

SCHEDULE OF ACTIONS MATTER 19 (HOUSING SUPPLY AND DELIVERY)
(Action 19.6)

POTENTIAL RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN TOWN CENTRES

19.6	Produce a note to the Inspector setting out the potential number of dwellings that could be provided in town centre (informed by the Bacup and Haslingden Vision / Masterplan documents which have been added to the Examination Library)
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 During the Local Plan Examination Hearing session on Matter 19 (Housing Supply), held on the 10th October 2019, participants questioned why the Council had not taken into account the potential supply of dwellings which could be provided within town centres. This could be through the conversion or change of use of entire sites and buildings, or the conversion of vacant or underutilised space above ground floor premises. This was particularly in relation to the opportunities arising from the work being done to revitalise and repurpose the town centres of Bacup and Haslingden, where the Vision Statements highlight residential development as being an important element in their transformation. It was argued that these dwellings should be included within the overall housing supply table, alongside other sites such as proposed allocations and other identified sites such as those with planning permission for housing.

2 BACKGROUND

National planning context

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning policies should promote long-term vitality and viability of town centres by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure sectors and allows a suitable mix of uses, including housing. It also asks that policy recognises the important role that residential development can play in ensuring the vitality of centres and to encourage this on appropriate sites.

2.2 National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) on Town centres and retailing re-emphasises the role of housing in ensuring the vitality of town centres and giving communities easier access to a range of services. It goes on to specify that, given their close proximity to transport networks, local shops and services, local authorities may also wish to consider locating specialist housing, such as older peoples housing, within or on the edge of town centres.

2.3 It should also be noted that there are permitted development rights to enable changes of use to residential (C3), that will affect town centres.

2.4 These rights are set out in the [Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted Development\) \(England\) Order 2015, as amended](#). Such changes to residential include from shops (class A1), financial and professional services (A2), hot food takeaway premises (A5), as well as from betting shops, pay day loan shops, launderette, amusement arcades / centres or casinos (all of which are classed as sui generis). Often such changes are restricted in floorspace (upto 150m²). If prior approval is required from the local planning authority before the change of use can take place factors that must be considered include: transport and highways impacts of the development; contamination risks; and flooding risks. The desirability of the building to change to a residential may need to be considered because of the impact of the change of use on the provision of services, or where the building is located in a key shopping area and may affect the sustainability of the shopping area, and factors relating to the design or external appearance of the building.

Bacup 2040 Vision

2.5 The Bacup Vision focuses on the town's potential and how it can build on its current strengths and achievements brought about by the recent Bacup Townscape Heritage Initiative Project. One of its aims is to allow the development of quality retail within the inner core of the town centre whilst providing opportunity for the repurposing of other buildings around the inner core periphery into residential units. This addresses two key features of a thriving town centre by tackling and reducing vacant unit rates and increasing footfall rates.

2.6 In relation to housing, the Mission Statement sees a town centre where people want to live, as well as work and visit. The Vision's Opportunities Map identifies a number of existing residential buildings within the town centre as well as highlighting potential opportunities for other sites and buildings to be developed for housing, including a "living hub" around the former cinema/bingo hall on Burnley Road and several opportunities in the central and northern parts of the town centre. The document highlights that this is in response to the limited range of housing opportunities currently on offer within the town centre. The aim is to create a place with a range of housing to meet a variety of needs, working with housing providers to create sustainable residential opportunities.

Emerging Haslingden Town Centre 2040 Vision

2.3 The Haslingden Town Centre 2040 Vision presents a high level plan which is part of an ongoing project to develop a detailed masterplan and action schedule for Haslingden, allowing for the same measures as the Bacup Vision. This is part of the Council's ambition to enhance the physical, economic and social environment of the town centre and to increase the range of businesses, attractions and experiences in the town. Part of this Vision includes attracting more people to live in the town centre with one of the overarching outcomes being to create "A family friendly place with a suitable housing offer for everyone".

2.4 The Opportunities Map within the Vision identifies a number of existing residential uses in the town centre, alongside other sites and buildings that may have potential to be changed into residential use, such as through the redevelopment of derelict and underused buildings around Bell Street and Cockerill's Square. Key actions are also to identify opportunities for commercial properties to be repurposed for housing and to develop relationships with housing associations to create sustainable residential opportunities. This is within the context of a shortage of good quality 3 bed homes, as highlighted in the document.

Future High Streets Fund

The Council submitted a bid to the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) for Bacup Town Centre in March 2019. The successful bidders will be confirmed in an announcement due to be made in late summer / early Autumn 2020. The FHSF is part of “Our Plan for the High Street”, a Government initiative to help high streets to adapt and thrive amidst changing expectations and consumer patterns.

Bacup’s bid identified a need to create new functions for vacant properties, for example through the conversion of some of these to housing. The bid makes reference to the restoration of the Bingo Hall/former Regal Cinema and the former Woolworths building to a viable mix of commercial and residential uses.

3 TOWN CENTRE OPPORTUNITIES AND THE HOUSING LAND SUPPLY

3.1 Both these projects and on-going work in other centres (such as the proposed Rawtenstall 2040 Vision) aim to create increased opportunities for residential development in Rossendale’s town centres. This will be in addition to existing planning permissions and proposed allocations in the town, district and local centres, as identified in Table 2 below, which currently amounts to 55 dwellings.

3.2 The Council’s Economic Development team acknowledge that the Bacup and Haslingden Visions are at an early stage and further detailed work has yet to be undertaken to identify specific residential opportunities and gather more information on ownership, economic viability, funding and so on. Whilst certain buildings and areas have been highlighted as potential housing, at the moment, it is not possible to pinpoint which of these are most likely to come forward during the Plan period or whether they are indeed viable as residential. However, an indicative figure of a total of 30 new dwellings for Bacup and 20 for Haslingden has been suggested by Economic Development, subject to the findings of the more detailed work to be carried out over the coming months.

3.3 In relation to other centres or other opportunities not already identified in the Vision documents, there is likely to be some housing delivery from conversions and change of use of existing town centre premises. Unlike the methodology for the small sites allowance, which makes an assumption that historic delivery trends will continue in future, the town centres have traditionally not provided a large number of homes and to simply project this figure forward would not be appropriate, given that a lot of work is being done to improve the residential offer. This is particularly as the town centres offer a finite supply of land and buildings and the planning uses in such locations vary greatly according to wider economic circumstances.

3.4 A potential method to attempt to estimate the housing supply in town centres would be to identify the amount of vacant floorspace within the town centres and roughly translate this into the potential number of dwellings that could be provided if this space were to become residential. An assumption has been made that these dwellings would be flats and is based on the minimum size for a typical 1 bed (50m²) and 2 bed flat (70m²), as identified in the nationally described space standards. This is very much an indication only as it does not take account of additional communal space if required.

Table 1: Vacant floorspace in town, district and local centres

Town Centre	Vacant floorspace (m ²)*	% of total floorspace	Equivalent no. of 1 bed flats	Equivalent no. of 2 bed flats
Rawtenstall	2,431	10.9	49	35
Bacup	3,519	30.6	70	50
Haslingden	1,379	13.2	28	20
Crawshawbooth	191	7.2	4	3
Waterfoot	1,515	19.5	30	22
Whitworth	127	4.4	3	2
TOTAL	9,162		183	131

*Source: Rossendale Town Centre, Retail, Leisure and Tourism Study (2017)

3.5 Table 1 above shows that there is potential for between 131-183 dwellings to be created through the conversion of existing vacant floorspace in all town centres (based on the last available information from 2017). In practice, however, it would not necessarily be possible or desirable for all vacant space to become residential, particularly in ground floor, prominent locations. This is partly because some vacancy is always necessary in order to allow some movement and flexibility in the commercial market and partly because some of the space will not be appropriate for residential use. There is also a strong objective to revitalise the economy of town centres. Whilst this includes an element of residential use, the main focus will be on attracting new commercial uses to these areas. In order to do so, there must be available space, and care must be taken to avoid residential use becoming overly dominant (particularly in areas where there is currently a high level of vacancy).

3.6 Also, as highlighted in the Haslingden Vision, there is a desire to create larger, family-sized dwellings in the town centre. If this were to happen, the number of dwellings would be fewer, particularly if this would involve demolition and re-build at a lower density.

4 EXISTING HOUSING SUPPLY IN THE TOWN CENTRES

4.1 Table 2 identifies the existing housing supply in the town, district and local centres (within the boundaries defined in emerging Local Plan Retail Policy R1). This shows a current capacity of 55 town centre dwellings, not including those on the edges of the centres.

Table 2: Existing housing supply within town centre boundaries as of 01/04/2019

Town Centre	No. of dwellings with extant planning permission or remaining on sites under construction	No. of dwellings on proposed allocations (without permission)
Rawtenstall	28 M2 Spinning Point ¹	0
Bacup	10	0
Haslingden	10	0
Crawshawbooth	0	0
Waterfoot	7	0
Whitworth	0	0
TOTAL	55	0

¹ Please note that a report was taken to a Council meeting on 26/02/20

<https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/1184/council>

The Report proposes not to progress Spinning Point Phase 2 (which includes the 28 dwellings identified) at this point in time; however the Council still envisage some residential use on this site in the future.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 The Borough's town centres, particularly those subject to specific masterplans, provide a good opportunity to create new residential uses in brownfield, highly accessible and sustainable locations. The Council wish to ensure that there is clear communication and cross department working between both Economic Development and Planning, in order to enable the Vision documents and Masterplans to be supported, delivered and their objectives of creating thriving and sustainable town centres to be achieved.

5.2 However, as there is currently little evidence available to demonstrate the suitability, availability and achievability of the potential town centre opportunities identified in the Vision documents, it is not considered possible to add a specific number of dwellings to the housing land supply based on these.

5.3 Alternatively, it could be possible to estimate a potential number of dwellings which could be created through reusing vacant space. However, much more detailed work would need to be done to identify which vacant units could be suitable, if these are deliverable and the type of homes that could be provided. It is also difficult to predict which occupied businesses may change use, particularly as retail is able to change to residential without the need for planning permission. Many of these opportunities are likely to be small scale and will, in any case, be accounted for as part of the small sites allowance.

5.4 At the moment, to include either of these potential sources in the housing land supply would be akin to a windfall allowance, which the Council do not currently consider to be appropriate. However, as further evidence emerges on the deliverability of specific sites, these can be added to the housing supply as appropriate, alongside any other town centre land, which receives planning permission for housing.

5.5 If an allowance were to be made for town centre sites, based on the indicative figures suggested in Table 1, this could amount to a between 9-12 dwellings per annum (131-183 dwellings over 15 years) which could also take account of other opportunities not already identified. Care would need to be taken to ensure that this allowance would not involve double counting those already accounted for as part of the small sites allowance. Viability and market demand will remain a challenge but the Council is committed to tackling such issues through the work being undertaken to promote and support a range of new uses for the town centres.

Further note:

As requested in Action 6.1, the Council is also producing more detail for proposed policy R1 on the function of the retail hierarchy and the role of each of the centres within the Borough. This will link into the work being done to develop the vision and spatial strategy and will make reference to the wider projects being undertaken in the town centres.