Retail Centres Report

ON BEHALF OF ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

June 2026

Contents

1. Introduction 3

Instruction 3

Report Structure 3

2. Relevant Background 4

Antrim & Newtownabbey Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2019) 4

Independent Examination (2022) 5

Section 14 Direction (2025) 5

Summary 6

3. Town Centre Health-Checks 7

Methodology 7

Summary Health-checks 7

4. Retail Hierarchy 9

The RCLS Findings 9

Subsequent Consideration 10

5. Boundary Assessment 12

Introduction 12

2025 Update 12

6. Soundness 17

Appendix A – Health-checks 19

Appendix B – Boundary Plans 20

1. Introduction

Instruction

1.1 Nexus Planning ('Nexus') was commissioned by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council ('the Council') in September 2025 to undertake a Retail Centre Report ('RCR') for the Borough.

1.2 The Study will form part of the evidence base upon which the emerging Local Development Plan is established and will inform decisions on retail planning applications in the Borough. The Council adopted its Plan Strategy in July 2025 and is now working towards the adoption of its Local Policies Plan.

1.3 The Study builds on a wide-ranging Retail and Commercial Leisure Study ('RCLS') prepared by Nexus on behalf of the Council in January 2019. As with that report, the approach adopted by Nexus and the brief provided by the Council reflects the latest guidance provided in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement ('SPPS') 2015.

1.4 Our commission under this RCR is to update the health-checks which were carried out in 2019, including specific consideration of Whiteabbey Village, which has been promoted in the retail hierarchy and was not previously subject to consideration. The Study also addresses the requirements of a Section 14 Direction issued by the Department for Infrastructure ('DfI') in October 2025 regarding the proposed retail hierarchy for the Borough, with particular emphasis on defining the status and boundary of the Abbey Centre.

Report Structure

1.5 This report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** sets out the context for the Retail Centres Study by detailing the key findings of the 2019 Study and the subsequent Section 14 Direction;
- **Section 3** provides health-checks in respect of each of the Borough's eight main centres;
- **Section 4** considers any recommended adjustment to the draft retail hierarchy;
- **Section 5** examines the creation of new, or amendment of current, town centre boundaries; and
- **Section 6** discusses compliance with the tests of soundness as set out in DfI's revised DPPN:06 'Soundness'.

2. Relevant Background

Antrim & Newtownabbey Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2019)

2.1 Nexus prepared the RCLS on behalf of the Council in 2018/2019. The RCLS examined trends in the UK and Northern Irish retail and leisure economy at the time. The performance of the Borough's seven largest centres was examined through health-check assessment, where they were found to be broadly in good health, assisted by their attractive nature and/or proximity to extensive residential catchment populations. The Study did go on to make a number of recommendations with respect to place-based improvements.

2.2 The RCLS was underpinned by an 800-household telephone survey carried out by independent market researchers, NEMS Market Research. The results of those surveys, coupled with our own health-check assessment, enabled us to form detailed views on a range of qualitative matters on the strengths and weaknesses of each centre, as well as a quantitative assessment of market share and catchment area for each centre. The RCLS concluded with forecast capacity for new retail and leisure floorspace to 2030.

2.3 As part of the RCLS, as well as advising on a number of policy matters, Nexus was asked to recommend appropriate boundaries for each of the seven main town centres in the (then) draft retail hierarchy. Those boundaries were enclosed at Appendix F to the RCLS.

2.4 With particular relevance to this RCR, based on an assessment of market share and other factors, the RCLS supported the Council's proposals to designate Abbey Centre as a 'Large Town Centre'. The RCLS commented as follows:

> 6.16 The case for the *Abbey Centre* is less clear cut, as it does not have the range of community facilities that would be expected of a Large Town Centre, and it does not have the look or feel of a town centre in the traditional sense of being a meeting place central to a walk-in population. Notwithstanding, it has by far the largest convenience and comparison goods market shares, two major foods tores, and a very large hinterland population within a 10 minute drivetime. Moreover, there are good Planning reasons to define Abbey Centre as a town centre. Metropolitan Newtownabbey does not otherwise have a town centre, and should a town centre use come forward in the area, it may otherwise be that the user would have to look farther afield to Belfast or Antrim if the sequential test were to be applied in its strictest sense. Given the relative distance between the three centres, and the very large population in between, this would seem nonsensical on sustainability grounds i.e. forcing residents to make longer public or private transport journeys to access facilities in the future. On balance, we therefore support the Council's suggestion that Abbey Centre should be defined as a Tier 1 centre. In doing so though, the Council should use its Planning powers to seek to bring forward a wider range of community uses in the area, and any opportunities to 'green' the centre in order to enhance its environmental appeal as a place to meet and socialise. We discuss further below the idea that the centre could be master-planned in the near future.

2.5 The RCLS separately recommended that Whiteabbey Village be considered for elevation to 'District Centre' status, commenting as follows:

> 6.28 In general, each of these centres has between 4-20 units. Of the various criteria used, we consider this to be amongst the most important. The only outlier to this is Whiteabbey Village, which has 40 units, and clearly has a village function as well as a range of community uses (as described in Appendix G). Whiteabbey Village is distinct from the proposed Neighbourhood Centre, put forward by the Forward Plan Team and also that of a Tier 4 Local Centre. In this respect, we recommend the Council gives consideration to defining Whiteabbey Village as a Tier 3 District Centre.

Independent Examination (2022)

2.6 An Independent Examination of the Council's Draft Plan Strategy ('DPS') was carried out in June 2022. The RCLS formed part of 'Evidence Paper 4' to the Examination.

2.7 The Planning Appeals Commission ('PAC') completed its Advisory Report in October 2023 and concluded that, subject to suitable modifications, the Council had arrived at a sound set of policies regarding its main town centre use policies. Having considered the Advisory Report from the PAC, DfI issued a Direction to the Council in September 2024 that the DPS was sound, subject to 93 modifications, and that it should adopted the DPS under section 12(1)(b) of the Planning Act (NI) 2011. The Council then adopted its DPS in July 2025.

2.8 One of the modifications sought by DfI related to the Abbey Centre. DfI concluded that:

> 3.2 The Department has, however, concluded that the designation of the Abbey Centre as a Large Town Centre has not met the necessary requirements in relation to regional strategic objectives for town centres and retailing. The Department notes the PAC's findings however considers that to ensure that regional strategic planning objectives are not undermined, the Department directs the Council to excise the proposed Abbey Centre designation from the Plan Strategy in accordance with the modifications that are part of this direction. The explanatory note which accompanies this direction, sets out a full explanation of the Department's consideration on this matter and other new modifications.

2.9 This matter is subject to the Section 14 Direction outlined below.

Section 14 Direction (2025)

2.10 DfI issued the Council with a Section 14 Direction in October 2025. This requires, pursuant to Section 14(2)(c) of the 2011 Act, that the Council to prepare new strategic and operational planning policy in respect of the Abbey Centre, taking account of the town centre first approach contained in regional planning policy for retail and other main town centre uses. Specifically, the Direction specifies that:

> 3.3 The Abbey Centre will be designated as a 'District Centre' in line with the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) (para 6.276) which states that district centres should be retained and consolidated, and should be a focus for local everyday shopping, and ensure their role is complementary to the role and function of the town centre. District centres fulfil an important retail role in providing consumers with convenience and choice in locations outside city and town centres.

2.11 Building on this, the Direction specifies that the Council should:

- Review and update the retail evidence base. This will require an update to Evidence Paper 4: Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (Jan 2019). Of particular relevance 'Market share & Capacity Assessment' and 'Policy and Proposals' sections in respect of the Abbey Centre. This will include review of but not limited to Para 6.16, 6.30 Figure 6.2, 6.59, 6.61 & 6.68, Appendix F.

- Review and update the hierarchy of centres to include Abbey Centre as a district centre in the Figure 5: 'Hierarchy of Centres in our Borough" and Table 4 as a district centre.
- To safeguard existing /established town centres and minimise adverse impact, the Council should define the spatial extent of the Abbey Centre district centre boundary, as supported by the updated evidence base.

Summary

2.12 The Council has therefore commissioned this RCR as part of their update of the evidence base, and to assist revised policy formulation, as required under the Section 14 Direction. The sections of the study which follow consider an updated heath-check of the Abbey Centre, as well as the adoption of a suitable District Centre boundary.

2.13 The Council also seeks that the RCR takes the opportunity to update heath-checks for Large Town Centres (Antrim), Town Centres (Ballyclare, Crumlin, Glengormley and Randalstown) and District Centres (Northcott and, for the first time, Whiteabbey Village). Appropriate updates to the boundaries for each are set out, including the definition of a new boundary for Whiteabbey Village.

3. Town Centre Health-Checks

Methodology

3.1 Health checks are recognised as important planning 'tools' for appraising and monitoring the changes in the overall vitality and viability of town centres and informing both plan-making and decision-taking at the local level.

3.2 In this context, this Study provides detailed health check assessments for the eight centres of Antrim, Ballyclare, Crumlin, Glengormley, Randalstown, Abbey Centre, Northcott and Whiteabbey Village.

3.3 Each of the health checks has been carried out in accordance with the PPS5: Retailing and Town Centres[1], which sets out a number of key performance indicators used to help assess and monitor the overall health and performance of the centres.

3.4 Using observations from site visits carried out in October 2025, we examine Experian GOAD categories, i.e. convenience, comparison, service uses, and vacant units. We compare the results against current UK average benchmarks for each category (Experian Category Report, 2024) for all centres and shopping locations covered by Experian. We also contrast results with the previous RCLS in 2019, for which the data was collected in 2018. Finally, we add our summary observations on the health of the centres in general terms, drawing on key indicators.

3.5 Full health checks are included as part of **Appendix A**. Headline summaries for each centre are as follows:

Summary Health-checks

- **Antrim:** Antrim centre has a good range of uses, including the Tesco Extra, filling station, Iceland and a good range of independent convenience and comparison retailers. Takeaway units make up a significant (36%) proportion of the leisure service units, and retail service units are mostly beauty related uses (hairdresser/barber). The proportion of vacant units is just above the national average, but does not account for the redevelopment of part of the Castle Mall, which will revitalise this area and the centre generally.

- **Ballyclare:** Ballyclare is a larger centre comprising a linear shopping parade, and including an ASDA, Home Bargains and a leisure centre to the northeast. It is considered that these larger footprint units are not well integrated with the rest of the centre and would benefit from improvements to pedestrian links, as characterised by the rest of the centre. The composition of the centre is roughly in line with national averages, providing a good mix of uses, with a mix of national multiple and independent retailers. The level of vacancy is not significantly above the national average; however, clustering of units to the north and south is exacerbating the visual impact of these units.

- **Crumlin:** Crumlin is a centre that is well integrated with the surrounding residential area, with small-scale units, and commercial and community uses interspersed with residential apartments along a main road. The centre has a very low proportion of comparison uses and would benefit from a diversified offer. Owing to the Tesco Superstore and Spar, the centre has a good convenience offer, and similarly benefits from a good range of leisure, retail and financial and business offers, proportionate to its size. The number of vacant units has increased significantly since 2019, and thus, the health of this centre should be monitored carefully.

- **Glengormley:** Glengormley is a linear centre, with a significant level of active redevelopment. Major retail and residential developments will change the makeup of the centre as it becomes higher density, with more residential

[1] https://library2.nics.gov.uk/pdf/drd/2014/0344.pdf

units. However, the centre has a good proportion of leisure and retail service uses to accommodate the existing and future local population. The centre lacks a large supermarket; however, it is located close to the Northcott Tesco. The centre has a very high proportion of financial and business services, especially compared to other centres and the national average, with them centrally clustered around the major intersection. Though compact, the centre's location along the busy Antrim Road does not make it a hub for pedestrian trips or activity.

- **Randalstown:** Randalstown is made up of predominantly small independent stores and is categorised by its lack of big box retail units. The retail service offer is above the national average, providing a wide range of health and beauty units, and leisure services are made up of a range of pubs, bars, cafes, restaurants and takeaways. The good mix of community uses, such as churches, community halls and gardens, as well as the distinct heritage character of the area, contribute to an enjoyable centre that is well cared for in terms of planting and pedestrian access.

- **Abbey Centre:** the Abbey Centre is a purpose-built retail centre comprising the Lesley Abbey Centre shopping centre, the Abbey Retail Park and the longwood Retail Park. Made up mostly of national multiplies, the centre is dominated by car parking and hardstanding but is very well used and frequented by visitors. The shopping mall is a traditional mall layout and provides a wide array of comparison, leisure service and retail service uses. The retail parks are large footprint retail parks, dominated by national multiples and predominantly comparison or convenience uses. For a centre of this size, the very low vacancy rate (1.9%) and high level of usage speak to a viable centre, but the lack of pedestrian infrastructure should be a focus for improvements.

- **Northcott:** Northcott is a centre comprising 6 units within a shopping centre, and a large, dedicated car park. Given the small size of the centre, there are no retail uses, financial and business service uses and no vacant units; however, the centre was well used, and the car park was nearly at capacity, speaking to the popularity of the Tesco supermarket. Despite its close location to Glengormley centre, given the layout of the centre, with its back to Ballyclare Road, it is estimated that there are many linked trips between the two centres, and Northcott centre was predominantly observed to be frequented by visitors in cars.

- **Whiteabbey Village:** Whiteabbey Village is located along a slip road off the A2 (Shore Road). It is a linear parade of shops providing a good range of uses to the local population. Comprising a SPAR supermarket, the centre is also complemented by community uses (medical and religious) and a good offering of leisure uses in the form of bars, café and restaurants, and retail service uses made up predominantly of health and beauty units. The provision of comparison units is well below average and would benefit from diversification of units. A large development at the entrance to the centre will reduce the number of vacant units by half, and also contribute to development in the centre, and increase the local population by way of residential units.

4. Retail Hierarchy and General Policy Direction

The RCLS Findings

4.1 The 2019 RCLS set out a number of recommendations in respect of the Retail Hierarchy at 6.2 – 6.30. The RCLS took account of the legacy plans for the area and recommended a hierarchy based on up-to-date health-checks assessment and market share assessment at that time. The process followed the requirements of SPPS 6.277-6.278.

4.2 In the RCLS, Figure 6.1 sought to summarise a number of empirical findings into categories which were considered relevant to the standing of a centre in the retail hierarchy (see below).

Figure 6.1 | Retail Hierarchy Indicators

Centre	Population within a 10 minute drivetime	No of Units	Market Share – Comparison Goods	Market Share – Convenience Goods	Community[46] Facilities	Supermarket
Antrim	29,572	148	2.1%	6.2%	LIB, LC, DS, PS, TS	Yes x 1
Abbey Centre	106,811	116	27.1%	15.5%	DS	Yes x 2
Ballyclare	25,174	136	1.3%	5.5%	LIB, LC, DS, PS	Yes x 1
Crumlin	15,001	59	0.5%	5.1%	LIB, LC, DS	Yes x 1
Randalstown	19,760	51	0.7%	1.1%	L, DS	No
Glengormley	79,250	153	1.1%	0.5%	L, DS	No
Northcott	79,250	7	0.4%	3.8%		Yes x 1

[46] Community facilities key = LIB (Library), LC (Leisure Centre), DS (Doctors Surgery), PS (Police Station), TS (Train Station).

4.3 Building on this assessment, our consideration at the time was as follows:

6.16	The case for the *Abbey Centre* is less clear cut, as it does not have the range of community facilities that would be expected of a Large Town Centre, and it does not have the look or feel of a town centre in the traditional sense of being a meeting place central to a walk-in population. Notwithstanding, it has by far the largest convenience and comparison goods market shares, two major foods tores, and a very large hinterland population within a 10 minute drivetime. Moreover, there are good Planning reasons to define Abbey Centre as a town centre. Metropolitan Newtownabbey does not otherwise have a town centre, and should a town centre use come forward in the area, it may otherwise be that the user would have to look farther afield to Belfast or Antrim if the sequential test were to be applied in its strictest sense. Given the relative distance between the three centres, and the very large population in between, this would seem nonsensical on sustainability grounds i.e. forcing residents to make longer public or private transport journeys to access facilities in the future. On balance, we therefore support the Council's suggestion that Abbey Centre should be defined as a Tier 1 centre. In doing so though, the Council should use its Planning powers to seek to bring forward a wider range of community uses in the area, and any opportunities to 'green' the centre in order to enhance its environmental appeal as a place to meet and socialise. We discuss further below the idea that the centre could be master-planned in the near future.

Policy Consideration

4.4 The Advisory Report received from PAC in October 2023, following Independent Examination concluded that the recommended retail hierarchy was appropriate.

4.5 However, as earlier reference, DfI has held that the Abbey Centre should not be classified as a large town centre and instead is more reminiscent of a district centre. The Section 14 Direction notes that the SPPS states that district centres "should be a focus for local everyday shopping, and ensure their role is complementary to the role and function of the town centre. District centres fulfil an important retail role in providing consumers with convenience and choice in locations outside city and town centres".

4.6 Looking at our assessment in 2019, it is evident that there were push and pull factors with regard to whether the Abbey Centre should appropriately be classified as a large town centre. Having re-surveyed the centre under our 2025 health-checks, we are content that there is very unlikely to have been any lessening of market share when contrast to our 2019 market share assessment. The centre has very low vacancy and high footfall. Abbey Centre has a comparison goods market share which is significantly greater than all of the other centres in the Borough combined, and has almost three times the convenience goods attraction. It also has a large catchment population (over 100,000 people within a 10-minute drivetime) and a number of units comparable to the main town centre and town centres of the Borough (surveyed in 2025 as 107 units).

4.7 However, Abbey Centre still does not have the range of community facilities which might be expected of a main town centre. Moreover, DfI has expressed concern under a town centres first approach that designating the centre as a main town centre might have an adverse impact on Belfast City Centre shopping area.

4.8 Accordingly, in light of the Section 14 Direction, the Council must re-designate Abbey Centre as a district centre in its retail hierarchy. It certainly fulfils all the relevant criteria of a district centre set out in the SPPS, most notably in terms of providing for everyday shopping. Therefore, in keeping with the Section 14 Direction, we recommend that the Council designates Abbey Centre as a district centre in an update to Figure 5 and Table 4 of the adopted Plan Strategy (2025).

4.9 The findings of the RCR do not necessitate any other changes to the retail hierarchy of the adopted Plan Strategy (2025).

4.10 Following correspondence between the Council and DfI during the course of 2026, it has also become necessary to review the wording of Policy DM6.5 so that consideration of the role and functionality of District and Local Centres is fully considered as part of any Retail Assessment involving development of over 1,000 sq m gross in such centres. We agree that policy can be amended further to incorporate this change and to further protect the vulnerabilities of centres elsewhere. Accordingly, we recommend amending the policy wording, on Page 99 of the Plan Strategy, as follows:

"DM 6.5 - A Retail Assessment will be required for any development proposal that involves an increase of more than 1,000m2 (gross) of retail floor space in District and Local Centres. The Retail Assessment should provide a proportionate response to the proposal being sought and incorporate an assessment of need, impact and the sequential test. This includes applications for an extension(s) which would result in the overall development exceeding 1,000m2 (gross) external area. The Retail Assessment should demonstrate that the proposal would not unacceptably alter the role and function of the centre itself, and that there would be no unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any existing centre within the catchment".

4.11 It has also been discussed that there should be an update to the monitoring provisions within the Plan Strategy. Our recommended update to the Indicative Monitoring Framework on Page 316 of the Plan Strategy is as follows:

"The number of planning applications permitted for retail development and complementary uses and the area of new floorspace (sq m) created, within District and Local Centres".

5. Boundary Assessment

Introduction

5.1 The context for defining the spatial extent of centres is set out at Paragraphs 6.280-6.283 of the SPPS. Town centre boundaries enable practitioners to consider the sequential, impact and needs tests when considering individual proposals for development and/or change of use. It is also relevant for consideration of the impact thresholds (nationally set at 1,000 sq m gross external area).

5.2 In keeping with practice across the UK, edge-of-centre is defined as sites which are within a 300m walking distance of the town centre boundary, whilst out-of-centre is defined as those areas beyond that 300m. Defining suitable town centre boundaries is therefore important in this context. The Council must weigh up the advantage of having a sufficiently large defined area to cater for the likely demands of the range of existing and future town centre uses within a centre, but also the disadvantages of defining too wide an area, whereby a number of sites which are not suitable for development fall within the edge-of-centre category. A balance must therefore be struck between the two.

5.3 The 2019 RCLS considered the merits of defining Primary Retail Cores and advised against doing so in Antrim & Newtownabbey for reasons of flexibility and the nature of the changing high street. We consider that this assessment has stood the test of time and, for the avoidance of doubt, reiterate the comments we made at 6.55-6.58 of the RCLS.

5.4 Thereafter, the RCLS (2019) reviewed the boundaries set out in the Council's Preferred Options Paper (2017) and, where relevant, suggested proposed amendments to the draft centre boundaries. The full set of recommended boundaries were included at Appendix F to the RCLS.

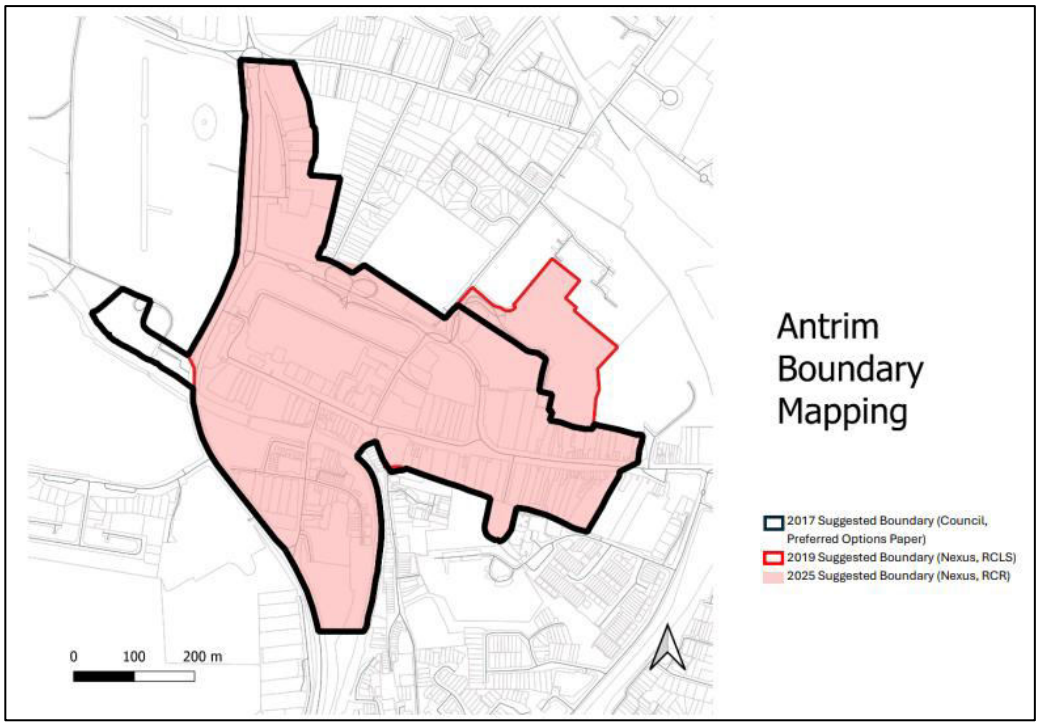
2025 Update

5.5 Taking account of the passing of time, and also the implications of a) designating Whiteabbey Village for the first time as a District Centre and b) the implications of the Section 14 Direction for the Abbey Centre, our brief is to update consideration of appropriate town centre boundaries for all eight centres.

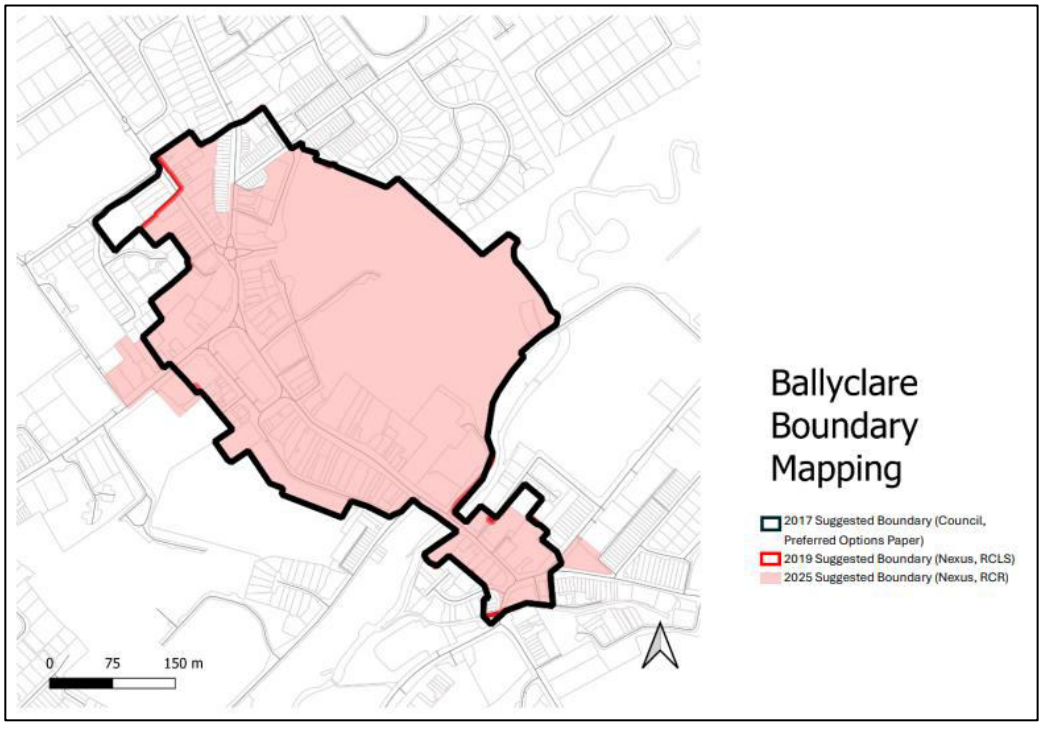
5.6 In doing so, we are cognisant of the extent of main town centre uses present. As per SPPS 6.271 and Footnote 58, this includes cultural and community facilities, retail, leisure, entertainment and businesses. In defining boundaries, it is important to have regard to the desirability to cluster main town centre uses for the policy implications around the sequential and impact tests highlighted above. Therefore, it is not the purpose of a town centre boundary to include all main town centre uses; rather, it is their purpose to include all such uses which are reasonably contiguous. We are therefore careful to exclude, for example, large areas of residential units which are not sufficiently interspersed with main town centre use units.

5.7 Nexus visited all eight of the centres in October 2025. In the summary below, we describe and depict the boundary evolutions between 2017, 2019 and 2025. Our final boundary recommendation for the Abbey Centre is included as a single-layer at **Appendix B**.

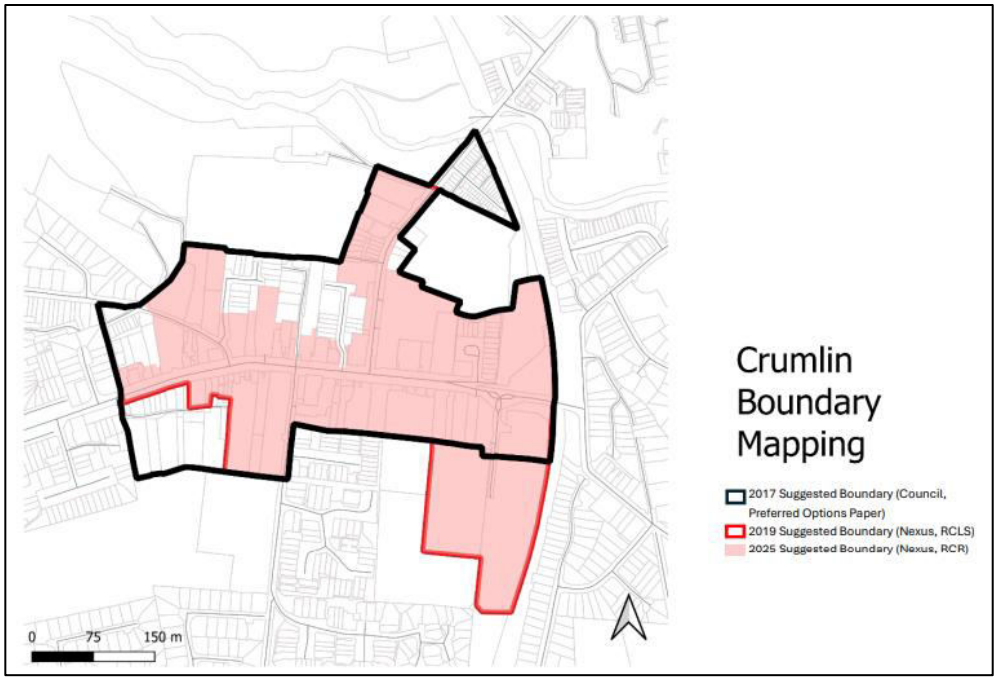
- Antrim (Large Town Centre) – We continue to recommend the same boundary recommended at the time of the RCLS (see 6.63-6.64 for detailed commentary on Tesco Extra and Antrim Gardens).



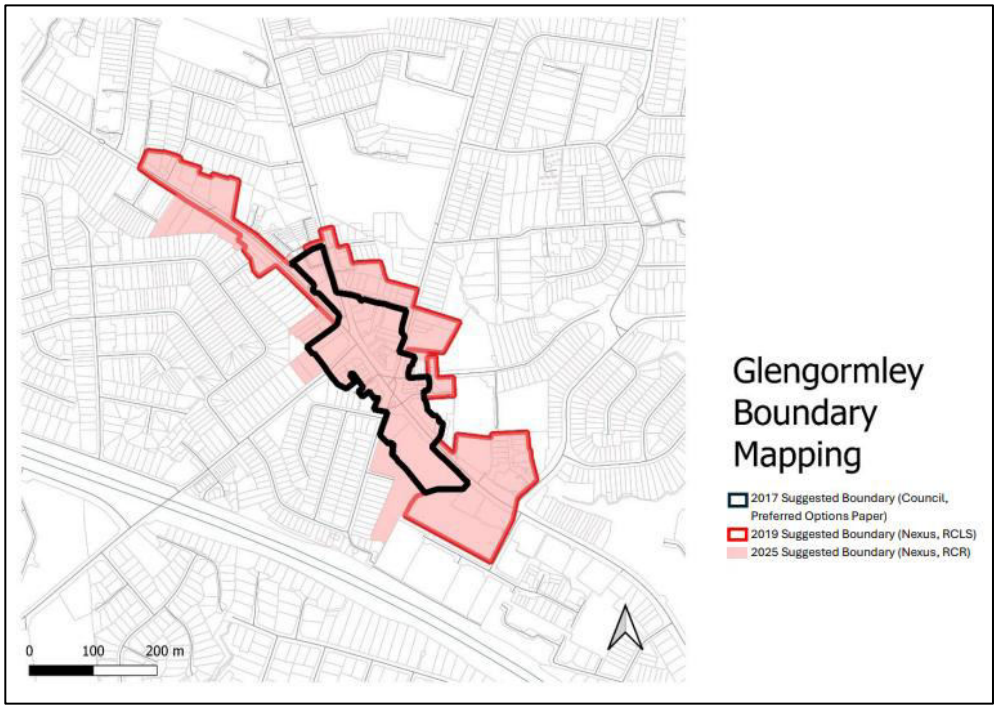
- Ballyclare (Town Centre) – A number of adjustments are recommended to the boundary for Ballyclare. Areas of predominantly residential units are recommended for removal along Ballycore Road and George Avenue to the north and Abercorn Drive and Mill Road to the south. The petrol station and associated retail development at Ballynure Road, also to the south of the centre, is recommended for inclusion.



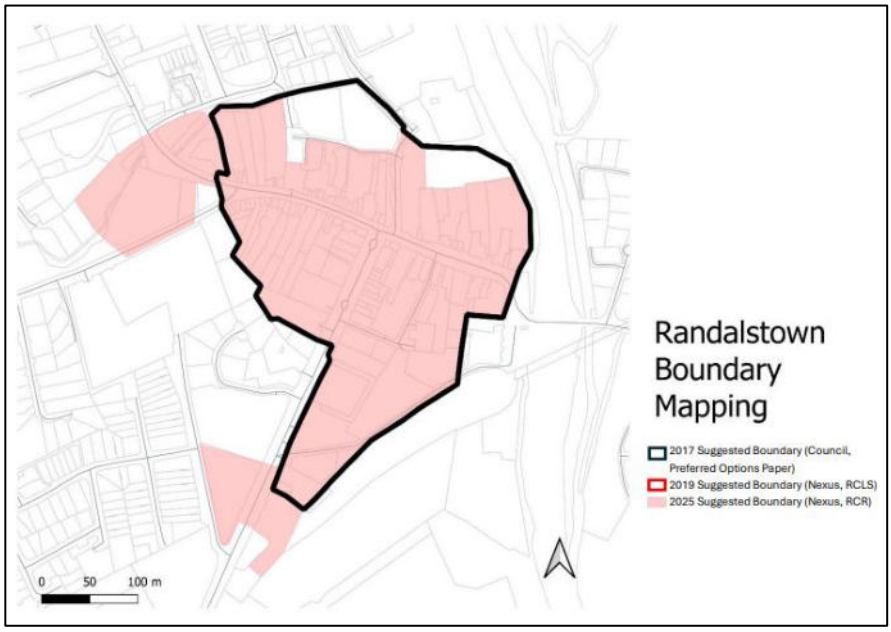
- Crumlin (Town Centre) – A number of alterations to the boundary, predominantly related to the Tesco store and leisure centre, were recommended at 6.65 of the RCLS, and those alterations are again recommended to be taken forward. In addition, our most recent survey recommends the deletion of areas of predominantly residential units at Beechview Courtyard and The Mews, north of the centre, as well as areas off Hill Street to the west.



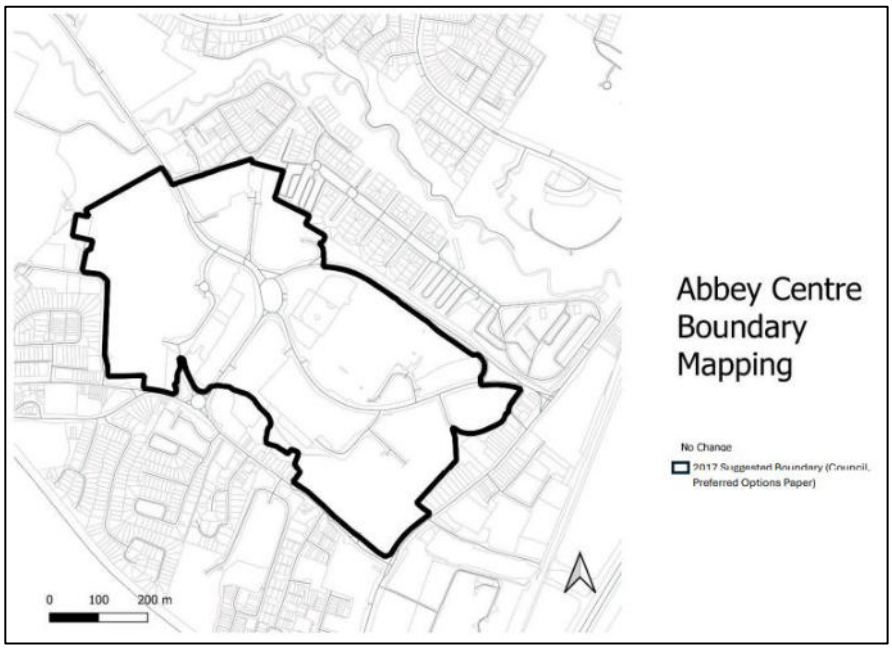
- Glengormley (Town Centre) – As commented upon in the RCLS, Glengormley has expanded rapidly in the past 10+ years. A number of expansion areas were included at the time of the RCLS, and as per the 2025 update, we recommend further expansion to the boundary. Specifically, we recommend the inclusion of retail, cultural and community facilities on Farmley Road to the south, and Hightown Road and Antrim Road to the west.



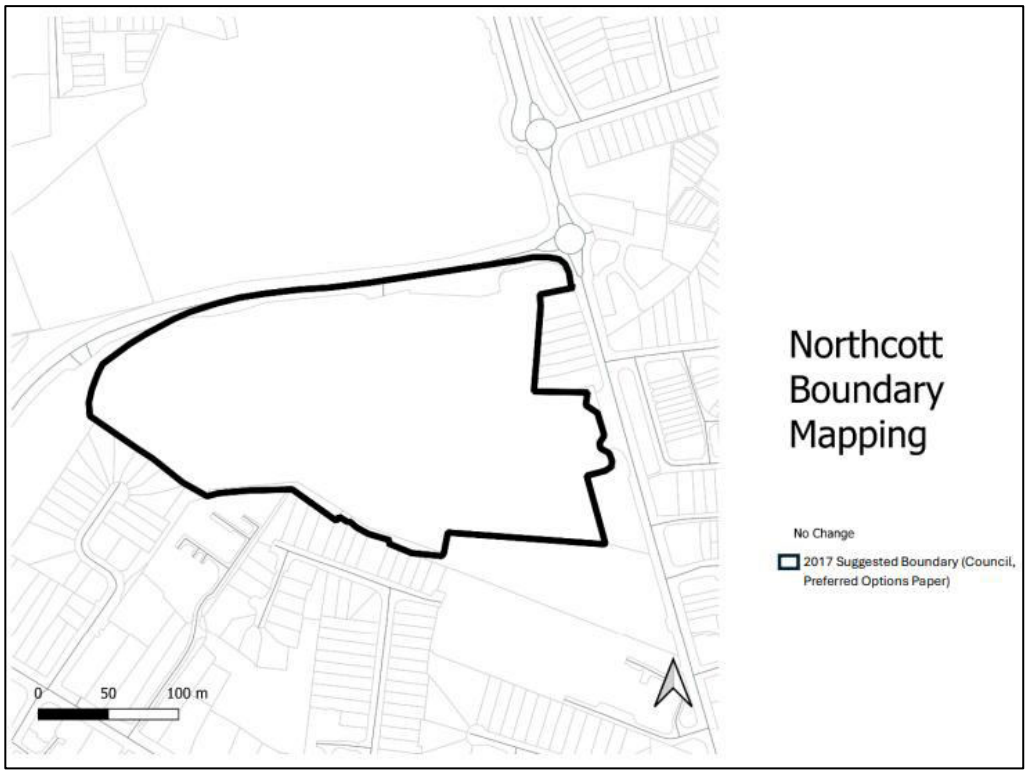
- Randalstown (Town Centre) – as part of the 2025 survey, we have recommended a number of amendments to the 2017 boundary. These include expansions to incorporate community buildings along New Street and Main Street. Contractions are recommended along Maine Fold and Neillsbrook Park to exclude residential units.



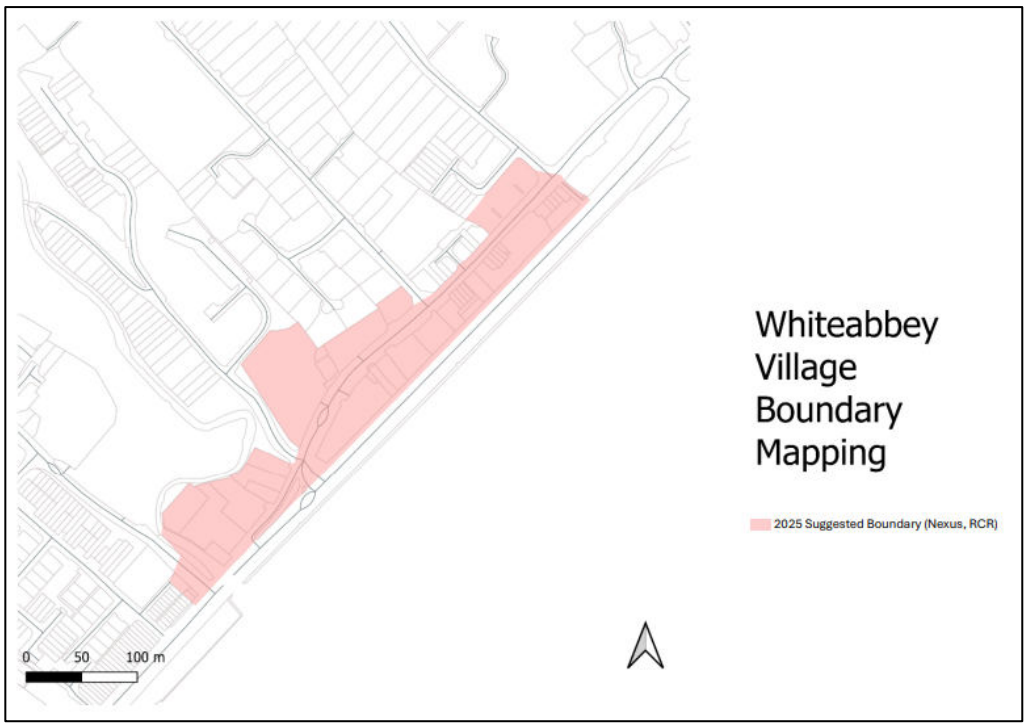
- Abbey Centre (District Centre) – Detailed commentary was provided in the RCLS regarding the boundary for Abbey Centre (see 6.60-6.61). Although that was in the context of the centre becoming a Large Town Centre, in terms of its boundary definition, we adopted a conservative position at that time by recommending against expanding the boundary to include Valley Retail Park and more distant retail units on Shore Road. Re-designation of the Abbey Centre as a District Centre lends new weight to those original recommendations. Cognisant of subservience to Belfast in the overall retail hierarchy, we therefore recommend that the Abbey Centre boundary continues to be tightly drawn to the Abbey Retail Park, Longwood Road Retail Park and the Lesley Abbey Centre. This reflects the boundary drawn in the Council's original POP.



- Northcott (District Centre) – No amendments to the POP boundary were proposed under the RCLS, and that continues to be the case following our updated assessment in 2025.



- Whiteabbey Village (District Centre) – A new boundary is required for Whiteabbey Village District Centre. Having surveyed the presence of main town centre uses in 2025, we recommend the following boundary, which closely follows the boundaries on either side of Shore Road.



6. Soundness

6.1 Development Plan Practice Note 6 ('DPPN6', DfI, May 2017) considers the tests of Soundness.

6.2 The 2019 RCLS set out a detailed consideration of compliance with DPPN6 at its Section 6. We do not repeat that content here, and for the avoidance of doubt, we consider our previous commentary remains valid in respect of Tests P1/P2/P3/P4/C2/CE2/CE3 and CE4.

6.3 We address below the remaining Tests which are most relevant to this RCR and, in particular, the Section 14 Direction.

- Test C1 – *Did the Council take account of the Regional Development Strategy?*

  The RCLS took account of guidance on town centres and retailing in the RDS, and engagement was undertaken with neighbouring authorities. Whilst the Advisory Report received from PAC in October 2023, following Independent Examination, concluded that the RDS was appropriately accounted for, the Section 14 Direction makes it clear that DfI considered that designation of the Abbey Centre as a Large Town Centre was not in general conformity with the RDS. This RCR has therefore sought to rectify DfI's concern by providing evidence in support of reclassifying the Abbey Centre as a District Centre, and therefore in conformity with the RDS.

- Test C3 – *Did the Council take account of policy and guidance issued by the Department?*

  The RCLS took account of the policy and guidance in relation to retail as set out in DfI's Strategic Planning Policy Statement, Regional Development Strategy and Development Plan Practice Notes. This is corroborated by the Advisory Report received from PAC in October 2023 following Independent Examination.

  This RCR also now takes account of the Section 14 Direction issued by DfI in October 2025 in regard to plan policy matters regarding the Abbey Centre and specifically its re-designation as a District Centre (3.3).

- Test C4 – *Has the Plan had regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the Council's district or to any adjoining Council's district?*

  The RCLS had full regard to the Council's own policies and strategies, as well as adopted and emerging plans of neighbouring Councils. This is corroborated by the Advisory Report received from PAC in October 2023 following Independent Examination.

  The Section 14 Direction drew attention to the potential impacts on Belfast City Centre shopping area, as the primary retail location in Northern Ireland, of designating the Abbey Centre as a Large Town Centre. This can in turn be interpreted to mean that the proposals were out of accord with the Belfast Local Development Plan – Plan Strategy (2023). Re-designation of the Abbey Centre as a District Centre overcomes this concern.

- Test CE1 – *The DPD sets out a coherent strategy from which its policies and allocations logically flow, and where cross-boundary issues are relevant, it is not in conflict with the DPDs of neighbouring Councils.*

  The RCLS explained that its capacity assessment was underpinned by a 'constant market share' assumption whereby no increase to market share in convenience and comparison goods retailing had been assumed into the future, and that the Borough retained the current status quo. Any forecast uplift in market share might otherwise be of concern to neighbouring authority areas. The 'constant market share' assumption is unaltered by this RCR, and the conclusion therefore remains valid.

Linked to this, the RCLS also concluded that the elevation of the Abbey Centre to a Large Town Centre would not cause conflict with the primary objectives of the Belfast Plan, not least as there was a significant volume of permitted and proposed retail development in Belfast, which, under its Plan, would exert pulls in the opposite direction. Notwithstanding PAC support, the Section 14 Direction asserts that elevation of the Abbey Centre to a Large Town Centre would, *inter alia*, give rise to such a concern. The re-designation of the Abbey Centre as a District Centre is therefore assumed to overcome this concern.

Appendix A – Health-checks

Antrim Centre

Description

The Antrim centre is a linear town centre comprising a traditional high street, and extending to the north to include community uses on Dublin Road, including the police station, the fire station and St Comgalls Church. It also extends to the south across the Massereene Bridge to include several commercial units and the large car park located off the A6.

The centre has a good range of convenience uses, including a large Tesco supermarket and filling station, and an Iceland supermarket, as well as independent convenience units including a butcher and baker, and food and wine shops. Of the 50 Leisure units, there are 18 takeaway shops, which make up a significant 36% of the offering. The remainder of leisure units is made up of cafés, bars, restaurants and pubs. In terms of financial and business uses, there is one bank (Danske Bank), as well as several solicitors and accountants. Retail services are made up predominantly of hairdressers, barbers, and beauty salons. At 14.9% the proportion of vacant units is above the national average (14%), but only just. Most vacant units could be found on High Street, causing disruptions in the active frontages to the street. This proportion of vacant units does not account for the redevelopment of part of the Castle Mall, wherein approximately 16 previous retail units have been demolished to make way for social housing, parking and amenities.

Overall, Antrim is easy to access owing to the Antrim station providing links to buses and trains between Derry/Londonderry and Belfast. There are also several bus stops throughout the centre providing regular services to surrounding areas. Large car parking areas outside the Castle Mall, off Castle Street to the north, outside the Tesco, off Railway Street to the west and on-street parking on High Street provide parking for visitors throughout the centre.

Pedestrian movement into and throughout the centre was good, particularly along High Street; however, it was noticeably limited further to the west. Similarly, to the south, on the other side of the Six Mile water, there were very limited pedestrian movements noted, and no pedestrian trips observed between the southern section and the linear shopping parade. It is considered that commercial units located in the south are quite isolated, only serving the immediate residential areas.

Overall, the layout and amenities of Antrim reflect a vital and viable centre, with a good range of uses. Community facilities such as the park outside of the Antrim Library and the Market Square market add to the overall quality. It is considered that completion of the Castle Mall development will help revitalise the centre, and aid in filling vacant units as new residents and interest are brought to the centre.

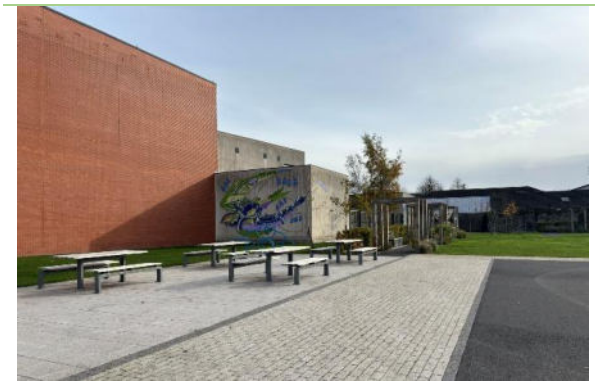


Figure 1: Open space, sports court, public seating and garden outside Antrim Library.



Figure 2: Inside Castle Mall, with public seating, greening and bins provided.



Figure 3: Row of units showing mix of residential with commercial, and façade treatment to vacant unit (former Thompson Cycles).

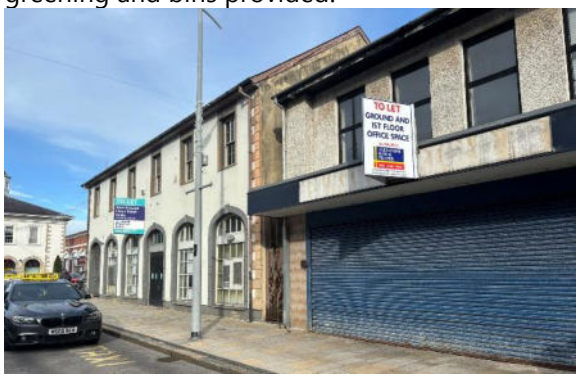
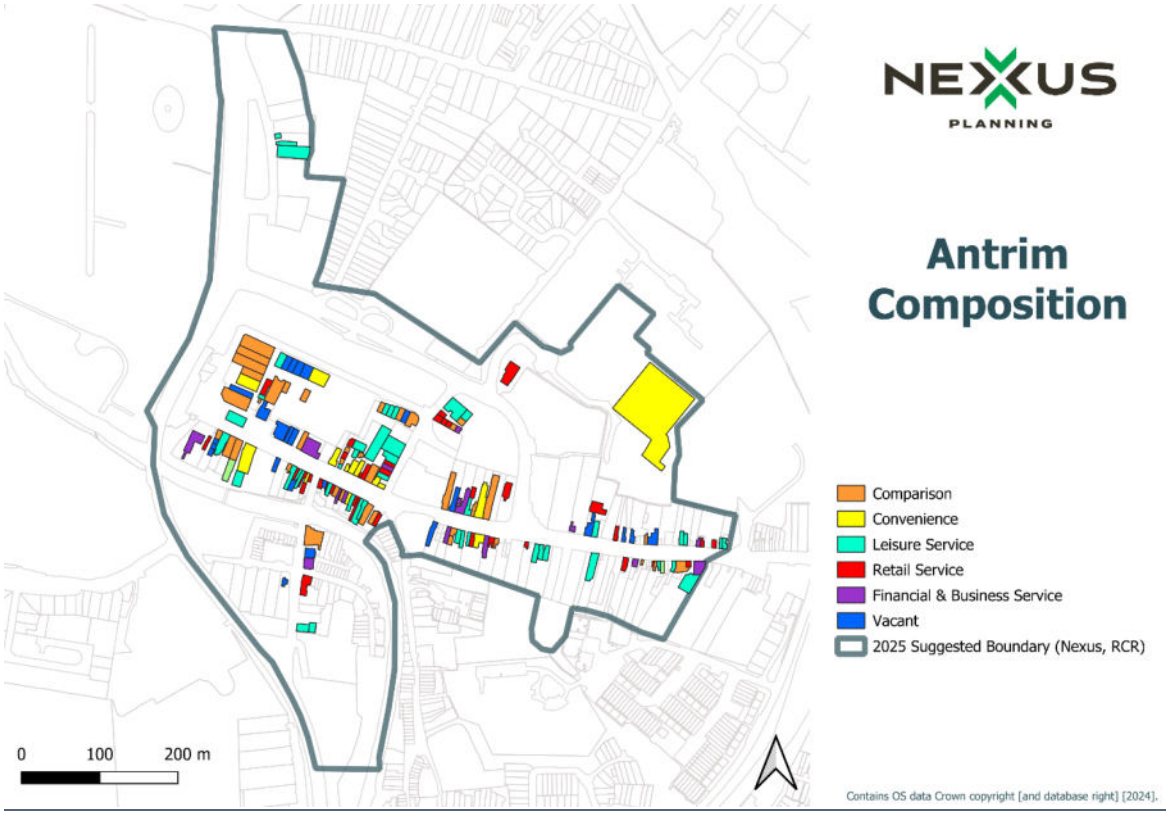


Figure 4: Vacant units adjacent to taxi rank on High Street.

Table 1: Antrim Town Centre Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	39	22.5%	25.9%
Convenience	14	8.1%	9.4%
Total Service	95	54.9%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	14	8.1%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	46	26.6%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	35	20.2%	*15.9%*
Vacant	25	14.5%	14.0%
Total	**173**		

Source: Neighbourhood centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.


NEXUS
PLANNING
Antrim
Composition
Comparison
Convenience
Leisure Service
Retail Service
Financial & Business Service
Vacant
2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)
0
100
200 m
Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Ballyclare Centre

Description

The Ballyclare Centre includes a central shopping area around The Square and extends north to include the Asda supermarket and the Sixmile Leisure Centre, and south, down Main Street, to include a cluster of retail units on the other side of Six Mile Water.

The centre, comprising 135 units, has a good mix of retail and service uses, including the ASDA store, complemented by two small Spar stores, and local convenience stores, two butchers, and a local greengrocer. The retail service offer is made up predominantly of hairdressing or salon uses (20 out of 31 units). The leisure offer is smaller for a centre of this size and made up predominantly of cafes and takeaway units. The comparison provision is bolstered by the large Homebargains store, but also provides local providers such as charity shops, clothing shops, stationery, craft shops and florists. There are 21 vacant units in the centre, accounting for 15.6% of all units, which is above the national average (14.0%). This is not a particular cause for concern, given the size of the centre; however, it is clear there is a clustering of vacant units towards the north of the centre at the intersection of Ballyeaston Road and Rashee Road. It was also noted that some vacant units are falling into disrepair, indicating an extended period of vacancy.

The centre is considered to be reasonably walkable due to wide footpaths, and the provision of street trees, particularly around the centrally located town hall, creates an enjoyable environment. It is noted that the southern end of the centre is evidently dislocated from the remainder of the centre, and limited linked trips were observed over the Main Street bridge on foot. There is significant construction around the Ballynure Road roundabout, including a large housing development, and reconstruction around the Spar and filling station. The reoccupation of vacant units along this end of Main Street should be a focus and would contribute to improving the environmental quality of the southern portion of the centre.

The north-east of the centre is certainly car-dominated, and as such, the provision of parking is easily accessible. This includes the central square, around the ASDA and Home Bargains, and around the leisure centre. As such, these big footprint units (ASDA, Home Bargains, Leisure Centre) are relatively hard for pedestrians to move through and do not encourage trips between these uses and the main street. In particular, the pedestrian path between the ASDA and the Leisure centre was uncared for and was overgrown with weeds and instances of litter. The enclosed metal fencing made it feel unsafe. As such, further consideration could be given as to how to better incorporate these large units better with the rest of the fine grain centre.



Figure 1: Pathways between the ASDA store (centre) and the Six Mile leisure centre is not well cared for



Figure 2: Shopfronts and public realm along Main Street



Figure 3: Vacant units along Rashee Road, which are falling into disrepair

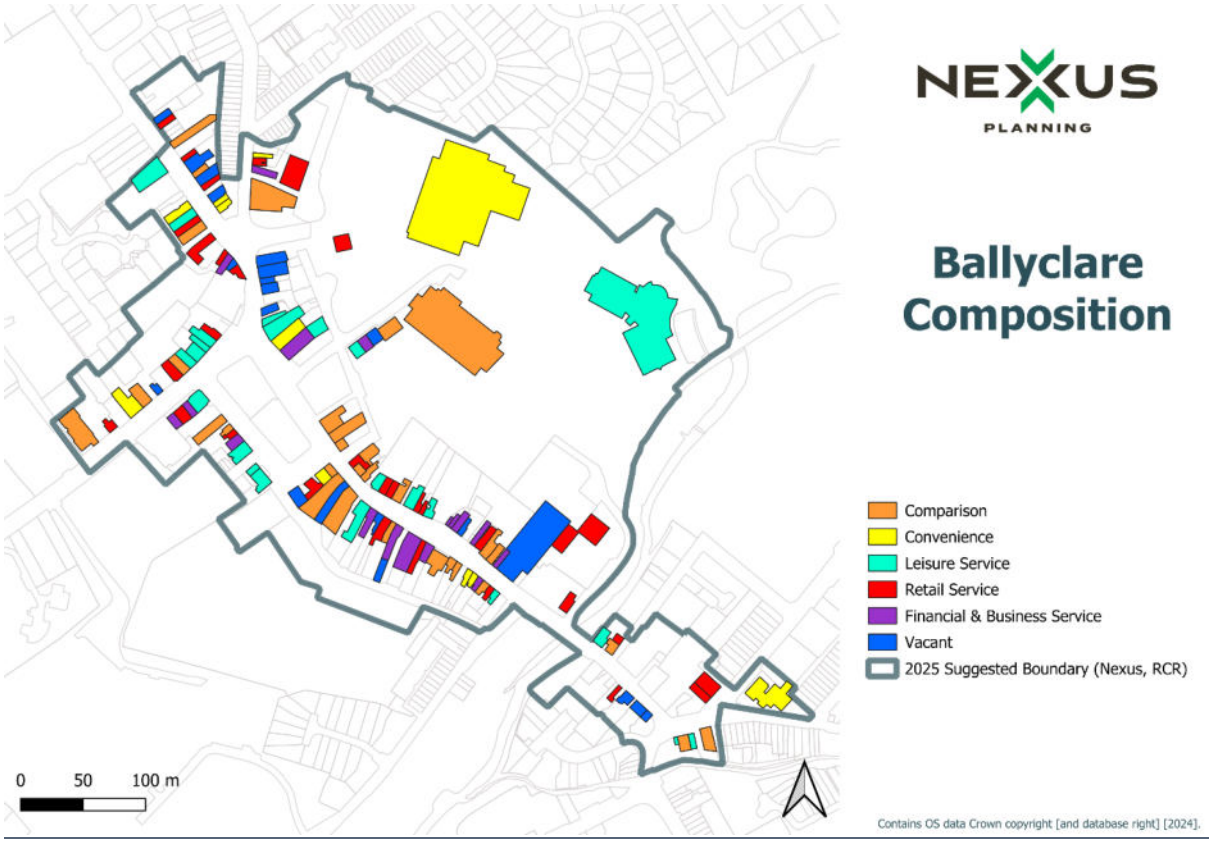


Figure 4: Ballyclare Town Hall, and car parking located in The Square

Table 1: Ballyclare Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	31	23.0%	25.9%
Convenience	11	8.1%	9.4%
Total Service	72	53.3%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	18	13.3%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	23	17.0%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	31	23.0%	*15.9%*
Vacant	21	15.6%	14.0%
Total	**135**		

Source: Neighbourhood centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.


NEXUS
PLANNING
Ballyclare Composition
Comparison
Convenience
Leisure Service
Retail Service
Financial & Business Service
Vacant
2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)
0
50
100 m
Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Crumlin Centre

Description

Crumlin centre comprises part of Main Street and extends north up Mill Road, and is made up predominantly of small-scale shop frontages, with integrated residential uses to the western edge of the centre. The centre has a low proportion of comparison uses, compared to the national average (7.9% vs 25.9%). This is significantly low for a centre of this size, and is made up of a hardware store, jeweller, farm supply, pet store and florist. There is, therefore, an opportunity to increase this provision to allow a diversity of comparison stores, such as clothing or shoe stores.

The centre has a good proportion of convenience uses, including the Tesco Superstore in the eastern part of the centre and a SPAR on Mill Road. There is also a good offer of local businesses, including two grocers and two bakeries. The Tesco Superstore is the largest commercial unit in the centre, and it can be assumed that some level of linked trips would occur between the centre and the linear shopping parade. The financial and business offer is made up of a credit union, insurance providers, and estate agents. The leisure and retail service offers are generally in line with national averages, with the leisure service mostly comprised of takeaway and restaurant uses. The retail service offer is predominantly beauty uses (hairdressers, barbers, salons), but there are also three dog groomers, which is a significant offer for a centre of this size. At 22%, Crumlin has the largest proportion of vacant units among other centres in Antrim and Newtownabbey, and this proportion is well above the national average (14%). These vacant units disrupt to shopping parade by creating voids in the active facades as vacant units have closed roller doors or boarded up windows.

The centre has bus stops at regular intervals on Main Street, and on Mill Road to the north, providing regular routes to Lisburn, Antrim and Belfast. On-street parking is possible on both sides of Main Street and was not observed to be fully occupied. Main Street was not a particularly busy thoroughfare; however, Main Street has only two pedestrian crossings. Regardless, footpaths are relatively wide, and good pedestrian activity was observed.

The centre was well maintained and clean with potted trees and trees, bollards and street trees at regular intervals along Main Street. The provision of hedging and grassed verges around the Tesco also helped to alleviate the impact of the hardstanding. The integration of residential units with commercial uses, and community uses such as medical practice, the community hall, and several churches, creates a locally focused centre that has a good environmental quality.

Overall, the centre is considered to be vital and viable; however, consideration should be given to the increase in vacant units since the last health check in 2019, from 9 units to 17 units, and reoccupation of these units could help to address the lack of comparison units.



Figure 1: Shopfronts on Mill Road, outside the Eurospar store



Figure 2: Shopfronts and public realm on Main St



Figure 3: Vacant units and units under construction along Main Street

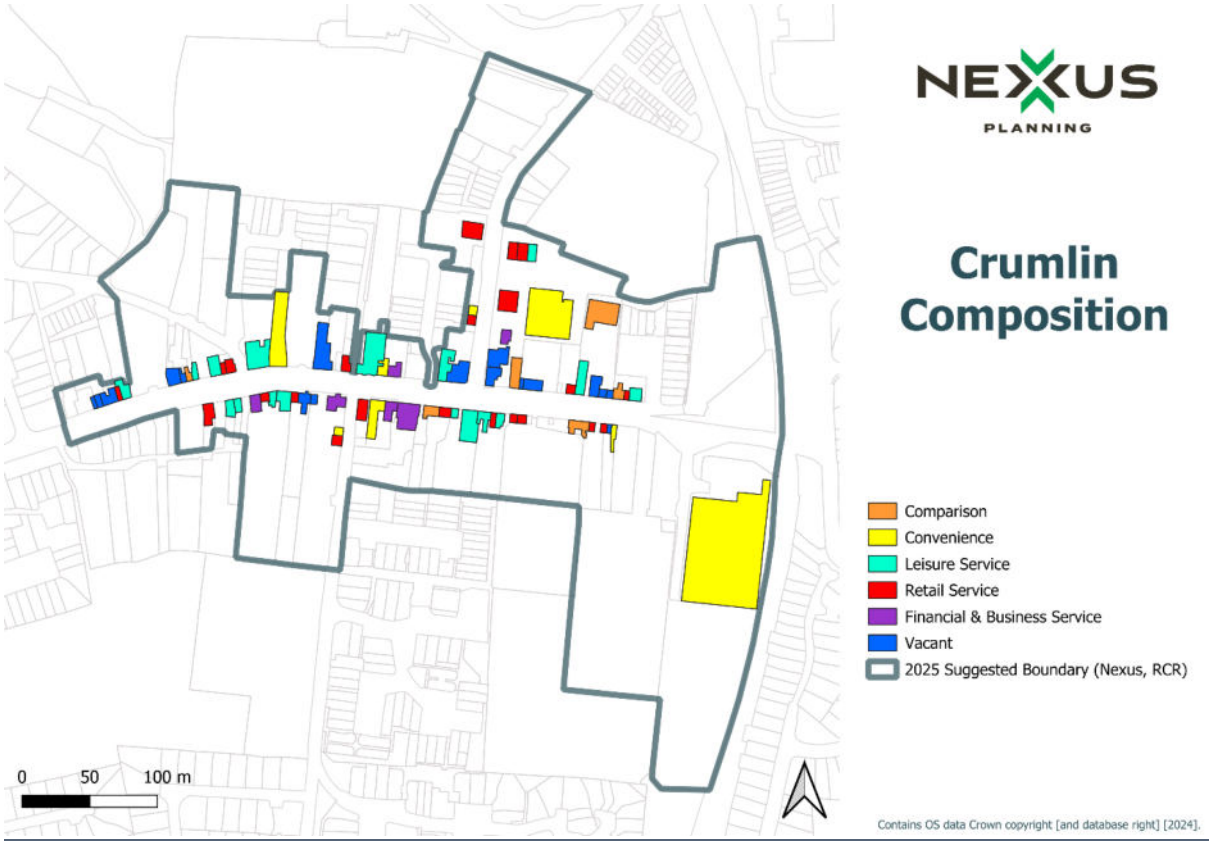


Figure 4: Tesco Superstore located in the eastern end of Main Street

Table 1 Crumlin Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	6	7.9%	25.9%
Convenience	8	10.5%	9.4%
Total Service	45	59.2%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	6	7.9%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	17	22.4%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	22	28.9%	*15.9%*
Vacant	17	22.4%	14.0%
Total	**76**		

Source: Neighbourhood centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.


NEXUS
PLANNING
Crumlin
Composition
Comparison
Convenience
Leisure Service
Retail Service
Financial & Business Service
Vacant
2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)
0
50
100 m
Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Glengormley Centre

Description

The Glengormley Centre is a linear centre located on Antrim Road, which includes the intersection with Ballyclare Road, Carnmoney Road and Hightown Road. Comprising 138 units, the centre extends for a length of approximately 800m. The centre is undergoing significant development. Notable development sites include the demolition of part of the Tramways shopping centre, to allow for the extension of the Spar convenience unit, a 63 dwelling apartment building with ground floor commercial unit at the Former Eurowash site (intersection of Ballyclare Road and Antrim Road), and adjacent to the Primary School off Church Road, where 49 apartments, and retail units are proposed at the former Thunderdome site.

There is a high proportion of Leisure Services made up predominantly of takeaway and restaurant uses. The Leisure offer also includes the leisure complex to the south, which provides golf, indoor play, karting and bowling facilities. Both comparison and convenience uses are almost half the national average. The convenience offer lacks a large supermarket; however, the Tesco store located at the Northcott centre is located to the north of Glengormley centre. The Iceland unit in the remaining section of the Tramways Centre and the Spar provide the main convenience provision, but access to these units will be improved once construction is completed. The comparison provision is limited in terms of the number of units, but provides a good mix of retailers, including home repair style shops (carpets and flooring, appliances, and bathroom refurbishment stores), with a mix of clothing stores and electronics. The centre has a high proportion of financial and business service units, more than double the national average (17.4% vs. 7.8%) and is made up predominantly of estate agents and solicitors. Despite the high level of construction, the number of vacant units is lower than the national average (9.4% vs. 14.0%) and is expected to decrease further once fundamental construction is completed, particularly as large housing projects are proposed.

The centre has a mix of wide and narrow footpaths, allowing mostly for unencumbered pedestrian access; however, the centre's location along Antrim Road, which is a very busy thoroughfare, is not conducive to a positive pedestrian journey.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to increasing planting and trees along Antrim Road, which would positively contribute to the environmental quality of the area. Overall, the centre has a wide range of uses; however, its linear layout on a busy road contributes to it feeling disjointed. In particular, the northern and southern extensions of the centre were observed to have little to no foot traffic but were predominantly visited by cars. However, the centre is still considered to be vital and viable, particularly given the relatively low vacancy rates and the significant development underway which is expected to improve the centre greatly.



Figure 1: Development site at Tramways centre and enlargement of Eurospar



Figure 2: Leisure units located parallel to Antrim Road

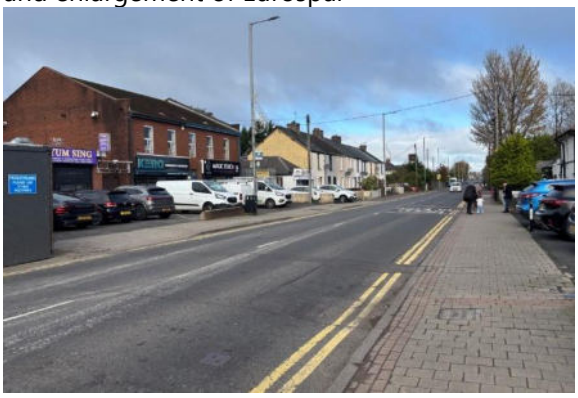


Figure 3: Commercial units integrating with residential units along Ballyclare Road.

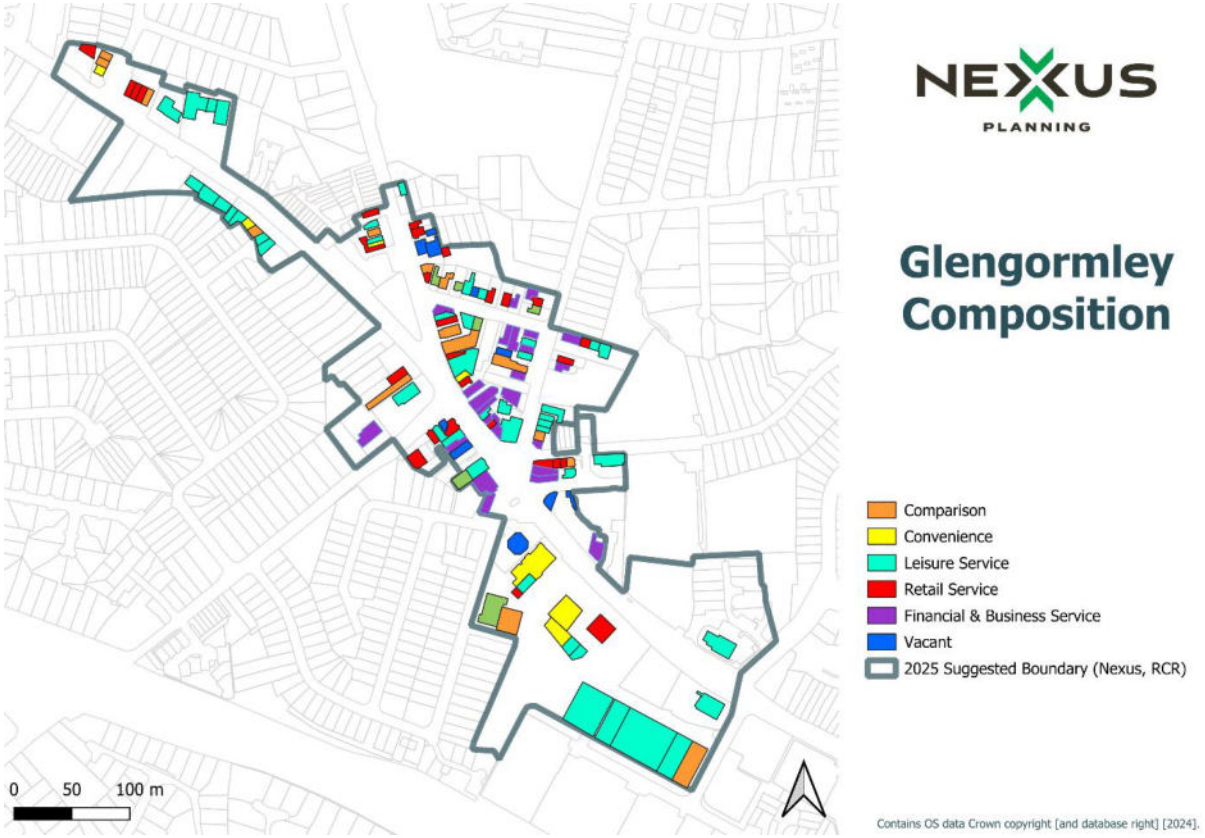


Figure 4: Olivia Centre located to the northern edge of centre, providing predominantly restaurants uses.

Table 1: Glengormley Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	16	11.6%	25.9%
Convenience	7	5.1%	9.4%
Total Service	102	73.9%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	24	17.4%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	49	35.5%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	29	21.0%	*15.9%*
Vacant	13	9.4%	14.0%
Total	**138**		

Source: Neighbourhood centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.


NEXUS
PLANNING
Glengormley
Composition
Comparison
Convenience
Leisure Service
Retail Service
Financial & Business Service
Vacant
2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)
0
50
100 m
Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Randalstown Centre

Description

Randalstown centre comprises predominantly the area surrounding the intersection of Main Street and New Street and is located beside the River Maine and the prominent railway viaduct (now disused). The centre is made up of 72 units and is one of the smaller centres in Antrim & Newtownabbey. The centre is made up of small units, predominantly independent businesses, and is categorised by its lack of big box retail units. The convenience offer is predominantly independent providers, including the butchers, off-licences, grocers and convenience stores. The largest offer is the Kearney's supermarket on Main Street, and the SPAR on New Street. The comparison offer is below the national average (18.1% vs 25.9%) and is made up of an eclectic mix, including a craft store, small gift boutiques, a gun shop, clothing stores and a large bridal wear centre. The retail service offer is predominantly health and beauty oriented, and the leisure offer is made up of local bars and public houses, local coffee shops, and a few takeaway units. The financial and business service offer is below the national average (4.2% vs 7.8%) but provides a solicitor, an accountant and an estate agent, providing a satisfactory offer for the local population.

There are 9 vacant units, clustered predominantly to the west of the centre, which transitions into a principally residential area. This area also includes the Presbyterian and Church of Ireland churches, the community hall and the community garden. An effort has been made to cover some vacant units with images of active frontages to alleviate the visual impact of vacant units. However, this could be further implemented temporarily to all vacant units as soon as they become vacant.

The centre is relatively accessible for cars with on-street parking along Main Street, and a dedicated car park behind, allowing customers to park and access the Kearneys and other centre services. There is a small car park associated with the SPAR, as well as a car park next to the Randalstown Library, providing walkable access to SPAR and other uses to the south. The centre is walkable, and pedestrian activity was observed throughout the centre, including people walking through the centre or visiting it specifically for a purpose.

In terms of the general quality of the centre, it was clean, and care has been taken to provide on-street or shopfront planter boxes and planting to contribute to the environmental quality of the centre. The Arches Laneway, providing access from a car park to the main shopping parade, was well cared for with aesthetic potted plants, making this laneway a designated and enjoyable pathway for pedestrians. The Moores Lane pocket park and Widows Row Garden, both link the centre to the wider greenspaces around the river and viaduct, providing a lush and well cared for centre. As such, the centre is considered to be vital and viable.



Figure 1: Greening and Planting on Arches Lane off Main Street



Figure 2: SPAR store on New Street, located next to the public library



Figure 3: Public Realm on New Street

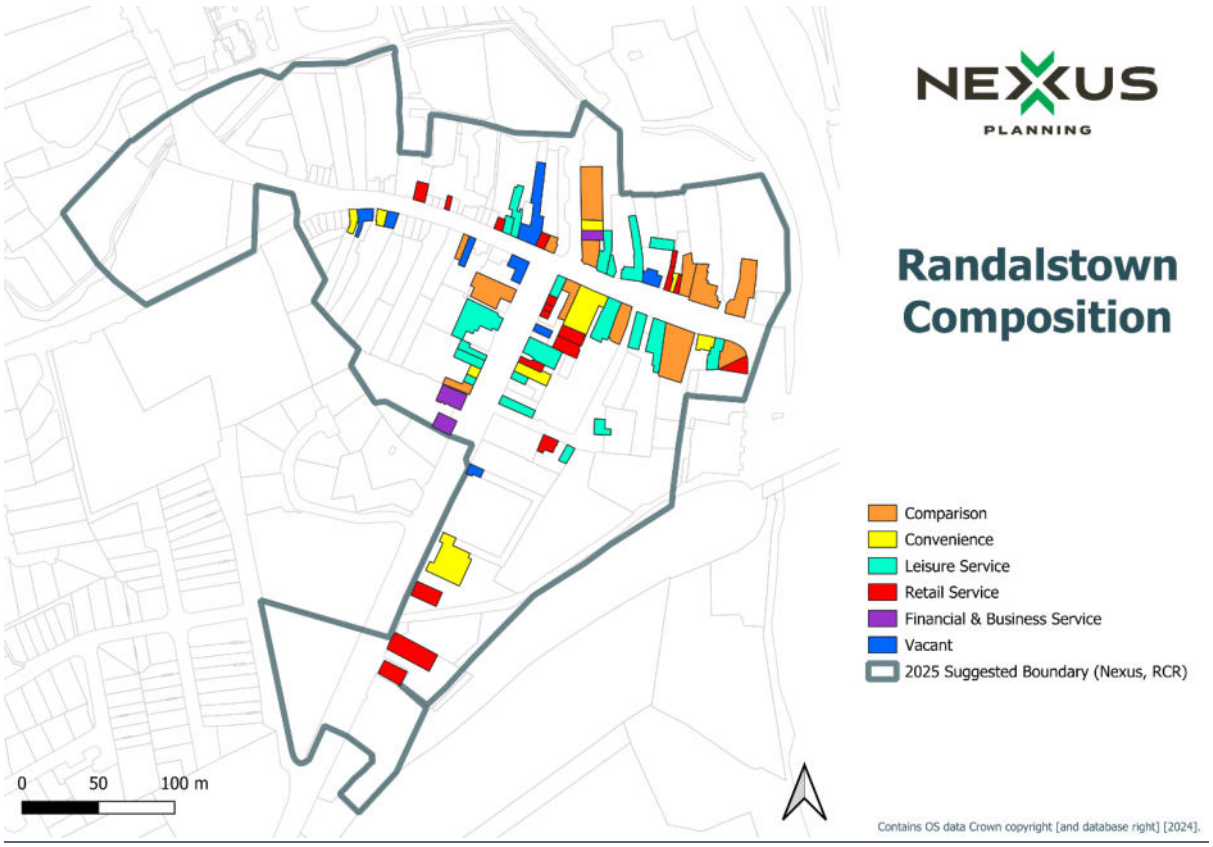


Figure 4: Vacant unit on Main Street, where façade treatment reduces impact of inactive frontage

Table 1 Randalstown Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	13	18.1%	25.9%
Convenience	9	12.5%	9.4%
Total Service	41	56.9%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	3	4.2%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	20	27.8%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	18	25.0%	*15.9%*
Vacant	9	12.5%	14.0%
Total	**72**		

Source: District centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.


NEXUS
PLANNING
Randalstown Composition
Comparison
Convenience
Leisure Service
Retail Service
Financial & Business Service
Vacant
2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)
0
50
100 m
Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Abbey Centre

Description

The Abbey Centre includes the Lesley Abbey Centre Shopping centre (made up of 73 commercial units), the Abbey Retail Park to the north (made up of 7 commercial units) and the Longwood Retail Park (made up of 26 commercial units) to the south. The Abbey Centre is made up predominantly of national multiples, with the shopping centre a traditional indoor mall style centre with units on either side of a central walkway, lighting, tiled floors, central seating, and kiosks at intervals. All stores are inward facing within the mall, except for the Dunnes unit to the west, which can be accessed from the road.

The Longwood Retail Park, located to the south of the shopping centre, is a traditional big box retail park, with perimeter buildings and a central car park. There is a mix of comparison units, but it also provides leisure services in the form of a health club, a casino, and a Subway and Costa unit. There is also a cluster of units, further east down Longwood Road, which has a particular focus on home goods and repairs. A large B&M unit is located centrally, adjacent to the Abbey Centre shopping Centre; however, it is serviced by its own parking lot.

The Abbey Retail Park to the north is notably dislocated from the other two sections, separated by a large roundabout and set back from Church Road by its dedicated parking lot. The retail park has 7 units, including a Tesco Superstore, M&S, Lidl, Wren Kitchens, Curry's, B&Q, and a building supply store.

Given the nature of this centre being made up of a shopping centre and a retail park, it is unsurprising that the comparison offer is double the national average; however convenience offer is roughly average, owing mostly to the Abbey Retail Park offering. Financial and business services are below average, with only four units (insurance, bank and money exchange) all located in the shopping centre. The leisure service is predominantly takeaway food or coffee shops, which are mainly within the Abbey Centre shopping centre. Retail service offer is below average and is only provided within the shopping centre with travel agents, opticians and two salons. For a centre of this size, the level of vacancy (1.9%) is a very good sign of the health of the centre and is well below the national average.

The centre is car dominated, as demonstrated by the huge supply of car parking. Whilst the retail parks are accessible on foot from the shopping centre, there is no direct route, and this necessitates crossing busy roads and walking adjacent to busy roads and car parking. There are only a few signalised crossings provided throughout the centre, requiring pedestrians to divert their route to access them. As such, it was observed to be commonplace for visitors to drive between uses, and ample parking at each section of the centre facilitates this. Overall, the centre is not particularly accessible for pedestrians; however, the centre was observed to be buzzing with activity, in particular the shopping centre, suggesting it is a very popular centre. The low level of vacancy and the level of activity suggested that, despite its lack of pedestrian infrastructure, the Abbey centre is both vital and viable.



Figure 1: Inside the Abbey Centre shopping centre which has central public sitting areas



Figure 2: Access to Home Bargains and other units within the Longwood Retail Park



Figure 3: View of Longwood Road (looking east) the main road providing access and movement through the centre

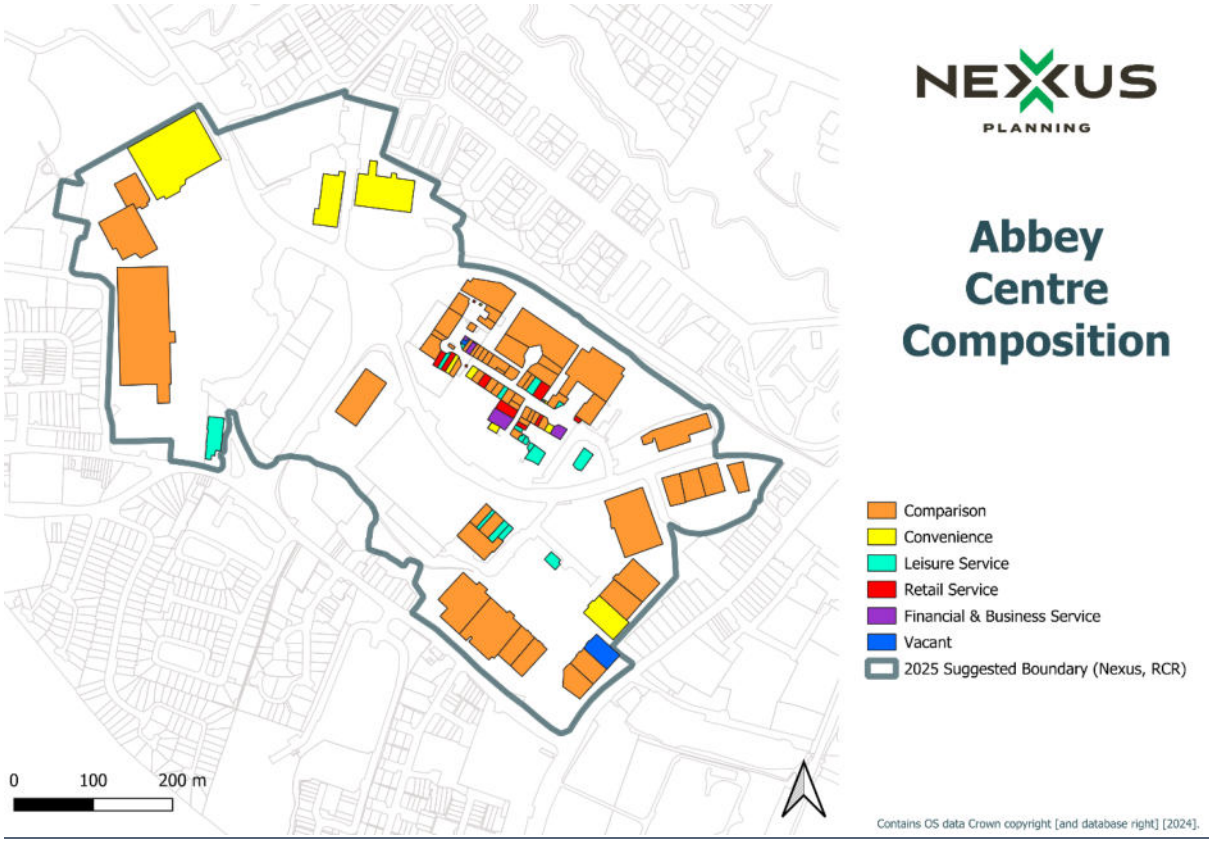


Figure 4: Dunnes unit located to the east part of the Abbey Centre shopping centre, the only outward facing unit in the mall.

Table 1 Abbey Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	62	57.9%	25.9%
Convenience	10	9.3%	9.4%
Total Service	33	30.8%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	4	3.7%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	19	17.8%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	10	9.3%	*15.9%*
Vacant	2	1.9%	14.0%
Total	**107**		

Source: District centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.


NEXUS
PLANNING
Abbey
Centre
Composition
Comparison
Convenience
Leisure Service
Retail Service
Financial & Business Service
Vacant
2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)
0
100
200 m
Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Northcott Centre

Description

Northcott Centre is the smallest centre in Antrim and Newtownabbey and is located directly north of Glengormley centre. The shopping centre comprises 6 units and includes a Tesco Extra, The Range, Burger King, Card Factory, Medicare Chemist and a Tesco café. The centre is accompanied by a large car park providing parking for approximately 600 vehicles. Since the 2019 Retail Study, the Range unit was constructed adjacent to the Tesco, thus diversifying the retail offer at this centre.

Given its limited size, the centre has no retail service uses, no financial and business service and no vacant units. With the provision of three comparison units, there is an over-representation in the proportion of comparison units; however, given the small size of the centre, this is not cause for great concern.

The centre is located just 700m from Glengormley; however, it is not considered that there are significant pedestrian linkages between the two centres. The Northcott centre is car-dominated and made up mostly of parking spaces and hardstanding. This is not conducive to pedestrian access, and the insular nature of the shopping centre, with its back to Ballyclare Road, means that a pedestrian must walk around the centre, either from Antrim Road or Ballyclare Road, in order to enter the shopfronts.

The centre has included verge planting and trees at regular intervals throughout the car park and around the perimeter to alleviate the impact of the hardstanding. This is a positive contribution to the environmental quality of the centre; however, the nature of this car parking focused centre does not allow for much more intervention to improve the quality of the centre.

A further four retail units are proposed to be constructed to the south of the Tesco unit and will allow further diversification of units. Overall, the centre is considered to be vital and viable, despite the limited over, the centre was very busy and the car park was almost at capacity, indicating a very well-used centre, owing mostly to the Tesco.



Figure 1: View of the Northcott centre from the parking lot.



Figure 2: Inside the shopping mall with Tesco utilising the main walkway for additional space for merchandise



Figure 3: Northcott Centre parking lot

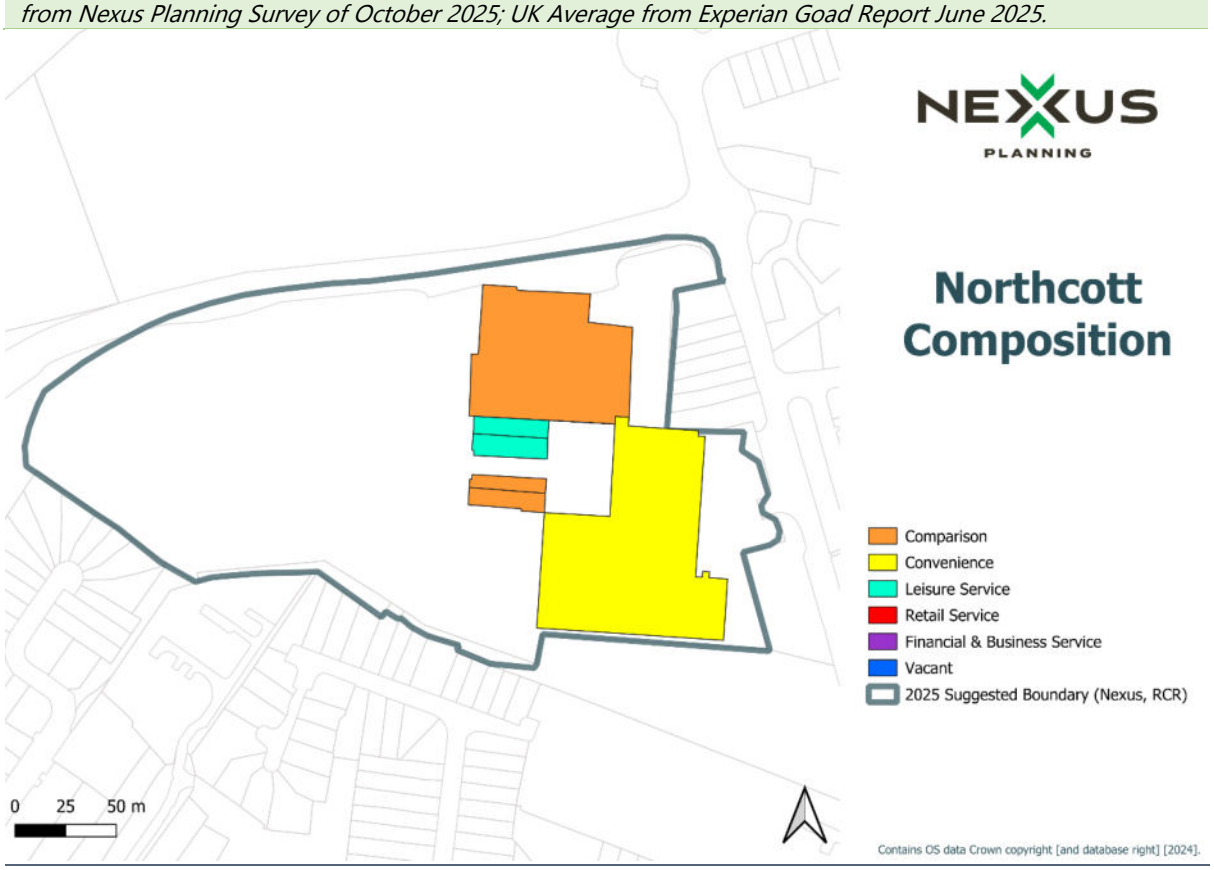


Figure 4: Location of proposed additional units

Table 1 Northcott Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	3	50.0%	25.9%
Convenience	1	16.7%	9.4%
Total Service	2	33.3%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	0	0.0%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	2	33.3%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	0	0.0%	*15.9%*
Vacant	0	0.0%	14.0%
Total	**6**		

Source: Neighbourhood centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.



Whiteabbey Village Centre

Description

Whiteabbey Village is a centre located on a slip road, adjacent to Shore Road between Glenville Road and Circular Road. It is predominantly made up of a linear row of shops, with a public car park in the centre.

The centre is anchored by the Spar supermarket and complemented by other uses for the local community, including the Whiteabbey Presbyterian Church and Methodist Church, and medical uses such as a medical centre, dentist and physio. The leisure service offer, accounting for 32.6% of the units, which is over the national average, is evenly split between restaurants, cafés, bars and pubs. There is no health club or gym provided, which could be a welcome addition to the centre's leisure offer. The retail service uses accounts for 34.9% of the units, which is double the national average. These units cater to a range of needs, including health and beauty, dry cleaning and dog grooming.

The comparison unit provision is well below the national average at 7.0% compared to 25.9% and is made up of only three units. The provision of a pharmacy and florist speaks to a highly local centre, accounting for local needs, but could benefit from the inclusion of more diverse comparison offerings. The three financial and business service units make up 7% of the units, which is below the national average of 7.8%. The provision of a broker, estate agent and solicitor covers a good range of service needs. The centre does not have access to a bank; however, online banking is resulting in the mass closure of branches, and it is considered that a financial institution would not prioritise a new store in a centre of this size. With six vacancies, the centre is right on the national average. Three vacant units are clustered to the south of the centre, upon entry to the slip road from the A2 (Shore Road), and lie next to a vacant, overgrown lot. As such, this detracts greatly from the overall impression of the area. However, it is evident that permission for a ground floor pharmacy and five apartments was recently approved, and would regenerate this area, and remove 3 of the 6 vacant units. This speaks positively of the health of the centre due to the quick reoccupation of units.

The slip road is quiet, and as such, the centre is set back from the main traffic on Shore Road. This provides an enjoyable and safe thoroughfare for pedestrians. Sidewalks are wide and unburdened by obstacles, and the addition of bollards facilitates safe passage through the centre. We note that there were no crossings in the centre, although there is a low level of vehicle movement; the addition of pedestrian crossings should be considered. The centre is pleasant with planter boxes, vegetation, and a wide setback to leisure units, allowing outdoor seating for a lively atmosphere.

Overall, the centre was attractive and has a good range of uses to complement the local area and surrounding residents.



Figure 1: Woody's Shopping Centre at the entranc to the centre with Spar and dedicated car parking



Figure 2: Outside sitting area at SOZO restaurant



Figure 3: Cleared site, and vacant units at 570 To 578 Shore Road, the site of the approved mixec -use development

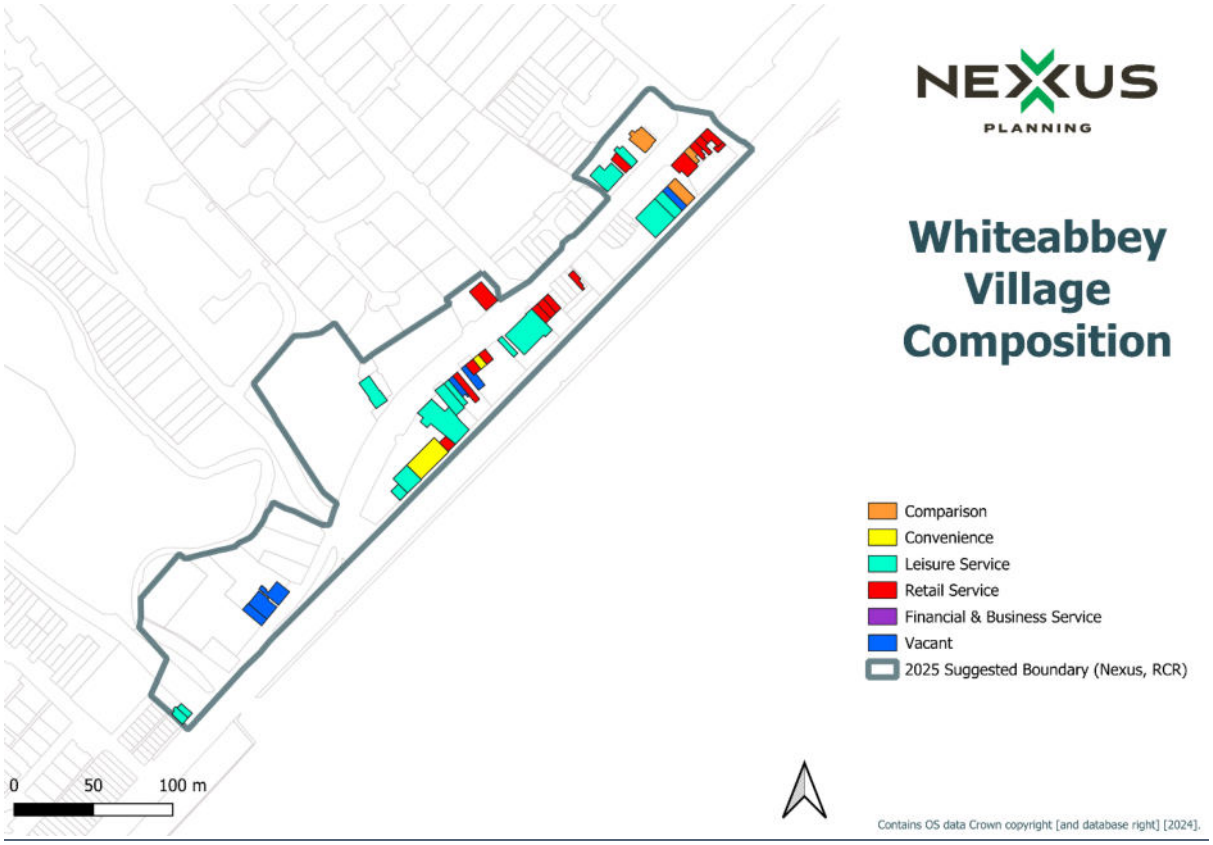


Figure 4: Planter box addition outside Presbyterian Church, and adjacent to a wide footpath

Table 1 Whiteabbey Village Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	3	7.0%	d25.9%
Convenience	2	4.7%	9.4%
Total Service	32	74.4%	**50.4%**
Financial & Business Service	3	7.0%	*7.8%*
Leisure Service	14	32.6%	*26.7%*
Retail Service	15	34.9%	*15.9%*
Vacant	6	14.0%	14.0%
Total	**43**		

Source: Neighbourhood centre composition based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of October 2025; UK Average from Experian Goad Report June 2025.


NEXUS
PLANNING
Whiteabbey Village Composition
Comparison
Convenience
Leisure Service
Retail Service
Financial & Business Service
Vacant
2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)
0
50
100 m
Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Appendix B – Abbey Centre Boundary Plan

Randalstown

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 50 100 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Antrim

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 100 200 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

NEXUS PLANNING

Crumlin

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 50 100 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

NEXUS PLANNING

Ballyclare

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 50 100 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

NEXUS PLANNING

Northcott

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 25 50 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

NEXUS PLANNING

Glengormley

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 75 150 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

NEXUS PLANNING

Abbey Centre

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 100 200 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

Whiteabbey Village

2025 Suggested Boundary (Nexus, RCR)

0 25 50 m

Contains OS data Crown copyright [and database right] [2024].

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