Huddersfield Town Centre Health check

2026

Table of Contents

Huddersfield Town Centre 1

Uses 3

Daytime/Evening Economy 4

Vacancies 5

Opportunity Sites 6

Pedestrian Flows 6

Accessibility 7

Perception of Safety 8

Environmental Quality 8

Stakeholders responses 9

Conclusions 9

Huddersfield Town Centre

Huddersfield is the principal town centre within the Kirklees district, providing a significant concentration of retail, leisure, and service activity across 674 units and approximately 144,465 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The layout of the centre is relatively compact and walkable, with key pedestrianised frontages focused around King Street, New Street, and the Kingsgate Shopping Centre, supported by a network of surrounding streets and arcades.

The town centre is notable for its rich architectural heritage, with a number of Victorian and Georgian buildings, particularly concentrated around St George's Square. The most prominent of these is Huddersfield Railway Station, a Grade I listed building often described as one of the most impressive station frontages in the country and referred to as the "St Pancras of the North." This architectural character contributes significantly to the town's identity and sense of place.

Huddersfield also has historic roots as a market town, and while the structure of the retail offer has evolved over time, this legacy remains visible in the layout of the centre and its continuing role as a civic and service hub for the wider district.

The town centre serves a large and varied residential catchment and functions as the main commercial and administrative centre for the area. This role is reflected in the diversity of uses present, including national multiple retailers, supermarkets, independent businesses, financial services, and civic functions.

Convenience retailing is anchored by Sainsbury's and Tesco stores, complemented by a range of smaller food outlets and independent grocery retailers. Huddersfield also accommodates a strong representation of national comparison retailers, including Primark, River Island, TK Maxx, and Boots, which provide for a broad spectrum of non-food shopping needs.

Leisure uses are spread throughout the town centre, with cafés, takeaways, restaurants, and pubs located along main thoroughfares and around shopping destinations. Although leisure provision is currently below national benchmarks in terms of floorspace, these uses support daytime activity and contribute to the centre's vitality. The presence of the bus and railway stations, located to the northwest of the retail core, ensures good accessibility from across the district and beyond.



Figure 1: Huddersfield benefits from a number of attractive heritage assets including its Grade I Listed Train Station



Figure 2: The centre feels safe and pleasant, with plentiful street lighting and large pedestrianised areas



Figure 3: Planter boxes and other street furniture contribute to the environmental quality of the town centre



Figure 4: The wide pavements and generally flat topography boost the Huddersfield's accessibility for pedestrians

Table 1 Huddersfield Town Centre Floorspace Composition

GOAD Category	Floorspace at 2013 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2013 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2013 (%)	Floorspace at 2025 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2025 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	58,710	39.7%	36.4%	36,535	25.3%	28.7%
Convenience	30,180	20.4%	14.4%	30,030	20.8%	15.3%
Financial & Business	13,410	9.1%	8.3%	9,061	6.3%	6.1%
Leisure	26,570	18.0%	22.7%	25,664	17.8%	27.7%
Retail Service	5,890	4.0%	7.2%	7,056	4.9%	7.2%
Vacant	12,990	8.8%	10.1%	36,118	25.0%	14.5%
Total	**147,750**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**144,465**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Composition of town centre based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of April 2025; 2013 data from WYG's Retail Capacity Study for Kirklees District (February 2014); UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

Table 2 Huddersfield Town Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2013 (no.)	Units at 2013 (%)	Units UK Average at 2013 (%)	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	237	36.0%	33.0%	176	26.1%	26.1%
Convenience	46	7.0%	8.1%	60	8.9%	9.3%
Financial & Business	68	10.3%	11.0%	48	7.1%	7.9%
Leisure	145	22.0%	21.9%	149	22.1%	26.5%

GOAD Category	Units at 2013 (no.)	Units at 2013 (%)	Units UK Average at 2013 (%)	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Retail Service	71	10.8%	13.6%	88	13.1%	15.8%
Vacant	92	14.0%	12.2%	153	22.7%	14.1%
Total	**659**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**674**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Composition of town centre based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of April 2025; 2013 data from WYG's Retail Capacity Study for Kirklees District (February 2014); UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

Uses

It is worth noting that the size of the Goad area for Huddersfield is larger than the adopted town centre boundary and includes additional premises around Castlegate and Chapel Street. This wider boundary captures some peripheral commercial areas, meaning the total number of recorded units is higher than in the defined town centre area.

Huddersfield town centre accommodates a broad and balanced mix of retail, service, and leisure uses, reflecting its role as a principal centre serving both local residents and the wider Kirklees district. The convenience goods offer remains one of the town's strengths and has stayed largely stable since 2013. Convenience floorspace accounts for 20.8% of total floorspace in 2025, compared to 20.4% in 2013, and remains well above the UK average of 15.3%. The number of convenience units has also increased slightly from 46 (7.0%) to 60 (8.9%), showing continued local demand. The sector is anchored by Sainsbury's and Tesco, both located within the town centre boundary, supported by smaller independent grocers and convenience stores. These uses are clustered mainly around the eastern and southern edges of the centre, where larger-format stores help to draw footfall into adjacent streets and support linked trips.

Comparison goods retail continues to play a key role, although this category has contracted considerably over the last decade. Floorspace devoted to comparison goods has fallen from 58,710 sq.m (39.7%) in 2013 to 36,535 sq.m (25.3%) in 2025, now slightly below the UK average of 28.7%. Similarly, comparison units have decreased from 237 (36.0%) to 176 (26.1%). This mirrors the structural decline in high street comparison retail nationally, influenced by online shopping and changing consumer behaviour.

Nevertheless, Huddersfield retains a reasonably strong comparison offer relative to other centres of similar scale, with a range of national multiples such as Primark, Next, River Island, TK Maxx, Boots, and New Look. These are concentrated along King Street, New Street, and within the Kingsgate and Packhorse shopping centres, forming a well-defined retail circuit that remains the focus of pedestrian activity. The loss of some key operators, including M&S and H&M, highlights an opportunity to strengthen and diversify the comparison goods offer in future.

The retail service sector, encompassing uses such as hairdressers, beauty salons, and phone repair shops, has grown modestly since 2013. Retail service floorspace has increased from 5,890 sq.m (4.0%) to 7,056 sq.m (4.9%), although it remains below the UK average of 7.2%. The number of units has also risen slightly, from 71 (10.8%) to 88 (13.1%), demonstrating the

growing role of service-based activity in supporting footfall and providing accessible local services. These operators are spread throughout the centre, with particular concentrations near the Kingsgate Centre and along New Street and Market Street.

Leisure uses, which include cafés, restaurants, pubs, and takeaways, account for 17.8% of total floorspace, a marginal decrease from 18.0% in 2013, and remain below the UK average of 27.7%. The number of leisure units, however, has remained broadly stable, rising slightly from 145 (22.0%) to 149 (22.1%). While the centre continues to host a range of food and drink operators, the overall scale of provision suggests that Huddersfield's leisure economy has not grown as rapidly as in comparable towns. Most outlets are located in the southern and eastern parts of the centre, as well as around St George's Square and Kirkgate, providing some evening activity but limited clustering. This indicates potential to strengthen the town's hospitality and cultural offer as part of future regeneration initiatives.

Financial and business services have declined modestly, reflecting national restructuring within the sector. Floorspace has reduced from 13,410 sq.m (9.1%) in 2013 to 9,061 sq.m (6.3%) in 2025, aligning closely with the UK average of 6.1%. The number of units has fallen from 68 (10.3%) to 48 (7.1%), illustrating the contraction of traditional high street banking and professional services. Remaining occupiers include banks, estate agents, solicitors, and accountants, primarily located in the northern part of the town centre close to key transport nodes, maintaining Huddersfield's weekday commercial function.

Overall, Huddersfield's composition has shifted towards a more service- and convenience-oriented role, reflecting wider changes in shopping behaviour. While comparison retail has contracted, the centre retains a strong retail core anchored by national multiples and a good mix of independent operators. Its compact layout, strong anchors, and planned regeneration initiatives provide a foundation for future diversification, helping Huddersfield maintain its position as the principal shopping and service destination within the Kirklees district.

Daytime/Evening Economy

Huddersfield Town Centre supports a multifunctional economy. The town plays an important role as a local hub for retail, education, and public services, with a strong daytime economy anchored by comparison retail, food and drink operators, and key institutions such as the University of Huddersfield and the Kirklees Council offices.

The daytime offer is centred around Kingsgate Shopping Centre, New Street, and King Street, with a mix of national and independent retailers providing choice and drawing local shoppers. This is complemented by a growing café and food-to-go sector, which serves local workers, students, and visitors. Businesses such as coffee shops, bakeries, and casual dining outlets help sustain footfall throughout the day, particularly during the working week.

Huddersfield's office market is smaller and more locally oriented, but it still contributes to daytime activity. A mix of professional services, health, and civic uses bring regular visitors to the town, further supported by the proximity of the rail and bus stations, which facilitate accessibility.

The evening economy in Huddersfield is more limited but has seen gradual improvement in recent years. Restaurants, pubs, and casual dining venues provide some evening activity, with a number of premises catering to the local student population. The University campus, located just to the east of the retail core, helps to support demand for food and drink uses into the early evening, particularly during term time.

Huddersfield also benefits from cultural and entertainment venues such as the Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield Town Hall, and the Odeon Cinema, which draw visitors for performances and events. However, these attractions are relatively limited in number, and there remains scope to further develop and diversify the town's evening leisure offer.

The proposed Cultural Heart scheme is set to play a central role in improving Huddersfield's evening and cultural economy. By introducing new event spaces, hospitality venues, and public realm improvements, the scheme aims to rebalance the town centre economy and encourage footfall beyond traditional retail hours.

Overall, while the evening economy is currently modest, Huddersfield Town Centre does provide a solid foundation for further development, and current investment plans are well placed to help expand and strengthen this important dimension of town centre vitality.

Vacancies

Huddersfield town centre currently experiences a relatively high level of vacancy compared to both national and regional averages. Vacant units account for 22.7% of all outlets and 25.0% of total floorspace, which is significantly above the UK averages of 14.1% and 14.5% respectively. While these figures reflect a degree of structural challenge, much of the vacant stock is associated with ongoing redevelopment and planned regeneration activity rather than long-term decline.

Vacant units are dispersed throughout the centre but are most noticeable around the edges of the retail core, particularly near the bus and railway stations and within the Piazza Shopping Centre area. The higher vacancy levels here largely reflect the planned redevelopment of the Piazza, where a number of former retail occupiers have vacated their premises in advance of forthcoming regeneration works. Once completed, this scheme is expected to deliver new public spaces and cultural facilities that will help to reactivate this part of the town centre.

A prominent individual vacancy within the centre is the former Wilko unit on New Street, a large property that occupies a highly visible position within the retail core. Its scale and location make it a key opportunity for reoccupation or repurposing to a mix of uses that could help anchor activity and footfall in this part of the centre.

Beyond these major voids, other vacancies are smaller in scale and scattered across the main commercial streets, such as King Street, New Street, and Market Place. These are generally in reasonably good condition, and many are suitable for reoccupation by independent traders, leisure operators, or community uses.

Overall, while Huddersfield's vacancy rate is currently elevated, the underlying causes are largely transitional and linked to regeneration. The combination of active redevelopment at the Piazza and the presence of several large, adaptable vacant units provides a strong platform for future investment and reoccupation once works are complete. With targeted reuse strategies and continued delivery of the town's regeneration programme, vacancy levels are expected to fall, supporting improved vitality and perception of the town centre environment.

Opportunity Sites

Huddersfield Town Centre contains a number of opportunity sites that have the potential to contribute meaningfully to its regeneration and long-term vitality. In recent years, Kirklees Council has taken a more proactive role in reshaping the town centre through its Huddersfield Blueprint, which is a ten-year vision for the town focused on the regeneration of key areas and the improvement of public spaces, transport, and the cultural offer.

One of the most significant opportunity areas is the Piazza Shopping Centre, which is now under Council ownership. Plans have been approved for its demolition, to make way for a new Cultural Heart that will include a refurbished Queensgate Market, a new museum and art gallery, a live music venue, and new public open space. This development represents a major transformation for the town and is expected to attract more footfall while enhancing Huddersfield's cultural identity. At the time of our visit, the site had been cleared and the construction work was progressing.

Another key site is the former House of Fraser building on King Street, which has remained vacant since 2022. Planning permission was secured in July 2019 (ref: 2018/62/93568/W) for a reconfiguration and partial change of use of the existing retail space to enable the provision of a leisure venue containing a cinema and uses including a games arcade, an adventure climbing arena, axe throwing, and a kitchen/bar area. At the time of our visit, it was evident that work had commenced. Once complete, this development will be known as The Light and will make an important contribution to the leisure offer of the town centre.

Additional opportunity sites include the area around Huddersfield Bus Station, which is identified for potential improvements as part of wider town centre accessibility and public realm enhancements. The planned station gateway improvements also present an opportunity to better connect the railway station with the rest of the town centre through new landscaping, pedestrian routes, and development frontages.

These opportunities are supported by significant public sector investment, including funding from the Government's Towns Fund and the Heritage Action Zone initiative. Together, these provide a foundation for meaningful regeneration and a renewed sense of place.

Pedestrian Flows

A moderate but consistent level of pedestrian activity was observed across Huddersfield Town Centre during the course of the day of our visit. The highest footfall was recorded along New Street, King Street, and within and around the Kingsgate and Packhorse shopping centres. The pedestrianised nature of New Street and sections of King Street contributes to a compact and easily walkable environment that supports linked trips between shops, services, and cafés.

During the morning and early afternoon periods, footfall was primarily driven by a mix of shoppers, workers, and students from the nearby University of Huddersfield, who were observed using local cafés and high street stores. The proximity of the bus and rail stations helps to support a degree of through-movement, and the town's relatively flat topography aids ease of access on foot.

At the time of our visit, there were no events at the market square. However, there are seasonal events that are held within the square at different times of the year, which contribute positively to footfall and create a sense of vibrancy.

Pedestrian activity thinned out towards the periphery of the retail core, particularly in the south-eastern areas, and along some of the older secondary streets, like Brook Street and the southern part of New Street, where a more limited retail/leisure offer was apparent. These areas tended to attract less foot traffic outside peak times.

Nonetheless, the town centre maintains a steady daytime presence due to its role as a key local hub for shopping, services, and education. The planned regeneration projects including the Cultural Heart development and public realm improvements are expected to help rebalance pedestrian activity across the centre and draw greater footfall throughout the day and into the evening.

Accessibility

Huddersfield Town Centre benefits from a good standard of accessibility, particularly by public transport. Huddersfield Railway Station is centrally located and provides regular local and regional services to destinations such as Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, and Bradford, as well as direct trains to smaller towns including Slaithwaite, Marsden, and Dewsbury.

Local bus services offer comprehensive coverage, with most services operated from Huddersfield Bus Station, situated just a short walk (7 minutes' walk) from the main shopping areas. The station provides frequent services to surrounding areas including Halifax, Holmfirth, Meltham, Brighouse, and Mirfield. Longer-distance coach services also operate from the town, linking Huddersfield with larger towns and cities across the UK.

Although Huddersfield does not have a tram network, the town is well-connected by road. The A62 and A640 provide key routes into the town centre, and Huddersfield's proximity to the M62 motorway ensures convenient links with both Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. Public car parks are located across the town centre, at Brunswick Street and Venn Street with signage to short- and long-stay facilities. Most of these car parks were not observed to offer disabled parking bays and electric vehicle charging points.

Access by bicycle is supported by a developing network of local cycling routes. While some infrastructure is still evolving, dedicated cycle parking is available in key areas of the town centre, including near the railway station and key civic buildings. The council is working to improve cycling links through its Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

In terms of accessibility for those with additional needs, the pavements in most parts of the centre are adapted to support movement of individuals with impaired mobility.

The central core is generally flat and pedestrian-friendly, with well-maintained pavements and pedestrianised zones. Benches and resting areas are available in the centre, at St George's Square for instance.

Perception of Safety

As a medium-sized town centre, perceptions of safety in Huddersfield can vary depending on location and time of day. During the daytime, steady footfall throughout the main shopping streets and key public spaces such as New Street, King Street, and St George's Square contributes to a general feeling of safety and personal security.

The compact nature of the town centre, along with a good level of active frontages, encourages natural surveillance. The relatively open layout of key streets also allows for good visibility, which helps to reduce opportunities for crime during retail hours.

At night, the town centre is generally quieter, although key streets benefit from street lighting and CCTV coverage, which helps to improve perceptions of safety. The bus and railway stations are within walking distance of the main shopping area, and monitored at various times of the day, although activity levels tend to fall sharply in the evening compared with larger centres.

Nonetheless, some areas, particularly less-trafficked side streets and alleyways, can feel isolated after dark and are not always well-lit. Instances of graffiti, vandalism, and other forms of anti-social behaviour were observed in some secondary locations, particularly around the fringes of the retail core.

Continued support for a diverse evening economy such as cafés, restaurants, and cultural and leisure venues may help to sustain activity into the evening and further improve perceptions of safety over time.

Environmental Quality

Huddersfield Town Centre generally offers a good standard of public realm, with the town's rich architectural heritage contributing positively to its character. A number of Grade II and Grade I listed buildings, including the historic Huddersfield Railway Station, Town Hall, and buildings along New Street and St George's Square, lend the town centre a distinctive and high-quality urban environment.

The main shopping areas, such as those along New Street, King Street and the Packhorse Centre, are set within a largely pedestrianised retail core that helps to create a calmer, more pleasant environment free from the immediate impacts of traffic noise and air pollution. On the whole, streets are clean and well-maintained, though occasional litter was noted during our visit.

The town's retail core also benefits from active frontages, with a good range of independent retailers, cafés, and national chains contributing to a vibrant street scene. Areas such as Byram Arcade and Kingsgate Shopping Centre add further variety, with the latter having undergone some recent improvement works to enhance the internal shopping environment.

However, there are areas of the town centre where environmental quality is more mixed. Certain secondary streets like Wood Street, can feel less well-cared-for and less consistent public realm treatment. At Wood Street for instance, bins were lined up on one side of the pavement, giving pedestrians access to only one side of the pavement, which was relatively narrow.

Huddersfield does benefit from a number of green and open spaces close to the centre, such as St George's Square and Greenhead Park (18 minutes' walk from the centre), which is located a short walk to the west. However, green infrastructure within the heart of the retail core at New Street and King Street is relatively limited, with few planted areas or soft landscaping features visible at Northumberland Street, and John William Street.

Stakeholders responses

A stakeholder survey was undertaken in May 2025 to gather views from residents, business owners, and town centre managers on the town centre's strengths, weaknesses, and future opportunities. Eleven responses were received, providing qualitative insights into perceptions of the town's vitality, accessibility, and overall performance.

The most frequently cited strengths included good public transport links, the range of leisure facilities such as cafés and restaurants, and the quality of public spaces and the wider environment. Respondents also valued the convenience of essential services and the town centre's pedestrian-friendly layout, which together support ease of movement and contribute positively to the overall user experience.

The most common weaknesses related to the limited range of leisure and cultural options, parking availability and cost, and concerns regarding cleanliness and safety. Respondents also highlighted the need for more evening activity, stronger design quality, and continued maintenance and reinvestment to enhance the appearance and appeal of the centre. Feedback emphasised the importance of building on recent regeneration activity and improving coordination between the local authority, businesses, and other stakeholders to promote investment, strengthen the cultural and leisure offer, and ensure that future development supports a vibrant and sustainable town centre.

Conclusions

In summary, Huddersfield town centre performs a vital role as the principal retail, service, and administrative hub for the Kirklees district. It accommodates a substantial concentration of commercial activity, supported by a diverse mix of national multiple retailers, independent businesses, civic functions, and educational institutions. The centre's compact and pedestrian-friendly layout, focused around, King Street, New Street, and the Kingsgate Shopping Centre, supports steady levels of footfall and encourages linked trips between shops, cafés, and services.

Huddersfield's heritage assets are among its key defining features. The presence of landmark buildings such as Huddersfield Railway Station, St George's Square, and the Town Hall contributes significantly to the town's character, providing a strong visual identity and sense of civic pride. The combination of historic architecture and a well-established pedestrian core gives the centre an attractive and distinctive setting.

The town's retail composition has evolved over the past decade, with a shift away from traditional comparison goods towards a more service- and convenience-oriented offer. Anchored by Sainsbury's and Tesco and supported by a growing number of independent retailers and cafés, the town centre continues to meet the day-to-day needs of residents and workers. While comparison retailing has contracted, Huddersfield still retains a strong presence

of national brands and key shopping destinations, particularly within Kingsgate and the Packhorse Centre.

Leisure and cultural uses provide an important foundation for the town's daytime and evening economy. Venues such as the Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield Town Hall, and the Odeon Cinema contribute to its wider social and cultural offer, while the nearby University of Huddersfield supports a steady student population that underpins local trade and activity. The planned Cultural Heart development, centred around the former Piazza Shopping Centre, represents a transformative opportunity to strengthen the town's identity, expand its leisure and cultural role, and attract new visitors.

Although vacancy rates are currently high, these are largely transitional and linked to ongoing regeneration activity. The redevelopment of the Piazza area, alongside other key opportunity sites such as the former House of Fraser building, will help to rebalance activity and reoccupy key frontages in the medium term. These initiatives, together with the wider Huddersfield Blueprint, are expected to bring about significant improvements in accessibility, public realm quality, and overall perception of the town centre.

Huddersfield is highly accessible, benefitting from excellent rail and bus connections, strong road links via the A62 and M62, and a walkable and level topography that supports movement on foot. The town centre generally feels safe and welcoming, aided by good lighting, active frontages, and consistent daytime activity. Environmental quality is strong within the retail core, though secondary streets would benefit from further enhancement and consistent maintenance.

Overall, Huddersfield remains a vital and viable town centre that continues to play a central role in the life of the district. While structural challenges persist, particularly around vacancies and the changing retail market, the scale of ongoing public investment and the strength of the town's heritage, accessibility, and civic offer provide a solid foundation for future growth. Continued delivery of regeneration projects and diversification of the leisure and cultural offer will be essential in securing Huddersfield's long-term success as a vibrant, resilient, and well-balanced town centre.