Southport Town Centre

Description	Southport is the principal retail centre in Sefton and is located approximately 30 kilometres from both Liverpool and Preston. Southport came to prominence as a seaside resort, and tourism and various events still make an important contribution to the local economy. Chapel Street, which forms part of Southport's retail core, is pedestrianised and the environmental quality of the centre is generally good partly due to the numerous examples of Victorian architecture notably along Lord Street. However, Southport has been the subject of a higher than average vacancy rate in recent years as recorded by Nexus Planning's survey of 19 March 2020, which has impacted upon its vitality and viability.
Status	Town Centre (as defined by the Local Plan for Sefton, adopted April 2017)

Photos

Figure 1: Southport has a number of seasonal leisure operators, that detract from vibrancy in the winter months

Figure 2: Lord Street has many architecturally attractive buildings

Figure 3: The pedestrianised Chapel Street area accommodates many of Southport's national multiple retailers

Figure 4: Wayfarers Arcade is highly distinctive and a key asset in Southport

Table 1: Town Centre Floorspace Composition

Goad Category	Southport Town Centre Floorspace at 2011 (%)	Southport Town Centre Floorspace at 2015 (%)	Southport Town Centre Floorspace at 2020 (sq.m)	Southport Town Centre Floorspace at 2020 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2020 (%)
Convenience	10.5	11.3	17,290	11.1	15.4
Comparison	37.0	38.2	43,400	27.8	33.5
Retail Services	6.1	4.8	10,480	6.7	7
Leisure Services	25.6	23.9	44,790	28.7	25.6
Financial and Business Services	7.3	6.9	10,760	6.9	7.3
Miscellaneous	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Vacant	13.6	15.0	29,140	18.7	10.6
TOTAL	**100**	**100**	**155,860**	**100**	**100**

Source: Composition of Southport Town Centre based on Experian Goad definition of the centre and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of 19 March 2020; historic data derived from Sefton Retail Strategy Review 2015 and Sefton Retail Strategy Review Update 2012; UK Average from Experian Goad Report February 2020

Table 2: Town Centre Unit Composition

Goad Category	Southport Town Centre Units at 2011 (%)	Southport Town Centre Units at 2015 (%)	Southport Town Centre Number of Units 2020	Southport Town Centre Units at 2020 (%)	Units UK Average at 2020 (%)
Convenience	6.6	6.5	47	6.3	9.2
Comparison	36.2	35.7	199	26.6	29.2
Retail Services	10.8	12.0	113	15.1	15.1
Leisure Services	24.6	24.0	198	26.4	24.5
Financial and Business Services	8.4	8.8	57	7.6	9.8
Miscellaneous	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Vacant	13.4	13.1	135	18.0	11.9
TOTAL	**100**	**100**	**749**	**100**	**100**

Source: Composition of Southport Town Centre based on Experian Goad definition of the centre and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of 19 March 2020; historic data derived from Sefton Retail Strategy Review 2015 and Sefton Retail Strategy Review Update 2012; UK Average from Experian Goad Report February 2020

Table 3: Town Centre Facilities

		Total
Key Anchor Store	Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, TK Maxx	52
Other National Retailers (floorspace greater than 200 sq.m)	B&M, Barclays, Bon Marche, Boots, British Heart Foundation, Caffe Nero, Cash Converters, Clarks, Clintons, Costa, Farmfoods, Flannels, Halifax, Holland and Barrett, HSBC, Iceland, JD, KFC, Ladbrokes, Lakeland, Lidl, Lloyds, Lloyds Pharmacy, Mecca Bingo, Millets, Nationwide, Natwest, New Look, Next, NFU Mutual, Pizza Express, Poundland, Prezzo, Primark, RBS, River Island, Ryman, Sainsbury's, Savers, Sports Direct, Superdrug, Tesco Express, The Edinburgh Woollen Mill, The Entertainer, The Works, Trespass, Waterstones, WH Smith, Wilko	
Community Facilities	Four places of worship, two community centres, two educational establishments, a dental surgery, a doctor surgery.	10

Source: Composition of Southport Town Centre derived from Nexus Planning Survey of 19 March 2020

Table 4 Major Retailers Present

Department Stores		**Clothing**	
Debenhams	0	Burton	0
House of Fraser	0	Dorothy Perkins	0
John Lewis	0	H&M	0
Marks & Spencer	1	Monsoon Accessorize	0
Mixed Goods Retailers		New Look	1
Argos	0	Next	1
Boots the Chemist	1	Primark	1
TKMaxx	1	River Island	1
W H Smith	1	Topman	0
Wilko	1	Topshop	0
Supermarkets		**Other Retailers**	
Sainsbury's	1	Carphone Warehouse	1
Tesco	1	Clarks	1
Waitrose	0	Clintons	1
		EE	1
		HMV	0
		02	1
		Superdrug	1
		Vodafone	1
		Waterstones	1

Source: Composition of Southport Town Centre derived from Nexus Planning Survey of 19 March 2020; major retailers are the 30 operators identified by Experian Goad as being the most likely to improve the appeal of a centre

Overall Composition

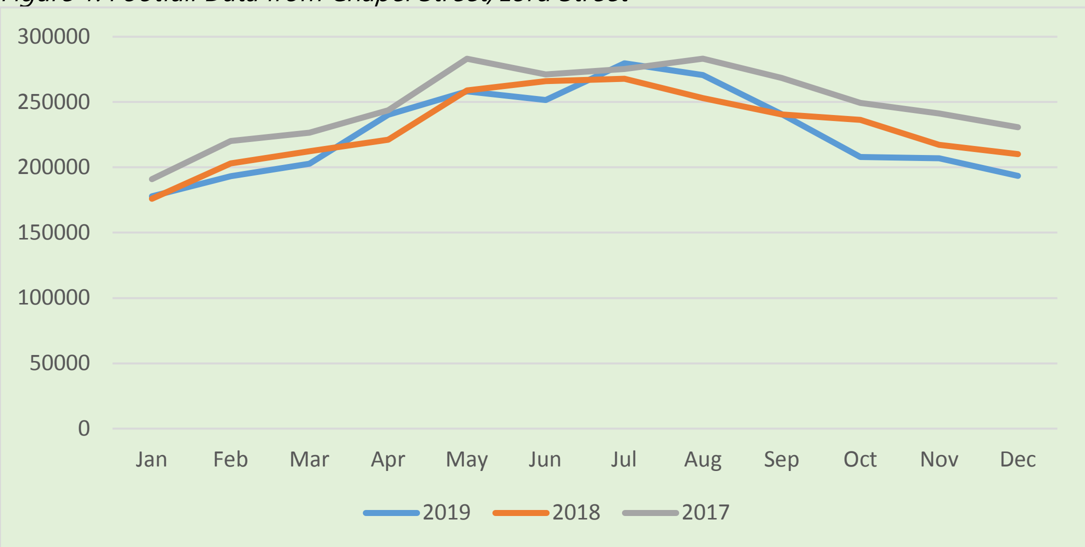
- There are 47 convenience goods operators in Southport, which account for 17,290 sq.m of floorspace. This equates to 11.1% of the total stock of floorspace in Southport.
- Comparison operators account for 43,400 sq.m of floorspace, and equates to 27.8% of all retail stock in Southport. There are 199 comparison goods units in the centre.
- There are 368 service units in Southport. These account for 66,030 sq.m of floorspace, equating to 42.4% of all commercial floorspace.
- Vacant units account for 18.7% of floorspace in the centre, higher than the 10.6% of floorspace recorded nationally.
- Our survey recorded 135 vacant units, equating to 18.0% of all commercial units in the centre. This figure is higher than the UK average of 11.9% of units being vacant. Both of these figures are greater than those recorded at the time of the previous survey in 2015 and have increased in recent months with the closure of both Debenhams and Beales.
- Southport is a diverse centre, providing both traditional retail shopping and a more 'touristic' offer centred around its historic role and a wide, diverse number of events held throughout the year.

Convenience & Comparison	There are 246 convenience and comparison goods units in Southport town centre, accounting for 60,690 sq.m of floorspace. In total, convenience and comparison goods retailers occupy 38.9% of all floorspace and 32.8% of all units. The 199 comparison goods units within Southport town centre account for 43,400 sq.m of floorspace (which equates to 27.8% of total floorspace in the centre). Although comparison goods units are found throughout the town centre, these are largely concentrated around Chapel Street. Operators include clothes retailers, jewellers, charity shops, furniture shops, chemists, antique shops and florists. National multiples with a presence in Southport town centre include TK Maxx, New Look, River Island and Primark. Whilst new retailers have been attracted to the centre in recent years – including Sports Direct and Flannels at Tulketh Street – recent losses have included BHS and H&M at Chapel Street, and Debenhams, Beales and Argos at Lord Street. These changes represent a significant loss to the range of major retailers present in Southport. In particular, the loss of Debenhams and Beales from the northern end of Lord Street is a considerable loss in respect of the ability of larger stores to help anchor both this area and the town centre as a whole. However, despite these changes there remains a reasonable (albeit reduced) range of major retailers present in Southport. In this regard, Southport accommodates 19 of the 30 major retailers identified by Experian Goad but only four of the 10 major clothing retailers. As such, Southport's fashion offer would benefit from improvement. The 47 convenience goods operators identified by our survey account for 17,290 sq.m of floorspace, which equates to 11.1% of the total stock. Convenience goods operators in Southport town centre include convenience stores, tobacconists, bakers, newsagents, butchers and greengrocers. The town centre as defined by Experian Goad includes three significant foodstores (in the form of Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Lidl), and also includes Southport Market Hall. Southport is therefore well served by convenience goods retailers, but has lost a number of comparison goods retailers in recent years (the number of comparison goods operators in the centre has very substantially fallen from 265 at May 2015 to 199 at March 2020). This decrease is demonstrated in the proportion of floorspace occupied by comparison goods retailers being lower than the national average level. However, the requirement for a strong comparison goods sector remains of great importance to Southport and its residents (not least because centres which are able to provide a comparable or stronger offer are some distance away).
Services	Service operators account for 66,030 sq.m of floorspace in Southport town centre. The 368 service units occupy 42.4% of total floorspace. The amount and number of service uses reflects Southport's dual role in meeting the needs of local residents and catering for tourists (particularly during the summer months).

	There are 198 leisure service units in the town centre, which account for 44,790 sq.m of floorspace, which equates to 28.7% of the total stock. Leisure service uses are generally located around the Promenade and Lord Street, with operators including cafés, restaurants, hot-food takeaways, public houses, bars, amusement arcades and hotels. The prevalence of leisure service operators in Southport can be attributed to the role of tourism in the local economy. Retail service operators account for 10,480 sq.m of floorspace, which equates to 6.7% of the stock of commercial floorspace in the centre. The 113 retail service operators include hairdressers, beauty salons, photograph processors, opticians, tattooists and travel agents. There are 57 financial and business service operators in Southport town centre. These account for 10,760 sq.m of floorspace, equating to 6.9% of all floorspace in the centre. Operators include estate agents, banks and solicitors. The amount of floorspace in financial and business service use is considered to be diverse and a valuable asset to the centre.
Vacancies	At the time of our survey there were 135 vacant units in Southport, which account for 18.0% of all units in the centre. These vacant units are distributed throughout the town centre. The vacancy rate is higher than the 13.1% of units recorded at the time of the 2015 survey. Whilst these vacant units are distributed throughout the town centre, there is a notable concentration along Lord Street, including both the former Debenhams and Beales units. In addition, a number of higher profile units on Chapel Street remain vacant, including the former HMV, BHS and H&M units. A number of these units, particularly the larger ones – are likely to be difficult to let in the current market and the limited number of larger retailers who are looking to take on more floorspace. In total, 29,140 sq.m of floorspace is vacant, which equates to 18.7% of the stock (significantly greater than the national average figure of 10.6%). Accordingly, Southport's vacancy rate, both in respect of the number of vacant units and the quantum of floorspace, is well above national average level and is a cause for concern. The vacancy rate equates to approaching one fifth of units and floorspace and is therefore clearly evident to visitors when walking around the town.
Miscellaneous	Southport town centre includes a number of community facilities, including places of worship, community centres, two educational establishments, and dental and doctor surgeries. In addition to these community facilities, there are a number of offices, stores and government offices. Southport town centre also accommodates a number of civic buildings including the Town Hall, including facilities just beyond the surveyed Experian Goad area, which contribute to the centre's overall offer. Such facilities include Southport Theatre & Convention Centre, which reopened in 2008 after a significant refurbishment. The theatre offers an extensive

	programme of shows and concerts throughout the year, which widens Southport's appeal and draws people into the centre.
Pedestrian Flows	Pedestrian access within and around the main shopping areas of Chapel Street, Eastbank Street and Lord Street is generally good. However, the width of roads and the amount of traffic on Lord Street and around Eastbank Street, combined with the lack of a continuous defined 'retail circuit' between Chapel Street and Lord Street do not always encourage pedestrian footfall throughout the centre. Pedestrian movement – particularly that of shoppers – is focussed around the pedestrianised area of Chapel Street, with lower levels of footfall evident moving in a southerly direction down Eastbank Street, and along the western part of Lord Street. On the northern side of Lord Street, footfall appears to be concentrated around the central area between Seabank Road to the north and Coronation Walk to the south. On the southern side of Lord Street, the Sainsbury's foodstore at St George's Place is also a key anchor driving pedestrian traffic. Automated Springboard counters record pedestrian movements across Southport town centre. Figure 1 demonstrates that footfall fluctuates from month to month, but that there has been a year-round reduction in pedestrian activity between 2017 and 2019. In total, counters recorded 2,984,320 pedestrian movements on Chapel Street and Lord Street across 2017, which reduced to 2,762,310 movements in 2018, and to 2,723,469 movements in 2019. As such, the reduction in activity between 2018 and 2019 is relatively moderate (equating to a 1.4% reduction), with a larger reduction in footfall apparent between 2017 and 2018 (equating to a 7.4% reduction).

Figure 1: Footfall Data from Chapel Street/Lord Street



Source: Annual Springboard Performance Data – Cumulative number of pedestrian movements recorded from counters situated at Chapel Street and Lord Street

Accessibility	Southport is a coastal town and this has strongly influenced its development and accessibility.

Road Access
Central Southport is located at around the junction of the principal routes of Lord Street and Eastbank Street. The A565 leads broadly north to south, linking Southport with Preston to the north and Liverpool to the south (both Preston city centre and Liverpool city centre are around 20 miles from Southport). The A565 also serves the settlements of Formby, Crosby and Bootle.

Along the A570, to the south east, lies the town of Ormskirk, beyond which lies Junction 3 of the M58, which links Merseyside to the M6 at Orrell, to the west of Wigan.

Traffic along the A565 and A570 appeared to be reasonably free flowing at the time of our visits to the town, although we are aware that significant congestion can occur both in the town centre and on the approaches to it, particularly on sunny weekends during the summer months.

Parking
The town centre is served by a number of car parks and parking areas, which collectively seem capable of meeting demand. However, the location and quality of some parking is not ideal.

There are a number of Council operated car parks in and around the town centre which include:

- the Central 12 Shopping Park (pay and display, providing 640 spaces);
- the Esplanade (pay on entry, providing 1,200 spaces, car park is Park & Ride);
- Splashworld (pay and display, providing 114 spaces);
- Marine Drive (pay and display, providing 790 spaces);
- Floral Hall (pay and display, providing 190 spaces);
- Dunes Leisure (pay and display, providing 174 spaces);
- Tulketh Street West (pay and display, providing 106 spaces); and
- Tulketh Street East (pay and display, providing 72 spaces).

We understand that the Kew and Fairway park and ride sites are no longer operational.

In addition, privately run car parks within the town centre include: the multi-storey facility on Tulketh Street, which has undergone a refurbishment since the last health check was undertaken; the NCP car park to the east of the railway station on London Street; the Promenade surface car park; and, a further surface car park to the rear of Wayfarers Arcade on West Street. Car parks at the Morrisons (550 spaces), Sainsbury's (150 spaces) and Lidl (120 spaces) foodstores provide further parking opportunities, although these facilities are short stay only. The majority of the car parks operate a pay and display system, with parking charges varying according to duration and location. By way of example, the popular surface car parks on Tulketh Street provide parking for two hours for £1.60 and four hours for £3.20. The multi-

	storey car park above Sports Direct on Tulketh Street offers long and short stay parking, with 12 hours priced at £3.90. On-street pay and display parking within the town centre, notably on parts of Lord Street and the Promenade, provides additional capacity. Charges are applied between 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday, with charges ranging from £0.80 for 30 mins to £7.00 for 10 hours. <u>Public Transport: Rail</u> Southport's railway station is centrally located and provides direct access to the centre of the town's shopping area at Chapel Street. Direct services are provided to the major key regional destinations of Liverpool, Manchester (and Manchester Airport), Wigan and Bolton, as well as important more closely located areas such as Ainsdale, Birkdale, Bootle and Formby. Prices for a return ticket to these centres typically range from between £3.75 to £11.60, dependent on the length of journey. The entrance to the station from Chapel Street is less than ideal, comprising a somewhat dark, poorly designed covered mall with little indication that it is the entrance and exit to a major railway station. The access to the station concourse from London Street to the north, whilst more open, is similarly of a poor quality. <u>Public Transport: Buses</u> Frequent bus services are available from the centre to Preston and Liverpool, as well as the neighbouring areas of Ainsdale, Birkdale, Churchtown and Formby. There is no bus interchange, but rather stops are provided along the key routes, including Lord Street and Eastbank Street and at the Esplanade for the Park and Ride. Bus stops at Lord Street, given its grandeur, provide a generally pleasant environment to wait for a bus. <u>Cycling Access</u> Southport has been granted 'Cycling Town' status and has benefited from financial investment from the Department for Transport's Local Sustainability Transport Fund in recent years to develop cycling infrastructure. It is considered that further opportunities exist to help improve accessibility for cyclists on the road network in and around the town centre. Bicycles can be hired at both Southport railway station and from the Eco Centre on the Esplanade. Secure cycle parking is provided at Southport railway station for 80 bikes. Elsewhere, cycle stands are located across the town in a number of visible and conveniently positioned places. Relatively modest traffic speeds on the highway network along the key routes into the town centre provide a conducive environment to enable access by bicycle.
Perception of Safety	Southport town centre offers a strong sense of personal safety, particularly on the key shopping and visitor streets. There is a healthy pedestrian footfall, strong active frontages and streets busy with traffic. There is little evidence of

	crime or anti-social behaviour, and the public realm is well maintained and provides a generally attractive environment. However, the poor access points to the railway station are likely to feel less safe after dark when footfall is lower. According to the website www.crime-statistics.co.uk 370 crimes were reported within a mile radius of Southport town centre in March 2020. This compares with 436 crimes reported across the same area in March 2019 and 401 in March 2018. The 'Southport Business Against Crime' initiative of the Southport BID is aimed at reducing low-level crime and anti-social behaviour. It seeks to improve security in the town through working with local businesses.
Environmental Quality	The town centre environment is generally of a good-to-high quality, particularly on Chapel Street and Lord Street. The wide open spaces that line Lord Street, particularly at the junction of Eastbank Street Square ensure a high quality environment that provides an attractive destination for users. However, the variable maintenance of canopies on Lord Street detracts from the grandeur of the street, as do a number of lower quality shop/business frontages. The number of vacancies within the centre is now such that they issue is readily apparent to visitors and creates a negative impression. In contrast to Lord Street, Chapel Street offers a more conventional high street environment with carefully maintained shop fronts and paving. The environment on Eastbank Street, a key linking area, is of a lower, if adequate standard, principally due to narrower pavements and high levels of traffic.
Conclusion	As the principal centre in Sefton, Southport has a diverse retail and service offer in respect of operators and uses. However, the level of vacant floorspace (both in respect of the proportion of floorspace and units that are vacant) has increased since the previous 2015 Retail Strategy Review reported and is higher than national average level. Furthermore, our survey found that comparison goods operators account for a smaller proportion of floorspace compared to the national average position. This is of concern as the comparison goods component of a higher order centre, such as Southport, will generally be an important part of its offer in drawing in visitors. Both the nature of the vacancy rate and the type of vacancies (which include some larger units in central areas) give reason for concern. There is a particular issue in respect of the loss of key retailers from Chapel Street and from the northern end of Lord Street. Whilst the loss of department store anchors is (to some degree) symptomatic of wider structural problems in the retail sector, this does not diminish the local impact of the closure of Debenhams and then Beales. Both stores made a significant contribution to Southport's offer and it is a weaker centre as a consequence. Shoppers will have less reason to venture to Lord Street, in particular. Notwithstanding this, Southport town centre has been able to secure important investment at Tulketh Street in the past few years in the form of the

	Sports Direct/Flannels development, and it will be equally important to continue to attract further new retailers in the town in order that its offer evolves. However, whilst Southport remains an attractive town centre which is able to perform two important roles (as both a retail and tourist centre), its performance has deteriorated in recent years, and its vitality and viability is currently considered to be relatively fragile. It is in need of investment and improvement in order to provide for the reoccupation of vacant stock and to secure the centre's ongoing relevance.