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**Area Based Collaborative Entrepreneurship  
in Cities**

# **Gorton District Centre**

**Case Study**

**December 2019**

## Gorton district centre (Manchester)

This case study provides an overview of Gorton district centre. It presents Gorton as a place with multicultural vibrancy, populated with a high percentage of younger people. Specific reference is given to the lack of channels in place to bring stakeholders together and encourage collaborative working around a shared vision or strategy.

The figures below show the location of Gorton district centre (Figure 1), as well as a map of the district centre itself (Figure 2).

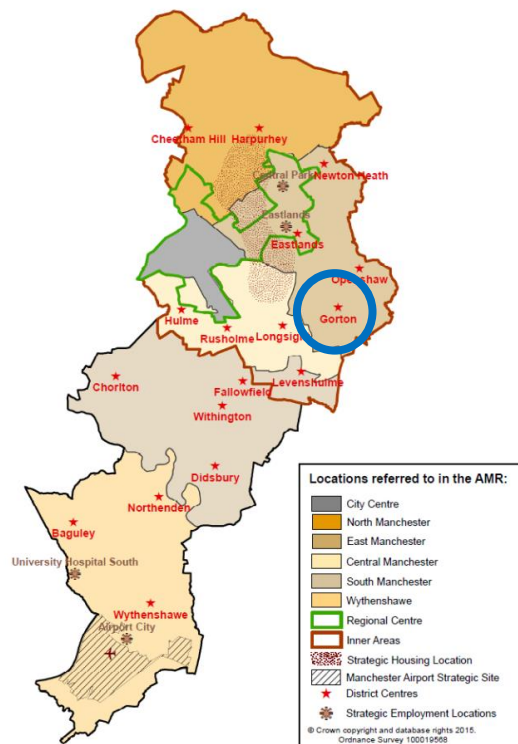


Figure 1: Location of Gorton district centre



Figure 2: Gorton district centre map

## Characteristics of the collective

As with many smaller district centres located on the peripheries of larger city centres, Gorton possesses a cluttered appearance. In general, the units in the centre look dishevelled and outdated. Furniture and household appliances can be found left outside some of the units on Hyde Road, as well as littering and shattered glass noticeable on the pavements and grass areas. The Gorton Market is not overly inviting due to its opaqueness and outdated photos, and the centre has quite a 'hard' functional image on the whole.

Gorton lacks a 'centre feeling'. The centre is dissected in half by Hyde Road, which is busy with traffic, and there is no real central hub indicating to visitors that they have arrived in Gorton. Although the pavements along Hyde Road are quite wide, flat, and easy to navigate, there are not many points at which the road can be easily and safely crossed by pedestrians.

Gorton district centre displays characteristics of a typical convenience/community centre, that is, it has a fairly steady footfall profile throughout the year and it is focused on the local community. The units in Gorton primarily provide a low-end convenience offer, revolving around food/groceries and household items (e.g. Tesco Extra). The centre seems to be more service-led than product-driven (e.g. hairdressers), and it is perhaps lacking in food and beverage establishments.

In terms of necessities, there are a few benches along Hyde Road and public toilets are easily found. There are no apparent bins, which conceivably contributes to the noticeable litter issues. Tesco Extra provides free parking for customers for up to 2 hours, but otherwise the centre seems to lack car parking facilities.

Gorton is amongst the wards with the highest number of recorded crimes in Manchester (MCC,

2018), and it is amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country in terms of crime deprivation (IMD, 2019).

## The community and the collective

Gorton has a population of 16,440 (ONS, 2011). The average age of Gorton residents is 34.5. In terms of ethnicity, 66.9% of the population are White; 14.8% are Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British; 12.1% are Asian or Asian British; 4.8% are mixed; and 1.4% belong to another ethnic group (ONS, 2011). When it comes to economic activity, 63% are economically active and 37% inactive (ONS, 2011).

### Age structure

	Persons	
	count	%
Gorton North 2011 Census Ward		
All usual residents	16,440	100.0
Age 0 to 4	1,653	10.1
Age 5 to 7	751	4.6
Age 8 to 9	342	2.1
Age 10 to 14	1,027	6.2
Age 15	186	1.1
Age 16 to 17	424	2.6
Age 18 to 19	420	2.6
Age 20 to 24	1,100	6.7
Age 25 to 29	1,334	8.1
Age 30 to 44	3,728	22.7
Age 45 to 59	2,870	17.5
Age 60 to 64	689	4.2
Age 65 to 74	1,037	6.3
Age 75 to 84	641	3.9
Age 85 to 89	155	0.9
Age 90 and over	83	0.5
Mean Age	34.8	-
Median Age	33	-

Figure 3: Gorton population age breakdown

The centre's proximity to aspirational yet more unaffordable neighbourhoods, as well as to the city centre, has led to an increase in young professionals residing in the centre (specifically those

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in the 30-44 age bracket). Gorton has a diverse socio-demographic profile. The demographic of the local catchment has been shifting over recent years, with African and Eastern European communities settling in the area, thus adding to Gorton's multicultural vibrancy.

## Governance structure of shared resource

In terms of future developments, a pioneering multi-service health and community hub is planned for the heart of the centre, which will bring together a partnership of public sector organisations, including Manchester City Council, health and social care partners and housing and community service providers. At present, there are some governance issues in Gorton, as there are no channels in place to bring stakeholders together and encourage collaborative working.

There is no Traders' Association in the centre bringing the retailers together around a shared vision or strategy, nor any channels to encourage other key stakeholder groups to collaborate. The Neighbourhood Team, however, has regular contact with residents about issues within the centre such as waste, parking, and general complaints.

There are a lot of independent traders along Hyde Road who appear to be working in isolation from one another not offering a consistent place image.

## The collective process and interaction

Our research in Gorton has shown that there are small pockets of collaborative activity. There is an event committee, for example, that is made up of a committed but small number of local residents. Aside from this group however, whose activity is limited to occasional seasonal events such as a Christmas lights switch-on, there is very little capacity evident. As such, our attention turns to looking at the centre itself, and how it presents opportunities and challenges for collaborative activity to enact change.

In order to understand how the community interacts with Gorton district centre, Springboard have installed a footfall counter on Hyde Road (November 2017) that records 24 hours of data per day. The data gathered by the counter shows that the footfall builds during standard business operating hours (9am-5pm), reaching a peak around 11am-midday, possibly due to people visiting the centre during their lunch break. Footfall then plateaus throughout the early afternoon, before gradually tailing off towards the evening and sharply falling after 5pm. Activity in the centre aligns closely with the market trading hours (9-5.30pm), and there is currently little provision in the centre to drive an evening economy. Similarly, data shows that footfall volumes are fairly consistent throughout the week, with a notable decline towards the weekend and particularly on Sunday, once again reflective of market opening days. Furthermore, Gorton has a fairly flat footfall profile across an annual cycle, which is in line with the recorded hourly and weekly data, and reflective of it being a community/convenience signature type. However, there are a few peaks in the data reflective of, for example, a Christmas lights switch-on event held in November 2017,

which demonstrates the power of events to bring the community together within the centre and to create a sense of vibrancy and vitality. Overall, footfall in Gorton has been declining since 2018.

Gorton provides a good range of basic services for its local community including: a police station, pharmacy, park/playground, community centre, library, dentist, medical centre, post office, funeral care, a church, and three schools. Gorton is open to different age groups. Apart from the two pubs attracting people of legal drinking age, Gorton offers a wide range of attractions for families and young people, such as the fun fair in Debdale Park, the charity family fun day at Gorton Market, or the Christmas lights switch-on. Similarly, Gorton has a Gymnastics Centre primarily targeted at children. Gorton, however, lacks civic space and recreational areas for people to gather together and spend time for free. The benches, for instance, that could be attractive to older generations are located at the edge of roads. Although Gorton is open to community members of all ages, and its low-end convenience offering is attractive to these, it lacks the pulling power to attract visitors from further afield. Although the Showcase Cinema might function as an anchor for Gorton, this is located slightly outside the main centre. Regarding independents, Gorton is inclusive and has a range of takeaways some of which cater to the ethnic diversity of the local community. Whilst there are several takeaways and pubs in Gorton, most of the amenities have notably short business hours (e.g. the library). There doesn't appear to be much of an evening economy, nor much open at the weekends to encourage footfall or dwell time. This could potentially make the district less accessible for people who work full time.

## Lessons learned

There is an increasingly diverse local catchment in Gorton that contributes to a sense of vibrancy, and offers potential to further meet its needs. Retail has adapted to serve the needs of these communities, with speciality produce shops and ethnic takeaways opening up over recent years.

There is an opportunity for population growth in Gorton due to new affordable housing being built and the centre being well served by public transport.

On the other hand, a key challenge that Gorton faces is that there is no real central hub, creating a sense of the centre being disjointed, coupled with a lack of a distinctive place identity. There is a lack of places to dwell in the centre (e.g. especially in terms of leisure activities, cafes, bars, and restaurants), which for residents this means there is no reason to linger in Gorton. There are appearance issues with some of the low-end retailers along Hyde Road creating a negative image. The market is a key anchor but is also not very inviting due to its opaque frontage.

Furthermore, there are governance issues in Gorton, as there are no channels in place to bring stakeholders together and encourage collaborative working around a shared vision for the future.

Our engagement with local stakeholders has revealed a series of recommendations that can help Gorton in its future development. Gorton should identify some 'quick wins' that will address areas of concern, but which can engender wider engagement and enthusiasm. These can include:

Basic improvements to appearance through some simple public realm clean up activity; extending dwell time in the early evening by extending opening hours (e.g. market, library etc.); and developing branding and marketing efforts around the centre's proximity to the Gorton Monastery; providing Gorton with an identity that it is lacking currently.

The market provides a vibrant independent retail offer, and helps to foster a sense of community. There are some successful events bringing the community together, such as the Christmas lights switch-on and a local carnival. These are organised by a small events committee. It is this kind of collaborative activity that needs to be encouraged in the centre. Gorton would benefit from developing a network of engaged local stakeholders who are in communication with one another and actively collaborating, sharing knowledge and generating ideas in order to enact interventions to improve the District Centre. Key to the further revitalisation of Gorton will be the nurturing and development of this local capacity that will enable local stakeholders to begin to tackle strategic goals and ambitions.

Finally, careful management and monitoring of interventions and activities (e.g. through footfall data), is essential in the ambitions to diversify the offer, create a night time economy, develop a strong place identity, and attract visitors from further afield. Analysing footfall data not only helps in developing an understanding of centre functionality and performance, but can also foster a sense of agency triggering collaborative decision making of different stakeholders. This evidence-based approach offers opportunities to track interventions and improve performance, but also a way to convey the success of interventions to the wider community in a quantified manner. This approach can be fundamental in gaining trust and ensuring buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders, from investors to local residents. Again, developing local capacity and collaboration amongst the community is an important pre-cursor to this.