

Ashton-in-Makerfield Town Centre: Ashton Square - Expression of Interest and Pre-Market Engagement

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Wigan Council is looking to revitalise Ashton-in-Makerfield town centre and has been awarded £6.6m of Capital Regeneration Projects (CRP) funding. A key component of the emerging “Our Future Ashton” plans is to bring back the town’s historic market site to help build a vibrant town centre.
- 1.2 For more than 100 years, Ashton had a thriving market on Garswood Street which closed due to Covid in 2020. However recent public consultation has shown that there is widespread public support to bring the former market space back into use. The aim is to restore the market site, bringing new life, new occupiers and new community uses right back into the centre of the town. This new Ashton Square will bring an exciting range of community, social and entrepreneurial uses to the historic market site.
- 1.3 The Our Future Ashton proposals aim is to boost footfall, offer a range of trading outlets, including new food and beverage units that will appeal to all, all blended around a new beautiful public space which will be used for regular events and activities throughout the year, restoring a sense of community and local pride and bringing Ashton’s vibrant and prosperous history back to life.
- 1.4 The new Ashton Square will be complemented by the other components of the Our Future Ashton scheme including:
- Improved public realm including streetscape greening and road safety interventions to reduce the impact of traffic and make the town centre more welcoming for pedestrians and cyclists; and
 - Shopfront and façade improvements along Garswood Street and Gerard Street
 - Improved lighting and public art.
- 1.5 The Council is looking to create an exciting opportunity for an external organisation to manage and operate a vibrant new Ashton Square.
- 1.6 As such, the Council is inviting Expressions of Interest and Pre-Market Engagement from individuals or organisations interested in the Management and Operation of the new Ashton Square on behalf of the Council, working closely with the Council’s markets management team. The Council is looking for a place manager and curator with a proven record of accomplishment in running small markets (or similar enterprises) and place activation.
- 1.7 The place manager will have experience of place marketing, maintenance and management, including supervising traders on a weekly basis and organising a regular events programme throughout the year. Joint bids will be considered where specialist expertise can be demonstrated e.g. supply of equipment and associated administration.
- 1.8 The appointed place manager will play an important part in contributing to final designs and the operation of the new Ashton Square.

2. Operator Requirements

2.1 The Council is looking to appoint an operator to create a successful vibrant Ashton Square. The selected operator / place manager will:

- Work with the Council and the Council's design team to finalise plans for the layout of Ashton Square, including the balance, mix and size options for the permanent and temporary stalls
- Work with the Council to build interest and excitement in the opening of the new Market Square during the construction period
- Hold an opening launch event
- Hold markets on a weekly basis at least three, or ideally four days per week, with occasional evening and weekend events.
- Run campaigns and host events (e.g. Fair Trade, Food and live events) within the new Market Square to improve the offer during the day and to consider options around expansion of future evening offer
- Hold innovative monthly themed events, centred on Local Producers and Crafts, and opportunities for community groups or events etc
- Manage the Market Square area and Occupiers on a day-to-day basis
- Repair and maintain all the elements of operators' Market Equipment, reporting any minor works associated with the Council's responsibility
- Clean Ashton Square area and the public toilets to the Council's Street Cleansing standards before, during and after each market
- Accepting that Market Trader Fees will depend upon agreed operating model, ensure Market Trader Fees Pricing Schedule is available and up-to-date and consult with and seek the Council's approval to any changes to Fees
- Collect Occupier Fees
- Deal with all Occupier & Customer Queries
- Allocating Occupiers their respective location and stall
- Pay all utility bills and the recharge of costs to occupiers
- Remove and Recycle Waste as appropriate (waste and recycling is the responsibility of the successful bidder / prospective operator; not the Council); and
- Ensure appropriate Security Measures are in place and Health & Safety Standards are met.

3. Proposed Management / Operator Agreement

3.1 There are various options under consideration on the management relationship / agreement between the Operator and the Council, including licence, lease, service concession, or an asset management agreement.

3.2 The Council is open to proposals that include more innovative approaches that might include for example, the Council's financial return structured around a share of trading turnover.

3.3 The Council is willing to consider proposals on how the Agreement is best shaped and invites consideration from operators as part of their expression of interest.

4. Format for EOI response

4.1 The Council is inviting prospective Operators to provide feedback on this EOI Document (and the attached EOI Brochure), and if interested to provide a response on the following key questions:

1. Operator experience on working with local authorities in the management of markets and lessons from this experience in terms of the Council's ambition for a new Ashton Square in Ashton.
2. Operator experience on working with local authorities in the management of place and lessons that have been learnt from this experience in terms of the Council's ambition for a curated Ashton Square.
3. Outline of the operator's response in terms of the Council's ambitions for what will work in Ashton; the proposed Ashton Square layout and balance / mix of permanent and temporary stalls; and recommendations on marketing and management of an innovative programme of events that will draw in users.
4. Outline response around preferred management agreement.
5. Confirmation of operator interest in proceeding to next stage tender proposition.
6. Company name, name of contact person, email address and telephone number.

4.2 Feedback will be treated as confidential, collated and used to help the Council develop and shape a future Invitation to Tender.

4.3 Please note, any party not expressing an interest at this stage will not be precluded from submitting a bid. The Council envisage that an Invitation to Tender will be advertised in Spring early 2025.

4.4 To register an interest and/or provide feedback please send by email to Markets@wigan.gov.uk and include your name, address, and telephone number.

4.5 The EOI does not guarantee that the Council will go out to tender, therefore the Council are not liable for any costs associated with providing a response.

4.6 All responses must be received by no later than 7th March 2025.