Skelmersdale Town Centre

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT AND MASTERPLAN

September 2008
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Executive Summary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Consultation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 The Key Principles of the SPD</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 The Town Centre Core</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6 Open Space and the Environment</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7 Access</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8 Housing</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9 Design and Public Realm</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 10 Services and Infrastructure</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 11 Implementation and Phasing</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Appendix A - Policy Context</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Appendix B - Design Standards</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

These are really exciting times for Skelmersdale and we have a fantastic opportunity to create a new and vibrant town centre that Skelmersdale deserves. I believe, with new shops, sports and leisure and other community facilities, as well as much needed quality housing, all set within a superb environment, that this will be a marked step-change in the fortunes of the town. The Masterplan for Skelmersdale Town Centre marks a key stage in the process of regenerating the town. This regeneration project is the largest scheme we have had in West Lancashire since the creation of the New Town itself, and represents an opportunity to learn from design problems of the past and to create a user friendly and vibrant town centre.

With a development partner already on board, the Council is confident that this Masterplan is deliverable and achievable within a realistic timescale. There has been widespread community involvement throughout the development of this Masterplan and this has demonstrated a high level of public support for the concepts and proposals contained within it. I would like to thank everyone from Skelmersdale, and the rest of the District, who commented and helped shape this document. Ultimately, all residents in West Lancashire will benefit from this scheme and the Council is committed to seeing it achieved.

Councillor Martin Forshaw
Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation
West Lancashire District Council

SEPTEMBER 2008

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Chapter 1 Executive Summary

1.1 Skelmersdale is about to undergo a multi-million pound transformation of its town centre into an area that will be attractive to residents and visitors alike. This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out a framework for how this regeneration should occur and will be an important material consideration in the determination of future planning applications for the town centre.

1.2 The main thrust of the 'Masterplan' (Figure 1.1) is to develop a new high street linking the Concourse Centre and Asda. This will include new shops, a cinema, bars and restaurants, and apartments. The town centre core will also include a new Library, a new Skelmersdale College and a new sports centre and swimming pool. All will be built to the highest standard of design and will be a massive investment into the town. Surrounding this will be other new uses including attractive and sustainable housing, some affordable housing, and massive improvements to the wooded valleys as areas that people can relax in and enjoy as part of their town centre visit. Road links and pedestrian and cycling facilities will be improved around and within the town centre area, as well as links to the surrounding housing areas. The new uses found within the town centre will create new jobs and training opportunities for local people, boosting the local economy.

1.3 The District Council would wish to see the following uses come forward through this Masterplan process.

- a range of new shops, bars and restaurants and potentially a new foodstore;
- a new sports centre and swimming pool;
- cinema;
- new modern college building;
- a new library/resource centre;
- a new Ecumenical Centre;
- a new bus station;
- a new police facility;
- approximately 250 new apartments within the town centre core;
- approximately 900 new quality modern houses, with a mixture of type and tenure, built to a high environmental standard;
- new and attractive public spaces that provide areas for people to meet or for street entertainment;
- improvements to the Tawd Valley and the wooded cloughs to ensure that they provide a safe high quality environment, including new pedestrian and cycling facilities, and possibly specialist recreational activities to attract yet more people into the Tawd Valley;
- new office space; and
- new roads, cycling and pedestrian facilities to link the town centre in with the surrounding residential areas and to make movement around the centre itself far easier.

1.4 Deliverability is an important component of this SPD and the Council, and its partner English Partnerships, are committed to achieving the vision set out in the Masterplan. A Development Agreement has now been signed with St Modwen Properties PLC to deliver the regeneration project.

1.5 However, other stakeholders will also have a part to play in the town centre's regeneration. The owners of the Concourse Centre will make an important contribution to the regeneration of the town centre through the provision of a large new foodstore as an extension to the Concourse Centre. Improvements to the Concourse Centre will also involve the relocation of the existing bus station to enable the provision of more modern facilities for bus services and the physical integration of the Concourse Centre with the new High Street proposed in the Masterplan. Skelmersdale College will need to deliver the new College building, and they are already drawing up exciting plans for a new multi-million pound facility, that will not only serve students but also contain facilities that the wider population can access. Lancashire County Council own land and buildings within the town centre and will play a big part in the development of the new library. Finally, it is hoped that Asda can play a part in looking at their own site and what improvements can be undertaken to better connect it to the rest of the new town centre.

1.6 This SPD forms part of the Local Development Framework for West Lancashire and provides a planning framework for the consideration of future planning applications in Skelmersdale Town Centre. The Council looks forward to working with all parties to ensure the delivery of this vision for the town centre.
Chapter 2 Introduction

2.1 This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been prepared by West Lancashire District Council to set out the planning guidance in relation to the major mixed-use redevelopment of Skelmersdale Town Centre. The SPD will be a material consideration for the District Council when determining all planning applications for the town centre.

2.2 The SPD provides planning guidance on various aspects of the regeneration project and includes a Masterplan which provides a framework for how the town centre might be developed. It identifies the key development principles of the project, including the mix and scale of different land-uses and how these fit together to create an integrated, functional and vibrant town centre. It also deals with the important issue of urban design, through the preparation of an accompanying Design Code, and sets out how new travel links and pedestrian routes will make the town centre more accessible and create better connections with surrounding estates. The SPD does not attempt to fix the design and location of individual buildings and the Masterplan is not intended to be an exact representation of what will be delivered. The developer will need to design a scheme, once the necessary assessments and studies have been undertaken, based upon the principles set out in this SPD.

Skelmersdale Town Centre - Context

2.3 Skelmersdale Town Centre covers some 98 hectares of land and includes the area of land that stretches north from the Concourse Centre to the existing Asda store.

Overview of Skelmersdale Town Centre

2.4 Skelmersdale Town Centre cannot be considered a traditional town centre and has not evolved from a historical base. The town centre comprises of a number of isolated buildings with poor connections. For example, the Public Library, Police Station, Nye Bevan Pool and College are all in stand-alone locations with low quality public space in between. The location of the existing Asda foodstore and the Concourse Shopping Centre are detached and do not encourage linked trips. The town centre is devoid of having a 'sense of place' or true identity and there is a limited alternative purpose for visiting, other than for day time shopping. Skelmersdale currently lacks any form of night time economy.

Current Retail Provision in Skelmersdale Town Centre

2.5 Skelmersdale Town Centre currently offers a limited retail provision compared with other regional town centres. The Concourse Centre does not attract major retail traders such as high street fashion retailers. Many of the regular high street names typically associated with towns of a similar size to Skelmersdale are not present. The town centre fails to provide opportunities in terms of flexible retail space for many retailers.

Open Space within Skelmersdale Town Centre

2.7 Within and adjacent to the town centre are wooded valleys, the main one being the Tawd Valley. There are also open grassed areas used in part for informal recreation. These areas are currently underused by the surrounding population and present barriers in movement to and from the main shopping areas, isolating it from the surrounding housing areas. Consultation has demonstrated that these areas are viewed as having an unsafe environment, particularly in the evenings. Vandalism and fly tipping has degraded the environment, increased the maintenance challenge and added to the disincentive for people to use these areas.

2.8 However, the wooded Cloughs also present a tremendous opportunity to provide informal recreation opportunities at the heart of the town centre, with some of the open areas providing an opportunity to deliver new homes and sustainable transport connections to link the town centre back into the urban fabric.

Current Access arrangements in Skelmersdale Town Centre

2.9 Skelmersdale evolved on the basis of a 'car first society'. The town itself has excellent access to the motorway network, with the M58 running alongside its southern edge. The road and transport network around Skelmersdale was designed around the car, with a complex network of main roads and estate roads linked by a series of roundabouts. Pedestrian routes were deliberately separated from roads which has left a legacy of footways and subways that people do not feel comfortable using due to the perceived risks of crime. Many people choose to walk by the side of the road rather than use the footway and subway network.

2.6 This means that residents of Skelmersdale travel further afield to Wigan, Liverpool, Southport and Ormskirk to fulfill their retail needs. Skelmersdale Town Centre now needs to compete with these centres and provide attractive retail opportunities that will make people choose to shop and visit Skelmersdale over other centres.
The one way system around the existing town centre also gives priority to the private car and acts as a barrier for local people who wish to walk and cycle into the town centre. The resultant impact is that people have created their own desire lines, cutting across areas of open space to create informal footpaths following the most direct and comfortable routes. However, such direct and informal routes may not provide the safest way into the town centre, particularly at night time.

The existing public transport system within Skelmersdale is limited. There is a frequent bus service which provides access to Wigan, Ormskirk and Southport but given the distance journey times can be high. There are very limited local bus services operating in the town itself with many residents favouring the use of private taxi. There are no direct train services within Skelmersdale with the closest rail station being located in Up Holland, approximately 2 miles to the south east of the town.

The great majority of housing within Skelmersdale was constructed in the 1960s and 1970s and was based on the Radburn layout. This radical layout of housing included orientating properties away from roads and the creation of communal walkways through estates. Over time the design of such estates has been shown, in combination with other social and economic factors, to cause anti-social behaviour problems and the quality of the housing in general is of a low standard.

The poor layout of the existing housing in Skelmersdale has resulted in a range of problems. In addition, the estates are surrounded by large areas of open space. Most of the existing housing is separated from the town centre by such open areas of land. This results in detaching Skelmersdale in a series of estates rather than one cohesive settlement area. Due to the Radburn design of housing estate there is limited natural surveillance and little sense of ownership over public spaces.
Figure 2.3 Aerial Photograph of Skelmersdale Town Centre
Constraints to Development

2.14 A number of constraints exist which will have to be given special consideration. These include:

- Undulating levels;
- Mine workings;
- Culverted streams;
- Open Watercourses;
- Environmentally protected sites; and
- Land Ownership.

Scope of the Supplementary Planning Document

2.15 A boundary for Skelmersdale Town Centre was defined by Policy DE11 of the West Lancashire Replacement Local Plan. During the initial tendering process to choose a development partner a ‘Project Area’ was drawn more widely to encompass part of the Tawd Valley, and extra land adjacent to Yewdale and Westhead’s Clough to ensure that this land was given consideration during the masterplanning process. A plan showing these two differing boundaries is illustrated by Figure 2.4.

2.16 The Partners have, therefore, been considering proposals for a wider area than that shown in the Replacement Local Plan, to ensure that the new town centre meets all the key principles set out within the original Vision and to ensure that the new town centre for Skelmersdale is viable commercially and will continue to function into the future.

2.17 This SPD therefore considers land beyond that area designated by Policy DE11 of the Replacement Local Plan. It also considers areas of land designated as Green Space (Policy EN8), and part of the Tawd Valley Park (Policy SC2). Some of the Cloughs and the Tawd Valley are also designated Biological Heritage Sites and are covered by Policy EN1. All these policies are set out in full within Technical Appendix A to the rear of this document.

2.18 The District Council recognises that this document cannot change Local Plan policy. However, it must realistically look at the whole Project Area and allow the public to give views on the best way forward for the wider area, as has already been done at the Options Paper stage. It will be made clear throughout this document where Masterplan proposals lie outside the town centre boundary and that they may be contrary to current policy. It will clearly state what sort of tests must be fulfilled by a developer to justify any exceptions being made to Local Plan policy.

2.19 When considering any application, the Local Planning Authority will need to weigh up the current policies within the Replacement Local Plan against Masterplan proposals within this document that do not fall within the official town centre boundary, and the need to achieve the aims of this document - namely a successful regeneration of the town centre. It has to be recognised, however, that any planning application for a different land use upon those areas would have to be treated as a departure application. When preparing its new Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPD, the Council will consider the need for future town centre regeneration and will seek to change policy designations where appropriate within the Project Area boundary.

2.20 Another important policy in the Replacement Local Plan concerns developer contributions (Policy DS3). Developers will need to engage with the Local Planning Authority at an early stage regarding the scale of developer contributions that may be required from developments in the town centre.

Figure 2.4 Skelmersdale Town Centre - Replacement Local Plan Boundary and Full Project Area
Chapter 3 Consultation

Consultation on the Document

3.1 This SPD has been prepared following the consideration of a range of comments received from the general public and other interested parties, at both the Options Stage and also through consultation on the draft masterplan. The details of these consultation exercises are set out in more detail below. The consultation undertaken met, and went beyond, the requirements set out within the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

Skelmersdale Vision

3.2 In 2004, the District Council embarked on the first steps towards the delivery of a new Town Centre for Skelmersdale through the creation of a 'Vision for Skelmersdale'.

3.3 Through consultation with local people in 2005, further visioning work sought to identify the key problems facing the town centre and to establish what is needed to make Skelmersdale a much better place to live, work and play. Key problems identified by local people included the poor physical appearance of the Town Centre and lack of accessibility.

Issues and Options for Skelmersdale Town Centre

3.4 In 2007, the District Council prepared an Issues and Options paper for Skelmersdale Town Centre. The paper was designed to set out the issues for the future of the town centre and asked people to comment, or pass comment, on other issues that they felt were important.

3.5 The issues put forward by the District Council included the mix of uses to be located in the central core, access, provision of new public transport facilities, future uses of open land in the town centre, future uses for the Tawd Valley and the future of Firbeck housing estate.

3.6 Widespread consultation was undertaken with all residents of Skelmersdale and other key stakeholders with a newsletter and questionnaire sent to every household and business within Skelmersdale. Exhibition events took place in the Concourse Centre where members of the project team were available to answer any questions from the public. Specific drop-in sessions were arranged to answer any specific questions in respect of how the project may impact on the residents of the housing estate (Firbeck) located within the Project Area.

3.7 The District Council received a positive response to the issues and options raised and comments received through the consultation provided a useful basis to continue with the preparation of a draft Masterplan and planning document for the town centre area.

3.8 A document containing all the results of the consultation can be found on the Council's website.

Design Workshops

3.9 In 2007, a number of key stakeholders were invited to design workshops into the masterplanning for Skelmersdale Town Centre. These workshop sessions were aimed at providing a brainstorming exercise to enable the key principles of the regeneration project to be discussed and shaped.

Consultation on the Draft Masterplan

3.10 Consultation took place on the draft Masterplan / SPD in April / May 2008. The draft document evolved from the previous options stage, following the consideration of comments received from key stakeholders and the general public.

3.11 As with earlier consultation exercises, all Skelmersdale residents and other key stakeholders were given the opportunity to comment on the draft document. Questionnaires were again sent to every household, accompanied by a newsletter providing a copy of the draft Masterplan and its key features. Exhibition events were held in the Concourse Centre where members of the District Council’s Planning team were available to answer any questions from the public. The documents and questionnaires were also made available online.

3.12 The results from the questionnaire survey, with 1,879 questionnaires having been returned, indicated that the great majority of respondents were happy with draft Masterplan. The results from the consultation exercise included:

- 93% of people supported the creation of a new pedestrian-friendly high street with a range of shops, cafes, bars, restaurants, a cinema and leisure and community facilities;
85% supported proposals to move the College, the library, the Swimming Pool, the Sports Centre and the Ecumenical Centre to new purpose-built facilities within the town centre;

91% agreed with proposals to develop parts of the Tawd Valley for recreational and leisure uses provided careful thought was taken to protect its natural environment and character;

92% supported proposals to create new routes, links and car parks to allow better access to the town centre;

90% felt that it would be appropriate to move the bus station from its current location on the first floor of the Concourse Centre to a new ground floor location to the east of the Concourse;

73% supported proposals for the provision of new homes in the town centre as part of the wider town centre regeneration, which would involve the clearance of the Firbeck estate and the development of land adjacent to Yewdale;

68% of respondents supported the proposals for the provision of new homes in the town centre as part of the wider town centre regeneration; and

80% of people supported proposals to develop open areas of land near Yewdale for carefully designed housing, providing this improved the Tawd Valley and funded new public and leisure facilities in the town centre.

3.13 A document containing all the results from the consultation exercise can be found on the Council's website.
Chapter 4 The Key Principles of the SPD

4.1 Through the visioning exercise conducted in 2004/5 a number of key principles were established that provide fundamental building blocks to the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre. These are as follows:

- Make Skelmersdale a leisure, recreational and retail centre of excellence within the North West;
- Ensure the parks and open space in and around the town centre are integral to its regeneration and are more accessible to Skelmersdale’s communities and visitors;
- Reconnect the town centre and community through the building of new roads and footpaths;
- Increase the number of residents within the town centre and diversify the style and range of residential accommodation available; and
- Ensure high quality design will be key to creating a vibrant town centre.

4.2 The five principles shown above formed the basis for preparing the key issues and options for the development of the town centre, on which consultation took place in the summer of 2007. Working with its Partners, the Council has taken account of the feedback from the local community, stakeholders and other interested parties in preparing this Supplementary Planning Document and Masterplan.

4.3 The following pages show how the visioning principles and ideas have continued to evolve into the identification of preferred options for proposals within the Masterplan (shown in Figure 1.1)
Chapter 5 The Town Centre Core

**Key Principle 1**

Make Skelmersdale a leisure, recreational and retail centre of excellence within the North West.

The Existing Town Centre

5.1 The current focus of Skelmersdale Town Centre is the Concourse Shopping Centre, with an Asda supermarket to the north of the town centre and a number of fringe developments (including a public library, a swimming pool and the police station) to the west and a number of office developments to the east.

5.2 Town centres are often characterised by a mix of uses, good access and high densities but, due to the high levels of open space within Skelmersdale, the general characteristics of a town centre cannot be currently applied. Presently Skelmersdale Town Centre feels isolated from the community it serves and does not fulfil its necessary role in providing an acceptable level of facilities and services for the people of Skelmersdale.

The Concourse Centre

5.3 The majority of existing retail provision comes from the Concourse Shopping Centre, which is a two-level indoor shopping area providing a range of food and comparison shops. The Centre is self contained and inward looking, which relates to the fact that it is the only shopping facility, apart from Asda, in the town centre, and thus, presently, it does not really need to connect well to its surroundings.

5.4 It is essential that further retail development does not harm the long term viability of the Concourse Centre. The regeneration of the town centre and the creation of a new high street gives the Concourse Centre a fresh opportunity for its own regeneration so it can become a successful part of Skelmersdale's future. A key objective of the emerging proposals for the proposed new High Street should be to achieve the maximum practicable integration with the Concourse Centre such that the new retail street operates as an extension of the existing shopping malls within the Concourse Centre. It is important that the Concourse owners develop their own plans to improve the Centre and look at ways of integrating with the new town centre. As suggested by this Masterplan, this could involve moving the bus station and opening up the western face of the Concourse to integrate with the new high street. There is also the opportunity to integrate a new foodstore within, or adjacent to, the Concourse Centre.

Asda

5.5 There is an existing Asda store to the north of the town centre. This is the only superstore in Skelmersdale and proves very popular with the town's residents and people from areas surrounding Skelmersdale. As with the Concourse, the superstore benefits greatly from the good road links both from around the town and to the wider hinterland via the M58. This demonstrates that, given the right type of development, new development can be successful in the town and the catchment of Skelmersdale can be increased.

The Mix of Uses

5.6 One of the key objectives of the Skelmersdale Town Centre SPD is to deliver a new central core for Skelmersdale. Proposals should bring together new retail, leisure, residential, recreation, civic uses, education, community and office development in a comprehensive approach. The Masterplan (Figure 1.1) identifies the key aspects of the Town Centre core.

The High Street

5.7 A new high street will form the central core of the town centre, with a mix of uses including retail, leisure and community uses and will run between the Concourse Centre to the south and the Asda supermarket to the north. New offices can also be accommodated above retail premises.

5.8 Development should be 3 or 4 storeys high to give a sense of enclosure to the high street and to allow for retail, residential and office uses above retail premises.

5.9 The high street should be designed so as to provide for a safe and pedestrian friendly shopping street. However, to further encourage the use of sustainable forms of public transport consideration will be given to the use of the high street for public transport (including buses and taxis) at off peak times. Any access provided onto the High Street area, either for public transport or for servicing or delivering, will have to be carefully managed to ensure that a safe pedestrian environment is created and that there is a high quality public realm.

5.10 Great care will need to be taken to ensure that the north/south route through the town centre does not sever pedestrian movements from the High Street across to the Concourse Centre. This issue is dealt with in more detail within Chapter 7.
Figure 5.1 Artist's Impression of the New High Street
Retail Provision

5.11 Proposed should seek to maximise the amount of retail floorspace in the town centre which would be viable and sustainable in the long term, and deliver attractive frontages which create a high footfall. Development of new retailing should complement the existing provision within the centre, located within the Concourse Centre and Asda, and should not undermine their vitality and viability. It is considered that the Masterplan proposals will deliver sustainable retail development and it has been demonstrated through a retail study already undertaken by the Council that significant increases in convenience and comparison goods floorspace is fully justified based on the poor level of existing retail provision and Skelmersdale’s position as a Regional Town in the Regional Spatial Strategy. Any new retail warehouse development will be appropriately controlled to ensure that it complements and does not harm existing retailers in the centre. The design of such units will also be an important consideration, with a requirement for high quality design that reflects other units in the centre, rather than poorly designed large 'boxes'.

Foodstore

5.12 In respect of convenience retailing, the existing main foodstore in the town is Asda. However, towns of similar size and population usually have more than one foodstore. This aligns with government policy to enable choice for consumers. The District Council has recently completed a retail study for West Lancashire which provides support for the creation of additional convenience retailing within Skelmersdale Town Centre. This report can be viewed from the District Council website at the Research, Mapping and Information page. 

5.13 The District Council will therefore support proposals for a new foodstore in the town centre, particularly where the retail offer complements the Council’s priority to deliver a new High Street and the existing offer within the Concourse Centre. As shown on the Masterplan diagram, any new foodstore should be located adjacent to and integrated with the Concourse Centre. This will help to reinforce the important role of the Concourse as the anchor at the eastern end of the extended shopping core of the town centre.

Creating a Night Time Economy

5.14 Development proposals for leisure uses such as cafes, bars, restaurants and cinemas which will further add to the diversity of the town centre will be encouraged. The development of such uses should not be clustered into one particular area and should be dispersed across the town centre and mixed between commercial uses.

5.15 Careful consideration should be given to the management of the night time economy within Skelmersdale, creating a safe environment for people to use at night. The development of new homes in the central core should ensure that natural surveillance is created, including the use of CCTV in key locations. A diversity of evening uses will help to extend the age ranges of users in the centre and mitigate against anti-social behaviour. Detailed plans should be developed in consultation with the Police and other key agencies. A recent report has looked at issues created in Lancashire through the night time economy and how, through proper planning, safer environments can be created to attract all age groups into town centres. All responsible authorities, such as the Police and the licensing responsible authorities, should be contacted at the earliest planning stage. Reference should be made to the recent report by Liverpool John Moores University - ‘Developing safer night time environments through effective implementation of planning’.

Community Uses

5.16 There are currently a number of community uses found within the town centre, including Skelmersdale College, the Public Library, Nye Bevan Swimming Pool and the Ecumenical Centre. The Masterplan proposes that all the above uses be relocated from their existing premises to new purpose-built facilities within the new town centre. The relocation and subsequent redevelopment of the existing sites will allow for a more comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre area.

5.17 One of the key uses within Skelmersdale’s new town centre will be the creation of a new college and further education establishment. This involves the relocation of the College from the existing sites, adjacent to Glenburn School and at Ingram near the library, to a new site in the heart of the town centre. The building should be of a high standard of design and should be considered a ‘landmark’ building within the new town centre.

5.18 A new wet and dry leisure centre will be created to incorporate the facilities found at both Skelmersdale Sports Centre, Digma and the Nye Bevan Pool. The new leisure centre will provide facilities such as gym facilities, sports facilities and a swimming pool which will be available for use by both the general public and students from the nearby education centres.

Figure 5.2 Existing facilities at Skelmersdale Library will be relocated into the core of the new town centre.
5.19 There will also be the development of a new library facility, which will sit at the heart of the town centre core to ensure that easy access can be obtained by all. The library will also provide a resource centre to ensure that a wide range of facilities, including internet access, can be found at the facility. There will need to be a ground floor presence to meet the needs of the County Council, with some facilities at first floor level.

Servicing the Central Core

5.20 Development proposals for the town centre will need to make sufficient arrangements for the servicing of all commercial premises in the town centre, with particular attention being given to the servicing of units on the High Street. In most instances the servicing of commercial units should be done from the rear of premises.

Civic Spaces

5.21 There are a number of existing Civic Spaces within the town centre. These are generally characterised as areas of featureless hardstanding with sporadic shrub and tree planting. They are in general poorly maintained and poorly valued pieces of land which do very little to improve the visual amenity of the town centre.

Figure 5.3 Existing Civic Spaces with Skelmersdale

5.22 The comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre will include the careful design of areas of open space and public realm to create a high quality environment. Attractive linkages between different buildings and activities will help in creating a sense of place and establishing an environment where people choose to spend time. High quality public spaces will be a critical factor in the success of the new town centre.

5.23 A culvert runs north east to south west through the town centre. It is unlikely that this will be de-culverted due its depth, but it provides an opportunity to create a ‘green link’ corridor though the new town centre, running approximately from where the library is now through to the Firbeck/Findon area. Careful treatment will need to be given to the area underneath the bridge that carries Northway over this link, to make sure this is a well used and attractive area.

Living in the Town Centre

5.24 New housing should be integrated into the central core to ensure a vibrant town centre where people can live, work and play during the daytime and into the evening. Residential units (in the form of apartments) above shops and houses in very close walking distance of the central core of the town centre will ensure active uses of all facilities and strengthen the function of the central core.

5.25 Provision should be made for one or two bedroom apartments within the town centre, tailored toward attracting single people and young couples. Roof terraces and balconies should be used to provide private amenity space. Access to residential properties in the town centre should be from the frontages of buildings and appropriate consideration must be given to the provision of car parking opportunities to residents of the central core.

5.26 It is anticipated that the central core of the town centre will be part of the first phases of development within the regeneration of the wider town centre area. This initial stage will not be covered within the accompanying Design Code and design matters are discussed below.

Design of buildings in the Central Core

5.27 The design of buildings in the central core of the town centre should be of a high standard and provide some individual character to Skelmersdale, to help create a sense of place.

5.28 Developers will be encouraged to bring forward proposals that create new streets and squares within the town centre that will have ‘active frontages’ with shops, restaurants, bars and cafes. Buildings in the town centre should be outward looking and visually open, with the creation of glass frontages, and be easily accessible for people with disabilities. Normally these buildings should be at least 3 or 4 storeys to allow for offices or apartment living above and a proper sense of enclosure of the street. Such buildings will be dynamic, colourful and well defined. Green links will provide a more relaxed and passive element within different parts of the town centre and will also create links to the surrounding landscape.

Development Opportunity Site

5.29 The relocation of Skelmersdale College facilities from the Glenburn site will provide a development opportunity site. Any development here would need to have full regard to its location near to a major secondary school. Suitable developments could include educational uses, offices or housing.
Chapter 6 Open Space and the Environment

Key Principle 2
Ensure the parks and open space in and around the Town Centre are integral to its regeneration and are more accessible to Skelmersdale’s communities and visitors.

Existing Open Space

6.1 One of Skelmersdale’s significant assets is the high quantity of open space that is found within the town. However, the sheer scale of open space within Skelmersdale means that a high proportion of it is not as well used as it would otherwise be, therefore qualitative improvements are needed. There is also biodiversity value to be found in the wooded clough areas which need to be protected as much as possible as part of the regeneration scheme, balanced against the need for enhanced and safer public access, particularly in the Tawd Valley.

6.2 Currently the town centre is surrounded by open space which separates the centre from the residential estates, creating something of an island within the middle of Skelmersdale. The level of open space is a unique feature to Skelmersdale, but is also another fundamental reason why the town centre is failing.

6.3 Traditional town centres are connected to the surrounding areas through built form, which creates movement, life and vitality. Much of the open space within the town centre is open grassland that provides little in the way of amenity value other than segregating surrounding residential estates. It also acts as a barrier for people visiting the town centre by foot or by bicycle, particularly at night time. Many of these areas are not busy and are perceived as being unsafe. Although the development will result in the loss of areas of open space within the town centre it is hoped that the open space which remains will be improved to a higher standard and will be more valued by the local community. This will dramatically improve links and accessibility to neighbouring areas, promoting cycling and walking. The development will transform some of the currently underutilised and threatening open space environments surrounding the town centre into living spaces that can be used and enjoyed.

6.4 Figure 6.4 identifies the preferred locations for open space facilities and the key linkages between them.

Biodiversity

6.5 As part of the development proposal, a full and detailed Ecological Assessment will be required to inform the design of the new town centre. The assessment must look at the current levels of usage of existing environmental features and assess the capacity of habitats to sustain greater pressure and usage, or to establish an appropriate level to sustain their value. This includes an assessment of the interrelationship between the wooded areas and areas of grassland and other habitats, to ensure that final designs take account of these spatial relationships, including the need for any ‘buffer zones’ between the areas of woodland and built development. Developers are advised to seek the advice of the Natural and Historic Environment Service at Lancashire County Council on the scope of the Ecological Assessment.

6.6 Some areas of open space within and outside the town centre will need to be enhanced in terms of their ecological value, to provide compensation for the expected loss of areas in the regeneration of the town centre. The establishment of replacement biodiversity resources should seek to create new ecological linkages, networks and corridors within the town centre, to ensure habitat connectivity. The further fragmentation of habitats in the town centre will be resisted.

6.7 Many of the wooded cloughs within the town centre are designated as Biological Heritage Sites for their biodiversity value. Any proposals affecting these sites for improvements to access and recreation should be carefully considered in terms of the impacts they might have on the interest of these sites. All measures will need to deliver objectives and targets in the UK and Lancashire Biodiversity Action Plans. Overall there will need to be a ‘step change increase’ in the biodiversity resource, and future management of the wooded cloughs should be carefully considered to ensure that their biodiversity interest is maintained.

The Tawd Valley

6.8 The Tawd Valley is a significant asset to Skelmersdale, but at present neither the town centre nor the Tawd integrate well with each other. The regeneration project will provide a unique opportunity to improve the relationship between the two features.
Figure 6.2 Artist's Impression of Integration between the Town Centre and the areas near to the Tawd Valley.
6.9 It is proposed within the Masterplan that the southern end of the Tawd Valley, in the locality of the Concourse Centre and the current position of the public library, should be more effectively used as a recreational resource for the town. There should be improved access, both in terms of standards and improved safety, for people to cycle and walk along the valley and to create an attractive leisure opportunity adjacent to the central core of Skelmersdale Town Centre. The whole of this area of the Tawd Valley will also need a full long term management plan.

6.10 Development adjacent to the Tawd Valley needs to respect its character and be specially designed to make the best possible use of the valley slopes. New developments should not turn their back on the Tawd Valley, but face onto it thus creating spaces that are overlooked, attractive and safe. Bars and restaurants could take particular advantage of the surrounding visual amenity of the Tawd Valley. Consideration should also be given to the creation of specialist recreational facilities in this section of the Tawd Valley, and developers will be expected to come up with exciting and imaginative proposals.

6.11 At present the Tawd Valley itself acts as a physical barrier for movement from the western areas of Skelmersdale to the town centre, mainly through the perceptions of safety by having to walk through wooded and concealed areas. This is particularly a problem at night. Therefore, consideration should be given to the creation of strategic gaps at key locations to encourage people to walk into the town centre and increase the perceptions of safety. Important routes which will need to be improved include the route through to Glenburn School, and routes linking through to Old Skelmersdale and the proposed new housing adjacent to Yewdale.

6.12 Through the Tawd Valley itself, including areas beyond the town centre project area, existing footpaths / cycleways need to be improved, to encourage cycling and walking. Careful management will be needed to ensure that these areas will flourish as havens for wildlife and encourage biodiversity.

Town Centre Cloughs

6.13 The wooded cloughs in the town centre provide environmental habitats for many species of plant and animal although at present there is no effective management of these areas and tipping and rubbish is regularly a widespread problem.

6.14 There will be a need for management plans to be prepared for all the cloughs with the town centre area, including Skelmersdale Hall Clough, Westheads Clough and Delph Clough. The improved management of such natural areas will ensure that the environmental and ecological features of these areas are protected and enhanced, as well as their recreational value.

6.15 Developers will be encouraged to remove existing culverts and make the best possible use of water assets, where this is both possible and viable. Where culverts remain, development will not normally be permitted above them.

The Town Centre Park

6.16 The cloughs in the town centre are formally designated as Biological Heritage Sites, creating important wildlife corridors in the town centre, and their status should be protected and enhanced. Where possible, developers should be encouraged to create new linkages between green corridors in order to effectively enhance the environmental value and provide for protected habitats for biodiversity. Enhanced public access should be considered within the Clough areas, particularly the Tawd Valley, although careful consideration will need to be given to any impacts upon biodiversity and mitigation measures put in place. If any essential work to create negative impacts it will be a requirement to compensate for any loss, which will include the creation of new areas for biodiversity or the enhancement of existing areas.

6.17 Currently Skelmersdale does not have a formalised ‘town park’, the closest equipped play space being located next to the Firbeck estate. Therefore the regeneration scheme will need to include provision for one or two high standard play areas, including high quality adventure play equipment to a recognised standard and areas for rest and relaxation.

6.18 Prior to any planning application being submitted, it is suggested that developers enter into discussions with the District Council Leisure section to ensure that appropriate provision and standards are met.
Figure 6.4 Areas of open space and key linkages with the town centre

Management of Open Spaces

6.19 The Council wishes to see the open spaces throughout the town centre maintained to a high standard into the future and the Council’s preference is for the developer to take a long term responsibility for these spaces. The Council will wish to see positive proposals for this as part of any planning application.

6.20 Management plans for the open spaces will need to be submitted and agreed with the Council.

6.21 The environmental quality of the wooded valleys in the town centre has been detrimentally effected over the years by, amongst other things, the dropping of litter and the dumping of shopping trolleys. Innovative ideas would be welcomed to see if work can be done with schools and community groups to encourage local people to become involved in the stewardship of the landscape. The Environment Agency will be able to assist with best practice in this field.
Chapter 7 Access

Key Principle 3
Reconnect the town centre and the community through the building of new roads and footpaths.

The Current Situation

7.1 The town centre enjoys very good road access from the motorway network. However, the existing road system within the town centre is one of the town centre’s fundamental problems that needs to be comprehensively addressed as part of the redevelopment scheme. The existing road network encircles the town centre, sending traffic around it, instead of creating direct access into it. This further exacerbates the low movement and activity levels experienced in the town centre, creating a feeling of desertion and isolation. The road network forms a barrier to pedestrian movements from the surrounding areas into the town centre, and this segregation prohibits walking, cycling and other more sustainable modes of transport for short journeys.

7.2 The existing footpath and cycle network uses subways and footbridges to cross vehicular routes. However, these networks are divorced from roads and other areas of activity, and this creates a feeling of isolation and vulnerability. The situation is exacerbated by poor lighting and maintenance and, as a result, people do not feel safe within the footpath and cycle network.

7.3 The building fabric of the town centre is made up of large blocks (such as the Concourse Centre) that create physical and visual impediments to movement around the town centre.

New Roads

7.4 The creation of a number of key new roads in the town centre will provide greatly improved access within and around the town centre. It will deliver direct access into the town centre core by private vehicles and public transport, which will increase activity levels and assist in creating a living town centre. The proposed new road network for Skelmersdale Town Centre is shown in Figure 7.2.

7.5 Along with the creation of a pedestrian-friendly high street, the Masterplan (Figure 1.1) also proposes the creation of a new north / south vehicle route to the west of the Concourse Centre which will allow traffic to directly access the central core of the town centre, and create more life and vitality in this area, preventing it from becoming a ‘dead zone’.

7.6 Careful consideration should be given to the levels of access permitted on the new north / south route. This road is not intended to create any form of rat-run, and careful management of the road should encourage drivers to use both the new route and the existing route to the east of the Concourse. Traffic movements along this route should be carefully considered with the possibility of promoting two-way traffic movements in the area.
7.7 Prior to the submission of any planning application, suitable analysis and technical assessment should be undertaken which indicates that the road network proposed can operate to the satisfaction of the appropriate highways authority and does not compromise safety, vulnerable road users, access, public transport priority and that it ensures sufficient future capacity.

7.8 Figure 7.2 and Figure 7.5 identify that new links should be created to allow the east of Skelmersdale to better access the town centre. Consideration should be given to providing links between Southway and both Tanhouse Road and Houghtons Lane.

7.9 Other roads will be created to access the housing sites located in the outer areas of the town centre. These are discussed within Chapter 8 of this document.

Traffic Management

7.10 Where the High Street crosses the north / south vehicular route careful management of the pedestrian and vehicular traffic flows will be required to stop any form of severance of the Concourse from the rest of the town centre. This could include the appropriate use of signalling, traffic calming and innovative use of road surfaces.

7.11 Any planning application will need to demonstrate that adequate widths of pavement will be provided, and it may be that careful surface treatments will be required to indicate that it is more of a pedestrian environment than a car dominated area. Treatment of this route will need to encourage slower vehicle speeds, with regular pedestrian crossing points. Particular emphasis will need to be placed on allowing pedestrians free and easy movement across the north-south road when moving along the main pedestrian axis between the Concourse Centre and the College / Sports Centre. The Council will expect the innovative use of materials and use of the latest thinking on traffic calming in proposals for this area. Options for closing certain roads at particular times of the day may need to be considered and designs should allow for such changes in the future if this is considered to be necessary.

Pedestrian and Cycle Links

7.12 As previously mentioned, the links for pedestrians and cyclists into the town centre, although numerous, are poor and uninviting. Many of the routes into the town centre are detached from roads and run through isolated cloughs. The lack of natural surveillance means that there is a perception that many of the routes are not safe and people are deterred from using these links, particularly at evening and night-time.

7.13 Although much of the infrastructure and networks exist within and around the town centre, significant works are required to ensure the quality and standard of these footpath links are improved. This should include improved lighting and improved quality of surfaces. Figure 7.5 identifies the key footpath and cycle linkages in and around the town centre. The scope of improvements to the footpath network may have to consider networks beyond the town centre boundaries and will have to support works being currently undertaken on footpaths and cycleways elsewhere in Skelmersdale. Developers need to demonstrate how proposals fit in with the overall network in the town.

Public Transport

7.14 The regeneration of the town centre, in particular any proposal relating to the regeneration of the Concourse Centre, needs to consider the provision of alternative bus facilities within the central core area. The existing bus station does not meet modern expectations and is not in the most accessible location for users. Hence there is an opportunity to provide more modern facilities in a more accessible location as part of the town centre regeneration proposals. The moving of the bus station would also enable physical alterations and improvements to be carried out to the western elevation of the Concourse Centre and facilitate its full integration with the new High Street.
7.15 Therefore, the relocation of the bus facilities to a new location within the central core (preferably remaining in close proximity to the Concourse at ground level) would have significant advantages. It would provide an opportunity to strengthen pedestrian flows around the Concourse Centre and the provision of new improved facilities will encourage the use of public transport.

7.16 Developers will be encouraged to work closely with Lancashire County Council to see whether further enhancements will need to be made to better connect the town centre with bus services. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of providing better bus links to the surrounding residential areas and to the closest rail stations, such as the stations at Up Holland and Parbold. Timings of existing services also need to be given consideration, with currently only an hourly evening service from Wigan and Southport serving the town centre. Throughout the remainder of the town there are very few and infrequent evening services currently serving the town.

Taxis

7.17 Taxis are used as an important means of transport through the town and it is important to ensure that sufficient provision is made, through the creation of one or more taxi ranks, for appropriate access into the town centre.

Car Parking

7.18 The provision of car parking will be an important issue for the new town centre. Given the increased range of facilities expected, future plans need to ensure there is appropriate provision available for car parking, including provision for disabled car parking. The District Council will apply Lancashire County Council’s maximum parking standards to all new proposals. Figure 7.2 proposes that new car parks should be easily accessed from all key transport gateways into the town centre.

7.19 Use of multi-storey car parking and underground car parking should be considered as a potential way of providing car parking within the centre core; new and innovative solutions will also be considered in this respect. The use of large areas of land for surface car parking should be avoided where possible.

7.20 Some car parking may be appropriate at the northern end of the high street, in the area fronting the new College and leisure centre. However careful consideration will need to be given to the public realm in this area. The important visual and pedestrian links will also need to be maintained from the top end of the high street to the key retail and other public facilities beyond.
7.21 Careful consideration must be given to the management of car parking within the town centre, particularly in providing car parking for people visiting but also for residents who will live there. Car park management systems may be used to inform drivers and effectively control car parking within the town centre.

7.22 Figure 7.2 shows the key traffic links that are envisaged in the central core and the relationships they have with new and existing car parking areas.
Chapter 8 Housing

Key Principle 4
Increase the number of residents in the town centre and diversify the style and range of residential accommodation available.

The Need for New Homes

8.1 Another key element in the regeneration of Skelmersdale will be the provision of high quality new homes, with the dual aim of increasing the number of residents in the town centre and, diversifying the style and range of residential accommodation available, thus attracting a range of people to the town centre to support the regenerated town. New housing development will be absolutely vital to financially deliver the new community facilities in the town centre core. Also, the more people that live in the town centre the greater the economic vitality of that centre, with more people spending money in the retail and service sectors.

8.2 A greater range and choice of housing is proposed in order to attract a greater number of residents to live in Skelmersdale Town Centre. Key characteristics of successful and sustainable communities include the provision of a variety of housing, in terms of tenure and price, and a mix of different households such as families with children, single person households and older people.

The Range of Housing Required

8.3 Developers will be required to cater for all types of housing needs, including:
- High quality market housing, for sale and to rent;
- Low - cost market housing; and
- Affordable housing.

8.4 The regeneration of the town centre will focus on increasing the diversity of the residential offer in terms of type, design, scale and height. New housing development will have to make the most sustainable use of the available land to provide a density appropriate for its town centre location and enable the necessary investment in the town centre core and supporting infrastructure.

8.5 Developers will be encouraged to:
- Provide new residential accommodation within the town centre core;
- Establish new residential areas adjacent to the town centre core;
- Extend existing residential areas towards the town centre core; and
- Introduce a wider variety of housing types, such as apartments, high quality family housing and executive housing.

Affordable Housing

8.6 Affordable housing is becoming increasingly important as property prices continue to rise, and in catering for lower income households. Intermediate housing includes products such as shared-equity housing including ‘HomeBuy’ schemes, and housing at discount values.

8.7 Skelmersdale currently has a range of lower priced property as part of the current housing market. Affordable housing provision will be a requirement in Skelmersdale Town Centre, with 10% of all new homes being affordable. This accords with Policy DE3 of the West Lancashire Replacement Local Plan that requires up to 25% of new homes in Skelmersdale to be affordable. Policy DE3 is contained within Appendix A.

8.8 In addition, there will be a need to replace the Council housing stock that is proposed for demolition at Firbeck/Findon. Replacement Council housing will need to be constructed on District Council land elsewhere in Skelmersdale to compensate for this loss. The sites and the amount and type of housing should be agreed with the District Council, and it is anticipated that the financial value of the housing lost will be used to provide for the new homes.

8.9 As stated above, affordable housing can come in various guises and it is considered that the most appropriate for Skelmersdale Town centre is a combination of social rented and shared-equity housing. The exact mix will need to be agreed with the District Council.

8.10 There is a common misconception that affordable housing equates to ‘cheap’ housing, and that such accomodation is designed and built to lower standards than market housing. This is not the case and affordable housing will need to be provided so that it is ‘tenure blind’ - meaning

Figure 8.1 Illustration to show the potential for new homes
that potential buyers will not be able to distinguish affordable housing from market housing. Affordable housing will also have to be distributed evenly throughout the town centre, thus providing balanced mixed communities.

New Housing Sites

8.11 Within the scope of the Skelmersdale Town Centre project there are a number of possible locations for new housing development. There are large areas of open space around the town centre that could be utilised and areas of land around the existing road network which can maximise housing opportunities and there is general support for the provision of new housing across the whole of the project area covered by this SPD as an integral part of the town centre’s comprehensive regeneration.

8.12 It is anticipated that in the region of 1,150 new homes will be built in Skelmersdale Town Centre over the next five to ten years. The Masterplan (Figure 1.1) included in this document identifies a number of new housing opportunity sites. These include:

- The town centre core (H3 & H4);
- Land to the north of the town centre (H5);
- Land to the east of the town centre (H6 & H7);
- Land to the north-west of the town centre (H1);
- Land to the south of the town centre (H8); and
- Land to the west of the town centre (H2).

8.13 All new housing will be set in a high quality environment, adhere to the accompanying Design Code (outside the central core) and provide excellent links to the town centre core and local facilities and services. All new housing development should ensure that it respects the landscape in which it is located and should be particularly sensitive towards adjoining woodland areas by means of the creation of buffer zones between residential development and woodland.

8.14 Picture 8.2 is a plan of the housing opportunities sites in Skelmersdale Town Centre. Details on what type of development would be appropriate for these areas and the design standards required are set out in Chapter 9 of this document and will be included in the Design Code document.
The Town Centre Core (H3 & H4)

8.15 This is discussed earlier in the document, but will mainly consist of apartments located above retail premises or close to the Tawd Valley.

Land to the North of the Town Centre (H5)

8.16 Part of this site is an area of vacant land, which was formerly the site of the Findon estate. Originally developed in the 1970’s, the estate was never fully finished with the majority of the estate being demolished before it was ever completed. It has remained vacant for a significant length of time despite the estate roads and infrastructure all being in place.

8.17 The southern part of the site is currently occupied by the Firbeck estate which is sited adjacent to the Concourse Centre at the heart of the town. The estate contains approximately 190 dwellings that were originally constructed in the early 1970’s. Although valued by a number of the residents, the estate is of a poor design, based on the Radburn layout.

8.18 If the estate remains as it is at the heart of the town centre it would create a negative impact on the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre. Due to its Radburn design the remodelling of the estate would be unrealistic and unlikely to be financially viable. Therefore it is proposed that this area of existing housing be redeveloped in order to improve the visual environment of the town centre and allow for a more comprehensive approach to the redevelopment of the town centre.

8.20 Access to the site could be considered from a number of potential locations as shown within Figure 8.6 overleaf. These include potential access from Southway, Birch Green Road and Houghtons Lane. There will need to be careful consideration of the road network within this area to minimise the use of the area for through traffic from the east of the town into the town centre and vice versa. Although vehicle flows should be minimised through this area, the flow of pedestrians and bicycles should be encouraged with safe routeways created through this area, as highlighted in Figure 8.9 (p28).

Land to the East of the Town Centre (H6)

8.21 To the east of the town centre and to the east of Southway is an area of open land which provides an opportunity for residential development. The site has been allocated in the past for commercial uses, but no development has ever taken place in this location.

8.19 The site should be comprehensively redeveloped for a range of housing types, sizes and tenures integrating the adjacent Findon site. There should be a mix of market and affordable housing in this area with the development of family housing and townhouses. The design of the buildings should be of a high standard (reflecting guidance set out within Chapter 9 of this document and the accompanying Design Code) and the layout / orientation of buildings should respect and enhance the natural features of the surrounding area, such as Skelmersdale Hall Clough, Elmers Green Clough and Westhead Clough. The density of development should be lower towards the periphery of the town centre with densities increasing towards the central core.

8.22 The site would be most appropriate for lower density family homes and should reflect the guidance on design set out within Chapter 9 of this document and the accompanying Design Code. The layout and orientation of the site should respect the character of the adjacent Delf Clough.

8.23 Access to the site will be a significant consideration due to the levels which surround the site. Southway would appear to be the more convenient point of access, as shown on Figure 8.6 but, due to the site being at a significantly higher level than Southway, an innovative engineering solution will be required to gain appropriate access to the site from this position.
Land to the West of the Town Centre (H2)

8.24 This housing opportunity site is characterised by a large swathe of open grassland, part of which is set out as an amphitheatre which is occasionally utilised for community purposes. Whilst the site is green, it is of low amenity value and actually isolates the residential estate of Yewdale and Old Skelmersdale from the town centre, acting as a barrier for pedestrian movement, particularly at night.

8.25 The site therefore provides a unique opportunity to bring high quality new homes that look towards the Tawd Valley and create new links between the existing housing area at Yewdale and the town centre. A new community in this location will help to ensure the creation of a safer environment with an increased number of people using the Tawd Valley for leisure and recreation purposes. This site provides an opportunity to create a high quality residential environment, with residents having ready access to all the amenities of the town centre. There should be strong pedestrian links to the town centre, as shown on Figure 8.9 (p28).

8.26 Development in this location should be more family orientated to take account of the adjacent green spaces within the Tawd Valley and should provide a mix of housing types, sizes and tenures. Residential properties should front the Tawd Valley and should be designed so that the new housing areas are carefully integrated with the improved green areas, which will provide high quality public open space.

8.27 New housing should be designed to look towards the Tawd Valley and respect the character of its setting. The close proximity of residential dwellings will assist in increasing natural surveillance in the area, increasing the perceived safety of the Tawd Valley as a pedestrian link and a natural resource.

8.28 There should be a range of densities considered for the site, with lower density development appropriate for any frontages towards the Tawd Valley. The development should also be broken up by a number of green corridors that will provide existing residents of Yewdale with views across to the Tawd Valley.

8.29 Development in this area should be of a high standard and should respect the character of its surrounding and adjacent natural features. Guidance set out within the accompanying Design Code and within Chapter 9 of this document should be observed.

8.30 As a large proportion of this site to the east and north of Yewdale lies within an area designated as green space and Tawd Valley Park by the Replacement Local Plan, developers will need to demonstrate strong justification to depart from these policies. The Council accepts that there is strong justification in planning terms for considering housing on these areas, in terms of providing new homes and reconnecting to the town centre, but developers will also need to show that this housing is needed to deliver the regeneration of the town centre core and the important community facilities and infrastructure that are required. It will also need to be demonstrated that this housing will deliver a step change improvement to the Tawd Valley Park, as detailed elsewhere in this document.
Land to the North-West of the Town Centre (H1)

8.31 The site is located to the North of the Tawd Valley and comprises vacant land adjacent to Asda and the Inglewhite residential area. The site provides the opportunity to deliver family orientated housing, and will be designed to capitalise on its location adjacent to the Tawd Valley and its riverside setting. New development should be of a high standard and should follow guidance set out within Chapter 9 of this document and the accompanying Design Code.

8.32 New development will be designed to look towards the Tawd Valley and to respect the character of its setting. Although housing will not directly overlook the valley, it is hoped that the close proximity of residential dwellings will assist in increasing natural surveillance in the area and increasing the perceived safety of the Tawd Valley as a pedestrian link and a recreational resource.

8.33 Access to this site by vehicles will be predominantly from the east and the central core of the town centre, as highlighted in Figure 8.6. Pedestrian and cycle linkages into the Tawd Valley and existing housing areas in Inglewhite will be encouraged to provide safe and accessible opportunities for accessing the river corridor, as shown on Figure 8.9. There should be a range and mix of housing sizes and tenures to ensure that a sustainable community is created.

8.34 As the northern portion of this site lies within an area designated as green space and Tawd Valley Park by the Replacement Local Plan, developers will need to demonstrate strong justification to depart from these policies. The Council accepts that there is strong justification in planning terms for housing on these areas, in terms of providing new homes and reconnecting to the town centre, but developers will also need to show that this housing is needed to deliver the regeneration of the town centre core and the important community facilities and infrastructure that are required. It will also need to be demonstrated that this housing will deliver a step change improvement to the Tawd Valley Park, as detailed elsewhere in this document.

Other Housing Sites (H7 & H8)

8.35 Picture 8.2 (p24) identifies a number of smaller potential housing sites to the south of the Town Centre area. Developers will need to demonstrate the practicality and viability of these sites, if considering them for new residential development.

8.36 Any development proposed must be of a high standard and should reflect the guidance on design set out within Chapter 9 of this document and the accompanying Design Code. The layout and orientation of these sites should respect the character of their adjacent surroundings.
Key Principle 5

Ensure high quality design will be key to creating a vibrant town centre.

9.1 While Skelmersdale has several unique features, it lacks the appeal of many more historic town centres. Poor design of the existing centre, a lack of cohesion between the various uses and poor accessibility are key characteristics.

9.2 West Lancashire District Council recognises the importance of high standards of urban, architectural, and environmental design in creating places and spaces that are enjoyable, popular and safe. Proposals should demonstrate good urban design in line with the latest guidance produced by English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation.

The Design Code

9.3 In order to ensure design quality and to co-ordinate the approach to design over a number of sites over a long period, a Design Code will be applied to all the housing areas outside the town centre core, as described within Chapter 8 of this document.

9.4 The Design Code will be applied to the residential elements of the town centre (outside of the central core) only. The Code can be defined as ‘a set of illustrated design rules and requirements which instruct and may advise on the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code are detailed and precise, and build upon a design vision such as a masterplan or other design and development framework’ (Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing; DCLG, 2006).

9.5 The Design Code will deal with design principles such as:
- Facade design;
- Roof design;
- Development densities;
- Design of buildings in relation to their surroundings;
- Environmental performance;
- Public open open space and structural landscaping; and
- Materials.

9.6 The Skelmersdale Town Centre Residential Design Code will be prepared in accordance with feedback from consultation during the SPD process and will be used by the District Council and developers to provide guidance on the design of new homes.

Figure 9.1 Design of residential properties will play a key role in improving the visual amenity of the area.

Figure 9.1 Housing designs create opportunities for the use of Renewable Energies.
Renewable Energies

9.8 All development within Skelmersdale town centre will need to consider the role of renewable energies as part of their design. Where appropriate, the use of solar or wind power to create sustainable forms of energy should be used both for residential and commercial properties.

Design Standards

9.9 New development in all cases will be of a high standard of design, and will be required to accord with the standards set out within the ‘Code for Sustainable Homes’. All new homes built will achieve a minimum level 3 of the code for sustainable homes. This will mean a home is required to:

- Be at least 25% more energy efficient than a home built to the 2006 Building Regulations: this could be achieved by measures such as improving thermal efficiency of construction elements such as the walls and the roof as far as is practically possible, and reducing air permeability to the minimum level consistent with health requirements.
- Be designed to use no more than approximately 105 litres of water per person per day: this could be achieved by including items use as dual flush toilets and flow reducing taps.
- Meet other minimum requirements for: surface water management, materials, and waste management.
- Take account of other considerations, including: provision of drying space, provision of more energy efficient lighting, provision of cycle storage, provision of a room that could easily be set up as a home office, reducing the amount of water that runs off the site into storm drains, and enhancing the security of the home.

9.10 West Lancashire District Council recognises the impact that the development of the town centre may have on the environment. The Council will work with developers to ensure that new development are efficient in terms of their impact on natural resources and energy requirements. Key issues when considering the design of both residential and commercial buildings include:

- Energy / CO₂;
- Water;
- Materials;
- Surface water run-off;
- Provision for recycling and waste disposal facilities;
- Waste;
- Pollution;
- Health and well-being;
- Management; and
- Ecology.

9.11 Although the District Council recommends that level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes be achieved, this should only be viewed as a minimum and it would be advantageous to see even higher standards achieved. The creation of such high standard development could be used to market the new town centre as a truly green centre, both in terms of the landscape that surrounds it and also the sustainability of the scheme and its individual buildings.

9.12 The Council will therefore encourage developers to examine the potential to achieve the highest ratings of the BREEAM and ‘Code for Sustainable Homes’ standards. For example, Level 6 of the ‘Code for Sustainable Homes’, effectively zero carbon, could potentially be a unique selling point for Skelmersdale. Developers will also need to be aware that over time, the minimum requirements in terms of the ‘Code for Sustainable Homes’ will increase, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Level</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9.2 Renewable Energies in residential developments
Chapter 10 Services and Infrastructure

New Services and Infrastructure

10.1 The creation of new services and infrastructure will need to be considered within the early phases of new development. It will be important that the potential requirement of new development, in terms of the sewer capacities and the creation of new utility links, is considered within the preparation of any future planning application and it is recommended that discussions take place at an early stage with United Utilities and all other relevant service and utility companies over what is required in terms of new infrastructure.

Drainage

10.2 The creation of new areas of hard standing and loss of land that was previously open space will have an effect on the run-off of surface water.

10.3 Ultimately surface water will drain into the River Tawd. However, careful consideration will be required into the management of surface water run-off, through the creation of SuDs or other surface water treatments, to ensure that the town centre development has appropriate drainage and does not create flooding issues within the town or elsewhere in the vicinity. The provision of carefully managed attenuation ponds will also create additional enhancement to the public open space areas. The use of porous paving would help to reduce surface run off. Surface water can also contain pollutants and appropriate methods must be put in place to ensure that any pollution cannot get into the local watercourses and then further downstream affect such areas as the Ribble Estuary.

10.4 Only in exceptional circumstances should extra culverting of watercourses in the town centre be considered and, where possible, developers are encouraged to open up watercourses that are already culverted and use them as a feature within the development.

10.5 The Environment Agency and United Utilities will be able to provide advice on the most appropriate methods of drainage. Early discussions with these organisations is recommended.

Flooding

10.6 Careful management of water is required to ensure that the wooded cloughs that are situated in and around the town centre do not become more prone to flood risk. These valleys, particularly the Tawd Valley, are highlighted as areas of potential high flood risk within the Environment Agency's flood zone maps.

10.7 None of the areas proposed for built development in this document are located within areas at risk from flooding. It is important that through the planning application process the Environment Agency be fully included within the process to ensure that flooding issues are effectively considered.
Chapter 11 Implementation and Phasing

Determining Future Planning Applications

11.1 The District Council will seek to ensure that any future planning applications meet both the tests set out in Replacement Local Plan Policies and the tests of viability included within this planning document. Proposals should also ensure that they align themselves with the guidance within both this planning document and the accompanying Design Code.

11.2 Developers will be required to discuss with the Council the exact scope of information required to accompany any planning applications. The following are likely to be required:

- Design and Access Statement including Masterplan;
- Planning Statement;
- Environmental Impact Assessment;
- Details of existing and proposed levels;
- Topographical Survey;
- Ecology Statement;
- Tree survey and Arboricultural Assessment;
- Travel Plan
- Transport Assessment;
- Retail Assessment;
- Noise Assessment;
- Sustainability Statement;
- Construction Method Statement / Phasing Plan;
- Public Realm and Landscape Management Plan;
- Statement of Community Involvement; and
- Drainage and Flood Risk Assessment.

Phasing and Delivery of the Town Centre

11.3 The first phase of development for the town centre project will be the development of part of the central core of the town centre, including the creation of the high street area, new leisure facilities and swimming pool, and the creation of a new campus for Skelmersdale College. A new library will also need to be provided early in the phasing programme. Once these public buildings are delivered, the demolition of the existing buildings can take place, thereby allowing new shops and homes to be constructed.

11.4 The first phases of the retail development will occur near to the Concourse Centre and be developed up towards the Asda superstore.

11.5 Any future planning application for the town centre development should include a detailed phasing plan that sets out the detail of phasing and delivery of the new town centre. Each phase should contain a mix of uses, and it should be demonstrated that the public infrastructure will be delivered - developers will not be allowed to ‘cherry-pick’ high value uses and not deliver the new facilities that are required.

Monitoring and Management

11.6 The Council’s preference is for a management company to be created for the town centre. This will enable the long-term management of public spaces, street furniture and landscaping in the town centre area. This could be financed through residents and businesses within the town centre paying an annual contribution to a management company.

11.7 As part of the planning application for the central core area of the town centre the applicants need to ensure that they clearly set out how the management company will be established and operate.
National Planning Policy Context

The principle of the large scale development of Skelmersdale Town Centre has been considered within the context of all the planning documents that form the 'Development Plan' for West Lancashire and National Planning Guidance.

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS1 set out the Government's vision on the creation of sustainable communities and sustainable development. Key principles of PPS1 include Social Cohesion / Inclusion, Protection and Enhancement of the Environment, Prudent Use of Natural Resources, Sustainable Economic Development and Integrating Sustainable Development into Development Plans.

The creation of a new and vibrant town centre and ensuring that sustainability is at the heart of the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre will ensure the proposals are supported by PPS1.

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) underpins the delivery of the Government's strategic housing policy objectives and their goal to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home which they can afford, in a community where they want to live.

The regeneration project in Skelmersdale is not only about the creation of a multi purpose town centre core, but also the creation of new housing opportunities, providing a range of housing, in both tenure and size, to attract mixed and sustainable communities to Skelmersdale.

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres

The principle of the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre aligns with national planning policy as set out by Government in PPS6 (2005), which supports the promotion of the vitality and viability of existing town centres by planning their future growth. This strategic planning policy document underpins the development principles for Skelmersdale Town Centre as set out in this SPD.

PPS6 sets out the key objectives of focusing development in existing centres and encouraging good access to a wide range of services. PPS6 also seeks to ensure that centres provide an enhanced consumer choice by making provision for a range of shopping leisure and local services which meet the needs of communities.

The redevelopment of Skelmersdale Town Centre accords with this guidance and the Council will support redevelopment schemes that delivers on the 'town centre first' advice as set out in PPS6.

Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) provides further national guidance for conserving and enhancing biological diversity in England. The key objectives for planning being the promotion of sustainable development, to conserve / enhance and restore the diversity of England's wildlife and geology and to contribute to urban / rural renaissance by enhancing biodiversity.

Skelmersdale has a number of important habitats within the town centre area and development that respects the character of its surroundings will be important in protecting the environment in the town centre area.

Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) provides national guidance on providing planning policies on open space, sport and recreation. This includes the preparation by local authorities of local assessments of needs and opportunities and the creation of a local standard for open space. This should ensure that a local authority is able to maintain an adequate supply of open space, sports and recreational facilities.


Planning Policy Statement 22 (PPS22) sets out the Government's policies for renewable energy, which planning authorities should have regard to when preparing local development documents and when taking planning decisions.

The detailed applications received for all types of development, including both residential and commercial uses, should have consideration into how renewable energies can be incorporated within the design of the building to create a highly sustainable development.

Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control

Planning Policy Statement 23 (PPS23) sets out Government policy on the role of planning and pollution control. The statement advises that the planning system plays a key role in determining the location of development which may give rise to pollution, either directly or indirectly, and in ensuring that other uses and developments are not, as far possible, affected by major existing or potential sources of pollution.

Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk

Planning Policy Statement 25 sets out Government policy on development and flood risk, aiming to ensure that flooding issues are taken into account at all stages of the planning process to avoid inappropriate development taking place in areas at risk of flooding.

Although the town centre is not in a area specifically highlighted at risk of flooding, the detailed applications for development will have to consider the impacts that proposals will have on flooding, and in particular the surface water run-off into the Tawd Valley. Consideration will have to be given to whether any flood risk assessments will be required, and early discussions with the Environment Agency are advised.
Regional Planning Policy Context

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is currently in an advanced stage of preparation, having gone through a Public Inquiry in late 2005 - early 2006. The RSS for the North West of England provides a framework for the physical development of the region over the next fifteen to twenty years.

Skelmersdale is classified as a “Regional Town” within the RSS. In Regional Towns, development is encouraged to secure urban regeneration and economic growth that is complementary to the Regional Centres, to promote environmental excellence, green infrastructure and good environmental management including the enhancement of the historic environment, and to provide for a range of local facilities and services to improve health, reduce crime and enhance education and skills attainment within communities.

Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001 - 2016

Within the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan, as adopted by Lancashire County Council in 2006, Skelmersdale is designated as a ‘Regeneration Priority Area’ (RPA) within the County, where development should be of a sufficient level to support the RPA’s regeneration role.

Special mention is made of Skelmersdale’s position, ‘where wide ranging regeneration and environmental enhancement should be secured, including the enhancement of Skelmersdale Town Centre’.

Local Planning Policy Context

Replacement West Lancashire Local Plan 2001 - 2016

There are a number of policies which will have reference to the regeneration proposals for Skelmersdale Town Centre; these are highlighted below.

Any future planning applications submitted for Skelmersdale Town Centre must pay full consideration to the Planning Policies set out below and any other relevant planning guidance available at the time of submission.

Policy EN1

Biodiversity

The biodiversity of the District will be protected by not allowing development which would destroy or adversely affect important wildlife habitats or geological sites. Development which returns key biodiversity resources to viable levels, by promoting restoration, and re-establishment of habitats and species populations in accordance with National and Local Biodiversity Action Plans, is encouraged.

A. Nature Conservation Sites

In particular, the strongest possible protection will be given to Ramsar Sites, Special Protection Areas, Candidate Special Areas of Conservation and European Protected Species.

In the case of National Nature Reserves or Sites of Special Scientific Interest, only development serving an overriding national public need which cannot be located elsewhere will be considered but mitigation measures and compensatory habitat creation will be required.

In County Biological Heritage Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites and Local Nature Conservation Sites, only development which is required to meet an overriding local public need will be considered but mitigation measures and compensatory habitat creation will be required.

Presently designated sites are shown on the Proposals Maps.

The nature conversation policies referred to above apply not only to development in or on nature conservation sites, but also to development elsewhere that may indirectly affect such sites. Where development in allowed, planning conditions or obligations will be used to protect or enhance sites’ nature conservation interest.

B. Wildlife Corridors

Development will not be permitted which would destroy or significantly impair the integrity of the Wildlife Corridor shown on the Proposals Map, by:-

i. Resulting in the loss of the undeveloped open character of the Wildlife Corridor;
ii. Reducing the width or causing direct or indirect severance of a Wildlife Corridor;
iii. Restricting the potential for lateral movement of wildlife;
iv. Causing the degradation of ecological functions of the Wildlife Corridor;
v. Directly or indirectly damaging or severing links being Green Spaces, Wildlife Corridors and the open countryside; or
vi. Restricting public access to a wildlife corridor.

Development may be permitted where it will provide a substantial environmental gain to include the visual ecological or appropriate recreational functions of the Corridor.

C. Protected Species

Development will not be permitted that will destroy or have an adverse affect either directly or indirectly, on:-

i. Badgers;
ii. Species protected by Schedules 1 (Birds), 5 (Animals) or 8 (Plants) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended, and Schedules 2 & 4 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994; or
iii. Habitats that support these species at any time of the year.
NB. This policy covers all sites and corridors shown on the Proposal Map and any that may be identified in the future.

Policy EN8

Green Spaces

Development will not be permitted which would destroy or significantly impair the integrity of the main Green Spaces shown on the Proposals Map, or any other locally important area of open space, by:-

i. Resulting in the loss of the undeveloped open character of the area;
ii. Restricting access to a publicly accessible Green Space;
iii. Causing the degradation of the visual, ecological and historical functions of the area; or
iv. Directly or indirectly damaging or severing links between Green Spaces, Corridors and the open countryside.

Development may be permitted where it will provide a substantial environment gain to the visual, ecological or appropriate recreational functions of the Green Space or where it forms part of a scheme which provides an overall benefit to the local community in social, environmental and economic terms.

Policy DE3

Affordable Housing Development

Affordable housing development to meet the needs of local people will be permitted within settlement areas shown on the Proposals Map provided that:-

i. a need has been identified in the local area and the proposed development would meet that need.
ii. the affordable housing is made available for local residents in proven housing need, who cannot afford to rent or buy houses through the open housing market. The tenure of affordable units should be determined by need in the local area, and should meet local needs in perpetuity; and
iii. the site should be in reasonable proximity to local services such as schools, shops, medical facilities and public transport, and its development should not prejudice the realisation of other key planning objectives for the redevelopment of the site or local area.

A number of affordable housing units to be provided within approved housing developments outside of Skelmersdale will be between 30% and 50% on sites of 10 or more dwellings. The tenure of these affordable housing units should be determined by need in the local area, and should meet local needs in perpetuity.

Within Skelmersdale the number of affordable housing units to be provided on each site will be up to 25% on sites of 10 or more dwellings. These affordable housing units should include a mixture of types required to meet the overall regeneration and Housing Strategy objectives for Skelmersdale.

In determining the precise level of affordable housing provision to be made on any site, regard will be had to the following criteria: (a) site size suitability and economics of provision; and (b) the need to achieve a successful housing development.

All affordable housing proposed under this policy must be demonstrated to be genuinely affordable to those on lower incomes in the local area.
Policy DE11

Skelmersdale Town Centre

Proposals for the enhancement, regeneration and redevelopment of Skelmersdale Town Centre, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be supported. To this end a comprehensive masterplan for the improvement of the Town Centre will be prepared. Proposals will be expected to:

i. Conform to the masterplan;
ii. Include, or be part of, a range and mix of uses including retailing (food and non-food) leisure, entertainment, office space and residential;
iii. Be of a scale that is needed to serve the area and is appropriate in the Town Centre;
iv. Provide a major improvement in the facilities, services and attractiveness of the Town Centre;
v. Include provision for health care and educational facilities;
vii. Demonstrate good practice in urban design with development being innovative and of the highest possible quality;
viii. Prioritise convenience for pedestrians, cyclists and users of public transport over the car and include proposals to enhance or redevelop the bus station. The development will also require a Transport Assessment (including impacts on the strategic road network) and a Travel Plan;
ix. Support the ongoing project to develop a new Town Centre park and protect important and valuable open / green space where appropriate;

Development which would prejudice the regeneration of the town centre, or the implementation of the masterplan, for example piecemeal development proposals on key sites, or the over-provision of facilities, will not be permitted.

Policy SC2

Recreational Facilities

Facilities for informal countryside recreation activities are proposed at the following sites as shown on the Proposals Map:

1. Hunters Hill, Wrightington
2. Calico Brook, Appley Bridge
3. Parbold Hill, Parbold
4. Platts Lane and Mill Dam Lane, Burscough
5. Chequer Lane, Up Holland

Proposals will also be development to protect and improve facilities at existing countryside recreational sites shown on the Proposals Map at:

6. Beacon Country Park, Skelmersdale
7. Tawd Valley Park, Skelmersdale
8. Fairy Glen, Appley Bridge
9. Dean Wood, Up Holland
10. Abbey Lakes, Up Holland
11. Ruff Wood, Ormskirk
12. Platts Lane Lake, Burscough

New childrens play areas are proposed on the sites shown on the Proposals Map at:

13. Lathom Avenue, Parbold
14. Tabby's Nook, Newburgh
15. Abbeystead, Digmoor, Skelmersdale
16. Redgate, Ormskirk
17. Elm Place, Ormskirk
18. Land East of Eavesdale, Skelmersdale
19. Bescar Lane, Bescar
20. Bramble Way, Parbold
Technical Appendix B - Design Standards

Design Standards

Code for Sustainable Homes

In addition to new planning policies, DCLG launched the 'Code for Sustainable Homes' in December 2006, a new national standard for sustainable building practice. The Code measures the sustainability of a home against a number of design categories, rating the whole home as a complete package. The design categories included in the Code are:

- Energy / CO₂
- Water
- Materials
- Surface Water run-off
- Waste
- Pollution
- Health and well-being
- Ecology

The Council will work with developers to ensure that new development proposals are efficient in terms of their impact on natural resources and energy requirements.

Low Carbon Development

The redevelopment of the town centre should incorporate the principles of sustainable development. This will include a range of architectural and design features. The use of sustainable building resources and techniques so as to minimise the environmental impact, and the incorporation of energy-saving, waste management and water resource management systems will be encouraged.

New national planning policy places a greater emphasis on environmental sustainability, and the emerging climate change supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 sets benchmarks for the environmental performance of new development, including a greater focus on reducing carbon emissions and the use of renewable energy.

English Partnerships Quality Standards

English Partnerships have prepared a number of quality standards that new development should aspire to. These are grouped into four themes including quality places, quality homes and buildings, construction quality and rewarding quality and delivering locally. These standards should be used as a key benchmark for new development throughout Skelmersdale Town Centre and are summarised below:

Quality Places

- Design Statements - creating well-laid out and distinct communities.
- Building for Life Silver (or Gold) - the CABE quality standard.
- Inclusive Design - safe and overlooked streets and public spaces.