has a strong mix of independent retailers, several of which attract business from across the county. 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 and are further complimented by the independent traders operating on the market site. When these are considered, it is clear that Clitheroe benefits from positive impacts through both its chain and independent stores.

4.2.4 As smaller service centres both by floorspace and catchment area, Longridge and Whalley have a much-reduced chain store offering compared to Clitheroe. In Longridge and Whalley the majority of the chain stores present are within convenience and service retail sectors, with very little in the way of national retailer representation within comparison retail. Whilst this means that independent businesses are most prominent, shoppers within centres other than

Clitheroe are not able to shop for branded clothes or electrical goods effectively, and as a result they may travel to other centres.

4.2.5 Despite this, 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, but often the reason they are not present is either because there are no suitable retail premises available (modern, with a large floorplate), or it is not economically viable to maintain a store.

4.2.6 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. The following table presents a snapshot of some of the headline retailers present within service centres in the Ribble Valley.

National Retailer Brands	Clitheroe	Longridge	Whalley
Sainsbury	Yes	Yes	
Tesco	Yes		
Coop		Yes	Yes
Aldi	Yes	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		
Fat Face	Yes		

Table 4: Presence of selected national retailer brands within Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

4.3 Evening and Night-Time Economy (ENTE)

4.3.1 A more recent indicator added to Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) to assess service centre vitality and viability is the extent to which there is an evening and night-time economy offer. The ability for people to be able to visit local service centres for evening leisure activities is important as part of their long-term sustainability, especially given the prevalence of leisure and catering uses within Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

4.3.2 Despite being the smallest of the three service centres, Whalley has built up a large number of licenced premises which contribute to a lively evening and night-time economy. Within Whalley village there are 20 premises licenced to sell alcohol, of which 16 fall within the town centre boundary. This amounts to 29% of all retail units within Whalley, which is a higher proportionate share than both Clitheroe and Longridge. This has made the town an attractive place for local residents looking to spend an evening in the town, however, concerns have been raised regarding the proliferation of licenced premises authorised to sell alcohol within the area and the disturbance which may occur as a result. Therefore, despite Whalley's wide-ranging night-time economy offer, any future retail development or change of use should seek to ensure that there is no detriment to other constituent parts of town centre quality including environmental quality, safety and crime.

4.3.3 Clitheroe features a lower proportion of licenced premises but enjoys a more diverse evening economy offer. Though there are still a range of restaurants, bars and public houses, The Grand Venue offers a creative arts space where theatre, music, comedy and other family events are held. In addition, the recent Holmes Mill development features a café, Food and Beer Hall, Hotel and Cinema under one roof which creates an attractive leisure complex benefitting the night-time economy. Parts of the Holmes Mill complex are open as late as 11pm, with the centre's pubs also serving until as late as midnight at weekends, creating a strong offer which can compete with larger centres outside of the borough.

4.3.4 Of the three service centres, Longridge is the one which may have a reduced evening economy offer. The Palace Cinema was one of the oldest cinemas in the North West and was somewhat of a cornerstone for Longridge's evening and night-time economy appeal, however its closure in Summer 2021 due to circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted its evening economy. Longridge's town centre stretches the entire length of Berry Lane and this may also have an impact, as night-time venues are fragmented across a relatively large centre. In comparison with other centres, Longridge does not have the same strength of evening economy offer which Clitheroe and Whalley achieve and may benefit from additional evening leisure attractions within the centre.

4.4 Proportion of Vacant Units

4.4.1 The proportion of vacant street level property in a town centre is indicative of its health and performance. Though vacant units can always appear at any one time due to natural retail changes within a centre (known as the churn rate), vacancy rates provide a good indication of town centre health and the sustainability for retailers to maintain a physical presence on the high street. Vacancy rates peaked across all three service centres in 2010 following the recession but in recent years there has been a decrease in the number of vacant units and long-term vacancies have remained low.

4.4.2 Table 5 shows the results of monitoring undertaken to assess the level of vacancies within all three service centres. Comparing the results of this against data from August 2018, it is clear that the total number of town centre vacancies across all three centres remains stable. This is especially positive in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused severe increases in retail vacancies nationally due to forced closure and reduced high street footfall.

4.4.3 Information from the British Retail Consortium[7] reveals the average vacancy rate across all British town centres throughout Quarter 2 of 2021 was 14.5%. When compared to vacancy rates within the Ribble Valley for the same period, it is clear that local high streets within the borough perform consistently better than the national average. In Longridge no vacancies were recorded at the time of monitoring (August 2021), and in Whalley just 1 unit was noted as being vacant, amounting to just 2% of retail units within the centre. Clitheroe had a higher vacancy rate at 4%, though remains well below the national average and is consistent with previous results for the centre.

4.4.4 Compared to other rural centres this appears to be a healthy indication of the three service centres in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in a much higher vacancy rate in other high streets across the country. Reports have indicated that the effects of the pandemic have impacted chain stores more severely than independents[8], which may explain the low vacancy rates recorded given the limited presence of chain stores within Ribble Valley's service centres.

4.4.5 The low representation of national brands identified above 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. With zero and one vacancy respectively for Longridge and Whalley, it is clear that there are no issues from this perspective and no trends are identified.

[7] British Retail Consortium, 2021. *'One in Seven Shops Remain Shuttered', Available at:* *https://brc.org.uk/news/corporate-affairs/one-in-seven-shops-remain-shuttered/*
[8] BBC, 2020. *'Covid: Small shops better at surviving virus than big ones',* Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-54795486

4.4.6 In Clitheroe, table 5 presents a good example of natural retail cycles which can take place in centres with a higher proportion of units. Throughout the monitoring period May 2020 to August 2021, total vacancies were consistent at 10 units before falling to 9 during the most recent survey in August 2021. Despite this, an analysis of the units becoming vacant shows that 28 different premises have been vacant at any one time over the period, and 19 vacancies have been occupied. This is evidence of a buoyant local retail market where the high street offer is replenished and refreshed to meet changing consumer demands, as vacancies are quickly filled by businesses which acknowledge the benefit a high street presence in Clitheroe brings them.

Clitheroe				
Date	Total vacancies	New Additions	Continued vacancies from last survey	Vacancies in last survey now occupied
Aug-18	8	-	-	-
May-20	10	-	-	-
Oct-20	10	7	3	7
Mar-21	10	8	2	8
Aug-21	9	3	6	4
Longridge				
Date	Total vacancies	New Additions	Continued vacancies from last survey	Vacancies in last survey now occupied
Aug-18	2	-	-	-
Jun-20	4	-	-	-
Mar-21	1	1	0	3
Aug-21	0	0	0	1
Whalley				
Date	Total vacancies	New Additions	Continued vacancies	Vacancies in last survey now occupied
Aug-18	1	-	-	-
Jun-20	1	-	-	-
Mar-21	2	1	1	0
Aug-21	1	0	1	1

Table 5: Table demonstrating the results of vacancy surveys taken throughout 2020 to 2021 across the three main service centres of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

4.5 Pedestrian flows

4.5.1 Pedestrian flows are a useful indicator of movement density within town centres, providing relevant information for determining or reviewing primary and secondary frontages as well as identifying trends relevant to pedestrian accessibility. In combination with footfall data, this helps to visualise the way shoppers interact with the town centre in terms of the services they use and the walking routes they may take. The following table summarises the outcome of monitoring undertaken to observe footfall within Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley centres, data which can be viewed further in appendix 1.

Location		Average No. of Pedestrians per Hour*
Clitheroe	Market Place	405
	Market	375
	Castle Gates	692
Longridge	Outside Swifts Hardware	263
	Outside Library	82
Whalley	King Street	201

Table 6: Summarised footfall count data for the three service centres within the borough.
** Denotes averages taken from hourly footfall counts taken throughout May 2020 to August 2021.*

4.5.2 As the largest service centre within the borough, Clitheroe unsurprisingly maintains the highest levels of footfall. The busiest and most frequently used route within the town centre is between Moor Lane and Castle Street, which is where the majority of the centre's convenience and comparison shops are located. Reduced residential and non-retail uses protected by policy DMR1 of the Core Strategy enables a good continuation of the high street through these streets and further onto Market Place. Although recording the lowest footfall count within Clitheroe, Clitheroe Market is still well visited on market days and can itself have a higher flow of pedestrians than other service centres at peak shopping hours. Other locations experiencing a flow of pedestrians include King Street and Wellgate, though to lesser extents.

4.5.3 Within Longridge and Whalley pedestrian flows are more one dimensional, influenced primarily by their town centre form as shops are set along a single main road. In Whalley this is King Street, but more recently has also begun to experience a secondary flow of shoppers along George Street which has evolved to offer a mix of town centre uses. Berry Lane experiences the majority flow of pedestrians in Longridge, but often has much higher footfall towards the bottom of Berry Lane, closer to Inglewhite Road.

4.5.4 Generally, all three service centres are well visited relative to their size and service offering, and appendix 1 shows that these footfall counts have recovered well from the lockdown measures imposed throughout 2020. Without any covered shopping parades all centres within the borough, all three service centres remain somewhat dependent on good weather for consistent levels of footfall, though the level of service provision from Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley compared to other villages in the borough mean that they still manage to maintain a solid baseline level of shoppers.

4.6 Commercial rents

4.6.1 Commercial rents for retail 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 commercial rents within the Ribble Valley can offer competitive rents with other comparable town centre locations outside Ribble Valley. The following table demonstrates commercial rents within the three service centres within the Ribble Valley as advertised in August 2021[9].

	Clitheroe	Longridge	Whalley
Number of Advertised Retail Units	6	1	1
Average Cost (£ Sq. Ft. Pa)	19.24	16.57	45.18

Table 7: Assessment of retail units available for rent within service centres.

4.6.2 Figures derived from an evaluation of currently listed commercial retail properties for rent show that Clitheroe and Longridge centres compare well with other centres of a similar size and occupation level. Lower commercial rents do appear in geographically local centres such as Blackburn, Burnley, and Accrington, but these locations generally experience an oversupply of retail floorspace and consequently a higher proportion of vacant retail premises which can supress market values.

4.6.3 Within Clitheroe, principal high street locations such as King Street and Market Place can command the highest commercial rents, primarily influenced by their central location within common pedestrian flow routes. Despite this, a high level of occupation suggests these rates remain competitive to other centres in the context of current consumer spending and footfall within the centre. The same trend is seen within Longridge where Berry Lane is the prominent shopping location. Whalley has consistently low levels of vacant retail property and its relatively smaller high street results in higher rental prices. Despite this, the only attainable figure for commercial rent within Whalley is for just one premise and as such should be viewed with caution when commercial rents within that particular service centre is considered. Further monitoring will be undertaken on this issue to ascertain changes and trends as they occur.

[9] Commercial Rents taken from data on Zoopla website on 16/08/2021.

4.7 Barriers to Entry and Expansion

4.7.1 To prove long-term viability, centres must be able to continue to provide for the needs of existing retailers whilst simultaneously incorporating new businesses. This includes the ability for retailers to acquire new floorspace whether that is through the extension of existing units, the acquisition of other available premises or the development of new units. Failure to do this can impact not only the viability of a centre but also its vitality, as a result of a failure to provide the conditions which promote a diverse and active retail environment.

4.7.2 Barriers to entry and expansion can take many different forms, but perhaps most relevant for the three primary service centres within the Ribble Valley is the availability of space for town centre expansion. The growth of edge-of-centre sites within Clitheroe suggests that capacity within the town centre itself is limited, and room for expansion for existing businesses is difficult to find. Despite this, the consequences of retail 'churn' within Clitheroe means that opportunities for new businesses to gain a physical town centre presence still exist. As such, for town centre retailers looking to expand their options are often to either relocate to larger retail units where and when they are vacated, or to move to edge of centre sites with more scope for future expansion. Notwithstanding this, commercial rents are low enough within Clitheroe and as such do not act as a strong barrier for those looking to rent premises so long as they can find a suitable site.

4.7.3 The market site in Clitheroe has been identified as a site for retail growth within the town as part of wider redevelopment and regeneration, and at this point the site remains a designation within the adopted Core Strategy and Housing and Economic Development, Development Plan Document.

4.7.4 Whalley provides a good example of natural town centre expansion to accommodate a higher need for goods and services. Within map 7, it is clear that whilst King Street has been and continues to be the primary shopping street within the town, George Street has been subject to several successful planning applications which have diversified the retail uses found within the centre, albeit adjacent to the town centre boundary. Despite this example of natural growth within the centre, it is difficult to imagine where any further expansion is possible within Whalley due to the layout of its roads and buildings. Further to this, any substantial growth may not only change the atmosphere of the centre but require further public amenities such as car parking which is already a constraint on the centre.

4.7.5 Aside from expansion, Whalley is also one of the harder town centres to enter for businesses looking to secure a high street presence. Commercial rents appear highest out of all three centres, and business rates can also be high. Despite this, good levels of footfall and consumer spending mean that a high street presence can still be extremely profitable, resulting in a low vacancy rate within the service centre.

4.7.6 In comparison, commercial properties can be cheaper to buy and rent in Longridge than Whalley and in this regard is an easier retail market to enter, even despite a low number of vacancies arising. For existing businesses with a high street presence who are looking to expand, they will likely encounter the same issues as in Whalley and Clitheroe where space for expansion is minimal. With this in mind, the best option for some has been to take up premises on edge-of-centre locations.

4.8 Accessibility

4.8.1 When considering the accessibility of the three service centres within the borough it is notable that the centres are often bound by their innate built form and general layout which can cause both traffic and pedestrian congestion. Narrow footpaths and a close proximity to traffic flows directed through Clitheroe and Whalley centres can lead to a sense that the car is dominant, though both remain accessible for those walking within the centre and remain a natural focus.

4.8.2 In Clitheroe, access to the Town Centre for cars is reasonably good, with the main road network facilitating access from all directions. A one-way system is in place through the centre of the town to ease traffic, however, traffic congestion can be a problem at peak hours. Car parks are relatively convenient and well distributed around the Town Centre, with some of the town centre car parks owned and operated by retailers such as Booths, Sainsbury's and Tesco as well as the Council. Whilst those owned by retailers are intended for store customers' use, they also offer up to 2 hours free parking where there is evidence of people using these facilities to make combined trips to other shops. This aside, car parking has previously been 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.

4.8.3 Accessing Clitheroe Town Centre on foot or bicycle is relatively easy from all directions. Though there are no pedestrianised streets, a common route of access is through the castle grounds which is free from traffic. Some cycling infrastructure does exist with places to lock or store bicycles, but there is little in the way of dedicated cycle paths or lanes. Clitheroe's residential areas are within easy walking or cycling distance of the town centre, however, some busy roads around the town centre and roundabout junctions on approach from many directions may discourage some pedestrians and cyclists making trips to the centre.

4.8.4 In terms of rail access, Clitheroe Interchange provides an hourly direct service to Blackburn and through to Manchester, calling at Whalley, Langho and Ramsgreave within Ribble Valley. In addition, the ongoing *'Clitheroe to Hellifield Restoring Your Railways Ideas Fund',* hopes to reopen the Clitheroe to Hellifield rail line and open up public rail transport from the Ribble Valley to Yorkshire. This expansion of the rail network from Clitheroe to other parts of the area may present an opportunity to widen accessibility to the town, potentially establishing a new route for commuters as well as tourists.

4.8.9 Clitheroe Interchange, originally developed in 2000 to improve the usability of public transport, provides a public transport hub with further Bus and Taxi services. 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. Despite this, bus provision is better than in other rural towns of a similar size and compliments travel by rail by allowing access to more remote and rural villages within Ribble Valley.

4.8.10 Longridge town centre is relatively easy to access, although the centre is located almost entirely on Berry Lane which is on a hill. As a result, this could be potentially challenging for some disabled or elderly users or those with young children and is a problem difficult to alleviate. 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 covered areas with shops in the centre and pavements seem adequately maintained, unobstructed and shoppers are able to move about freely. Transport accessibility is fairly good, with good bus routes to other parts of the borough as well as to neighbouring Preston. By car, the M6 motorway is within 20 minutes' drive towards the west, with Clitheroe a similar distance to the east. Despite a close proximity to these locations, access is predominantly along country lanes which can struggle to withhold the flows of traffic seen at peak times.

4.8.11 Provision of car parking within Longridge is less than in Clitheroe but has improved. Booths operates a large supermarket premises on Berry Lane adjacent to a petrol filling station and includes a large car park behind Townley Terrace. In addition, a smaller short stay car park also exists further along Berry Lane behind the Co-op store. At peak times these car parks can become full, and residents then face parking along residential side streets adjacent to the centre which can be inconvenient.

4.8.12 In Whalley, access to the Town Centre for cars is reasonably good, with the main road network facilitating access from all directions. Traffic congestion can be a problem on King Street during peak times, however, a new through road to be built as part of the Lawsonsteads development between Clitheroe Road and the A671 to the North-East of the centre will relieve some of this pressure.

4.8.13 As with Clitheroe, car parking is 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 (e.g. cheaper or free parking). There is on-street car parking along King Street but this can easily become fully occupied early in the day making shoppers use neighbouring streets, which has the potential to inconvenience residents. In addition, parking manoeuvres during peak hours along King Street can often cause traffic congestion and frustrate those trying to travel through the centre.

4.9 Environmental Quality

4.9.1 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. Despite this, concerns have been raised regarding the quality and appearance of pavements along primary shopping streets within Clitheroe. All three centres contain a variety of traditional buildings with some quality frontages and attractive historic buildings; though their historic nature is also their downfall in certain locations. Within all three centres space for pedestrians can feel restricted by the historic layout of buildings within the centre, many of which are listed. As a result, a balance must be struck between protecting historic assets and the atmosphere of a centre, whilst providing adequate space for traffic and pedestrians.

4.9.2 Traffic movements at peak times within all three centres can diminish the visitor experience, although on-street car parking distances traffic flows within the three centres and helps to mitigate this impact. In Clitheroe, a 'Town Team' has been created to address a range of issues including the physical quality of the high street. In addition, a bid submitted to the Levelling Up Fund in 2021 titled 'Levelling up Longridge' incorporates environmental quality through its strategic objectives, proposing public realm improvements to improve the relationship between pedestrians, the high street and flows of traffic. Public engagement with these aims has been positive and shows the importance in considering environmental quality as an important part of all three service centres.

4.9.3 With this in mind, the general standard of cleanliness is high within all three centres, with very little evidence of litter, flyposting or graffiti. This helps to provide a pleasant environment for shoppers and visitors and enhancing the townscape quality of the centre.

4.10 Safety and Crime

4.10.1 In relation to safety and crime in the borough, Ribble Valley has relatively low levels of recorded crime. Town centres are often highest on the list of reported incidents in any Local Authority area, and Ribble Valley is no different. However, statistics show that the occurrence of crime is at a much smaller scale throughout the borough compared to local and national figures[10]. In the past, surveys have found generally good perceptions of personal safety amongst residents and visitors across all three service centres.

4.10.2 In 2021 a youth hub set within the grounds of Whalley Abbey was established in response to concerns raised regarding anti-social behaviour in the area. The hub provides a place for young people to meet and engage in positive activity and has had success in reducing reports of

[10] ONS, 2021. '*Recorded Crime Data by Community Safety Partnership 2020-21',* Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/recordedcrimedatabycommunitysafetypartnershiparea

disturbance in the area, providing an example of collaboration between local stakeholders to reduce crime and promote local cohesion. The success of this local initiative is positive for Whalley as a service centre and may present a template which other areas may wish to use in order to address similar concerns where they may arise.

5. Summary & Conclusions

Clitheroe

5.1 This assessment has found Clitheroe to perform well in the various aspects of town centre retailing. Retailer representation is good and well balanced, with a positive variety of goods and services on offer which consumers can depend on daily. Though the proportion of convenience retail use is low, floorspace provision within this retail category continues to be suitable. Clitheroe has a good night-time economy offer which prevents the need for local residents to travel to other destinations, and even draws others from neighbouring towns and districts. Commercial rents remain competitive, premises are sought after, and the low proportion of vacancies suggest they are also profitable. From these perspectives there are no concerns to note, and the service centre remains sustainable with great connectivity to neighbouring towns and villages within the borough and in neighbouring areas. Further work regarding the uplift of this centre specifically may consider environmental quality, and the opportunities to improve the public realm along primary shopping streets.

Longridge

5.2 Longridge has responded well to local development and recent increases in its catchment area, providing a similar retailing experience to Clitheroe in terms of the volume and variety of service offering. Vacancy rates are improved from recent years which is positive, however, the centre still lacks a strong retail core due to being spread in a linear nature along Berry Lane, which also reduces mobility as the high street goes up the steep hill. This may result in a fragmentation of the high street towards the top of Berry Lane, as seen in Map 6 through the increasing presence of non-retail uses towards the southern end of the street, and this may be a consideration for further monitoring and policy development. In addition, this assessment has identified that Longridge's evening economy offer could be improved. It has a large-enough catchment to support further leisure offerings, and this would further enhance the service centre. The same can be said for the introduction of national retailers, as just 9% of its retailers are chain stores, though suitable existing floorspace for such features may not be present at the current time.

Whalley

5.3 Despite being a much smaller service centre, Whalley continues to provide a high-quality service centre experience and this report finds good levels of both viability and vitality within the centre. Retail space remains proportionate to the demand for services within the settlement and it has continued to maintain a unique sense of place amidst some small-scale expansion and increasing footfall counts. Despite this, commercial rents appear to be higher than in other local centres and the catchment of the centre is increasing as local housing schemes are completed. This may require future consideration in terms of flows of traffic, accessibility, and provision of services, as there is little room for expansion. Further services should demonstrate that they can integrate themselves sustainably.

Conclusion

5.4 These Service Centre Health Check assessments present relatively positive outlooks in such that the vitality and viability of all three centres - Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley appear to be progressing. Each centre performs its own function in the wider Borough, and as such they cannot be compared, however this assessment finds that they all continue to be sustainable, addressing the needs of local residents. Further monitoring may be required in some areas to assess continued performance, but nonetheless the outcome of this exercise should provide a point of encouragement in that all three centres continue to play an important and effective role in serving the requirements of local communities.

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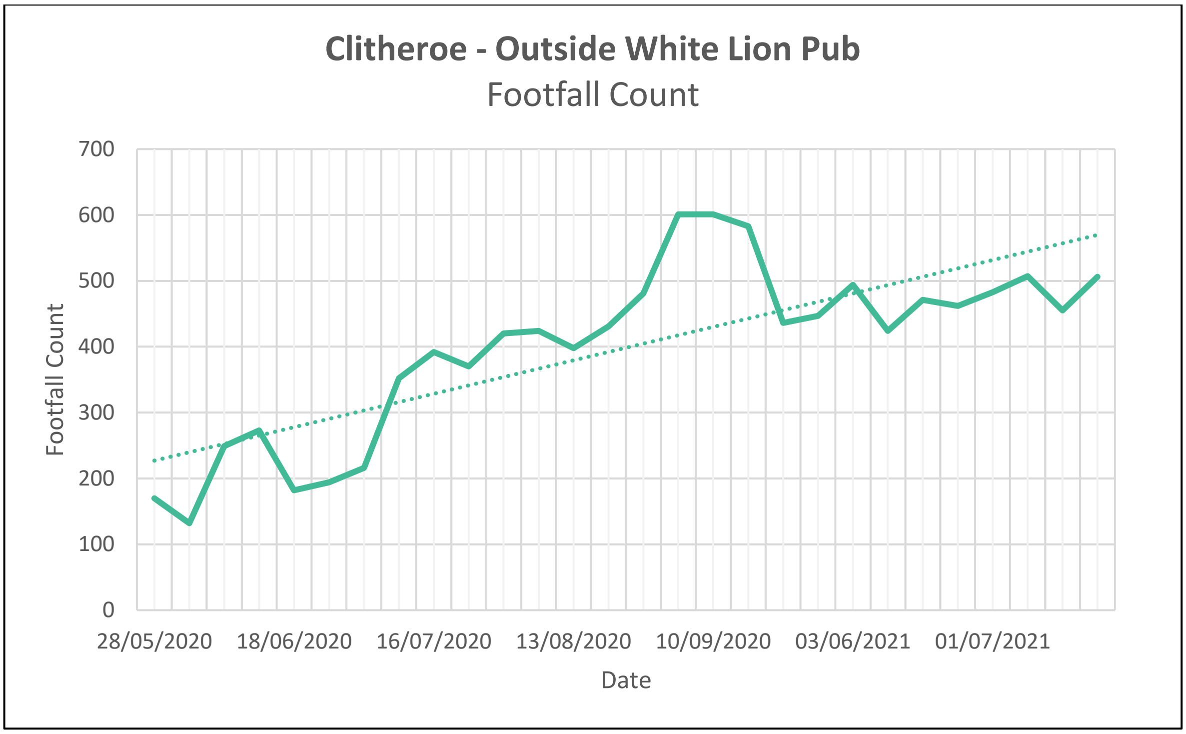
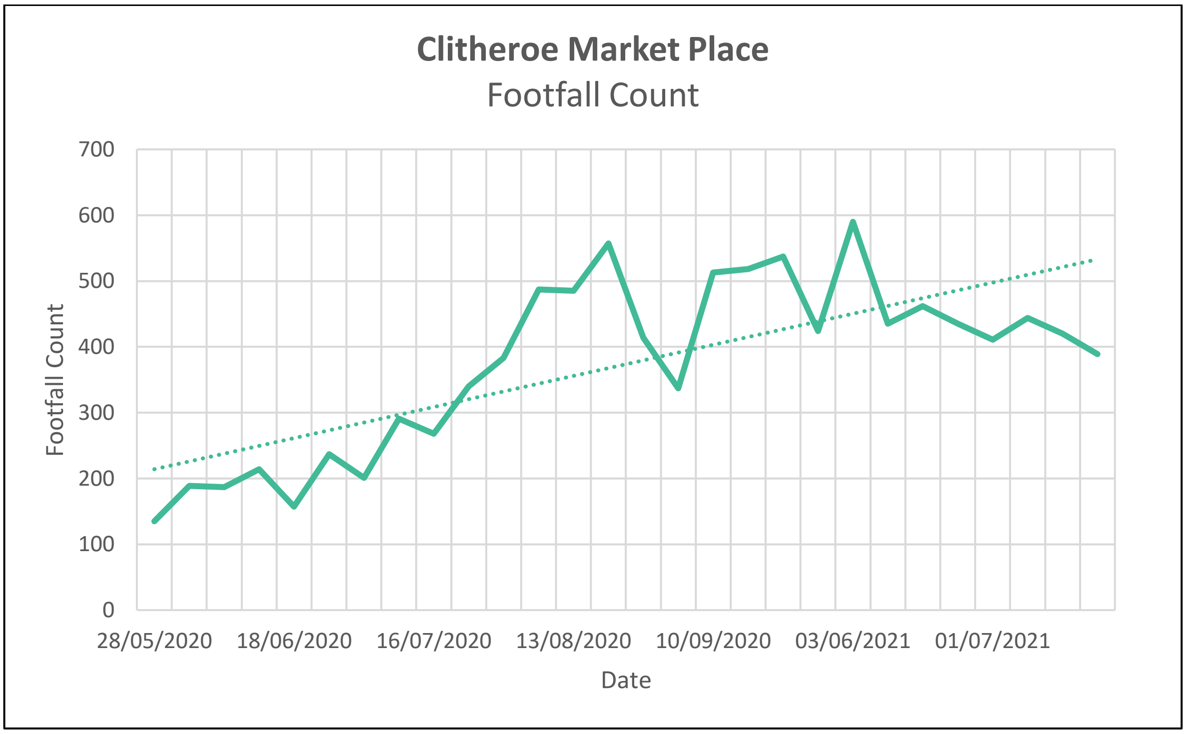
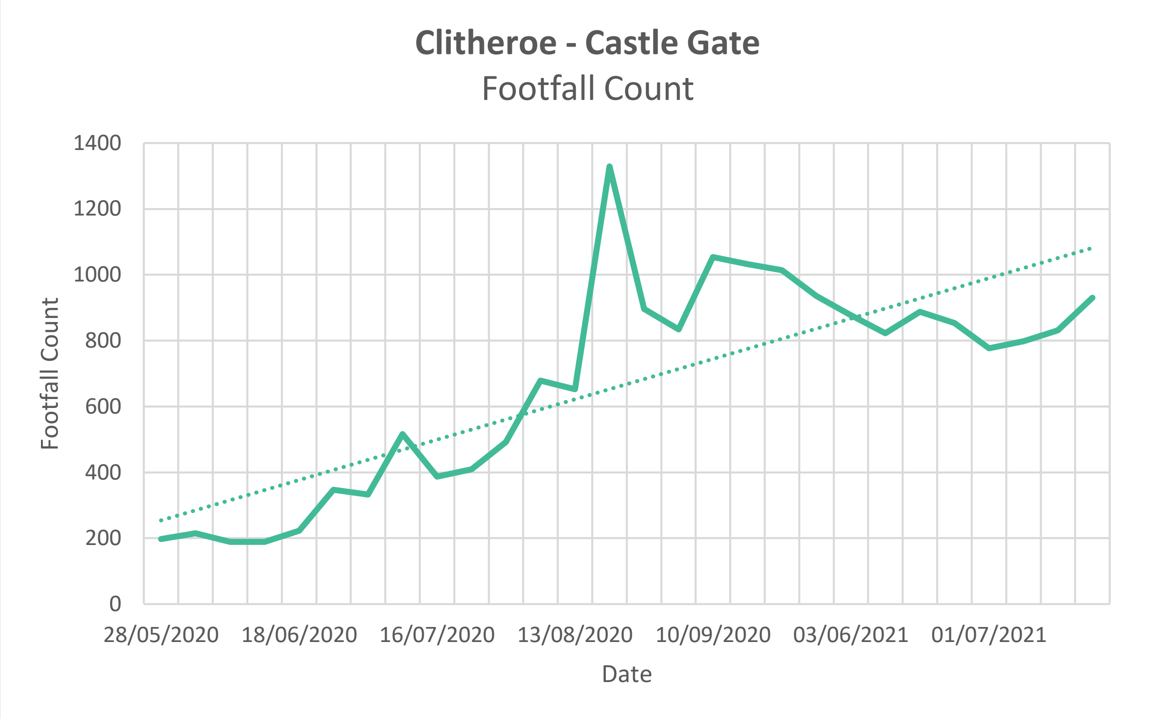
APPENDIX 1

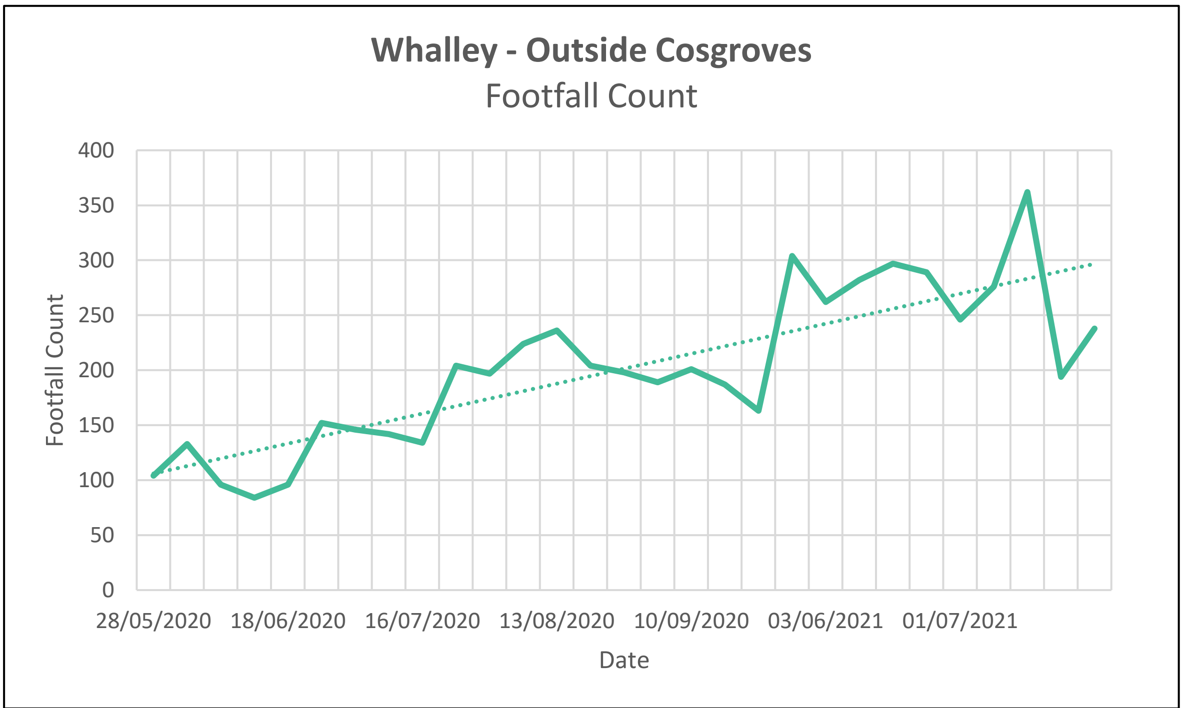
The following graphs show the outcomes from the monitoring of footfall counts at various points across the three service centres of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. Monitoring is undertaken for an hour at each location on Thursdays.



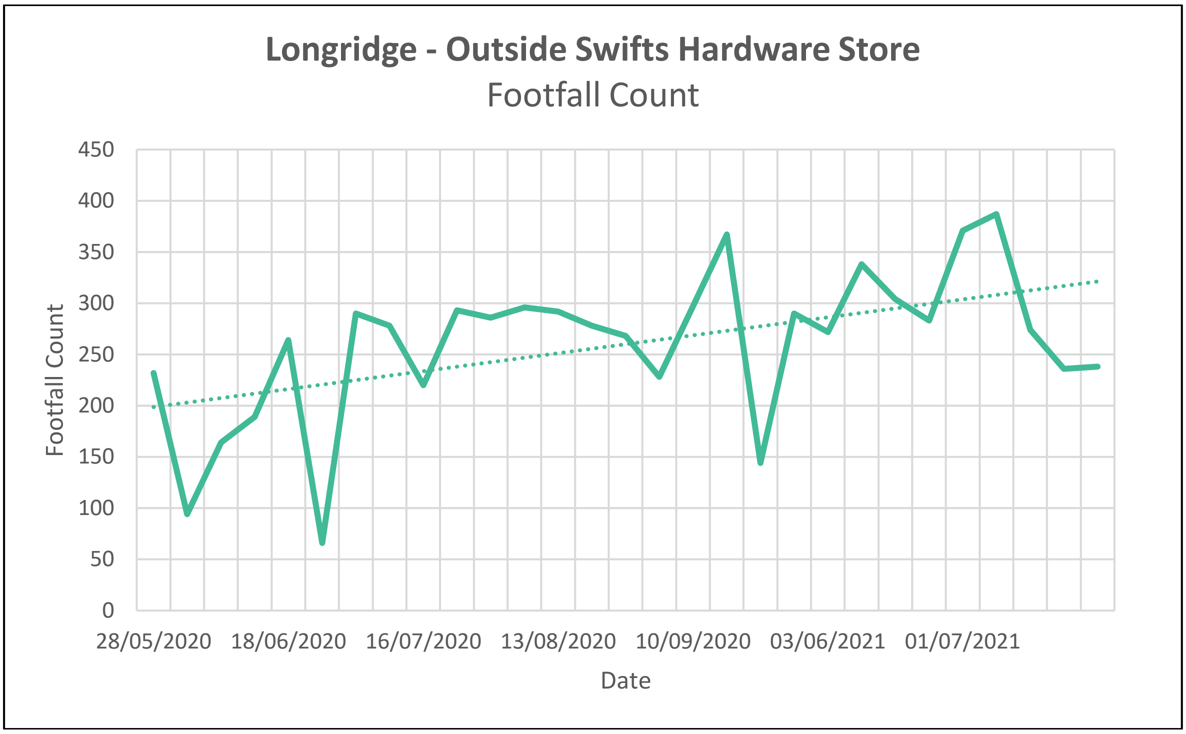


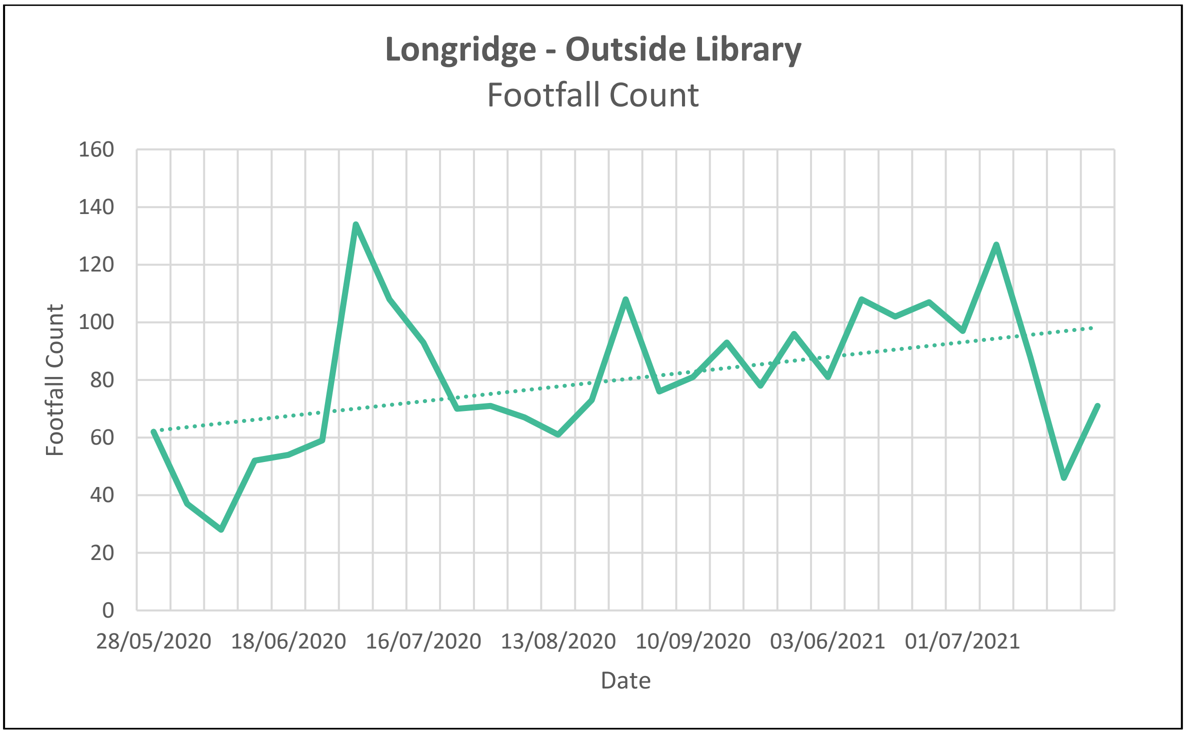
APPENDIX 1


Clitheroe - Castle Gate
Footfall Count
1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
Footfall Count
28/05/2020
18/06/2020
16/07/2020
13/08/2020
10/09/2020
03/06/2021
01/07/2021
Date


Whalley - Outside Cosgroves
Footfall Count
400
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
Footfall Count
28/05/2020
18/06/2020
16/07/2020
13/08/2020
10/09/2020
03/06/2021
01/07/2021
Date

APPENDIX 1


Longridge - Outside Swifts Hardware Store
Footfall Count
Footfall Count
450
400
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
28/05/2020
18/06/2020
16/07/2020
13/08/2020
10/09/2020
03/06/2021
01/07/2021
Date


Longridge - Outside Library
Footfall Count
Footfall Count
160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
28/05/2020
18/06/2020
16/07/2020
13/08/2020
10/09/2020
03/06/2021
01/07/2021
Date