

Skelmersdale

Lancashire

'Mark Two' New Town – Designated 9 October 1961

Skelmersdale was the forerunner of the 'Mark Two' New Towns and the first in the North West. Formerly a small mining town, it was designated as a New Town to accommodate some of the rapidly expanding population of Liverpool and wider Merseyside. Today, it is the largest and most densely populated settlement in the West Lancashire Borough and is adjoined to the east by the more traditional settlement of Up Holland. It has clearly defined industrial and residential areas and a significant green space network resulting from its New Town status. Some of the New Town estates and the town centre have not stood the test of time. A programme of town centre renewal, urban extensions and a new rail link are planned to regenerate the town.



Report 1X (Wikimedia Commons)

Key facts:

- **Location:** 21 kilometres north east of Liverpool, 26 kilometres north west of Manchester. It is the second-largest town in the North West without a railway station, but Preston, Liverpool and Manchester are all within a 30-minute drive time.
- **2011 Census population:** 40,710, in 16,769 households (6,175 of which, in 2,597 households, are in adjoining Up Holland).¹
- **Local authority:** West Lancashire Borough Council.
- **Local Plan status:** West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 (adopted 2013).

New Town designation:

- **Designated:** 9 October 1961.
- **Designated area:** 1,630 hectares, revised to 1,670 hectares.
- **Intended population:** 80,000, later reduced to 61,000 (population at designation: 8,500).
- **Development Corporation:** The 'Basic Plan' adopted in 1966 was based on a need to plan for the car; integrated industrial and residential sites; Green Belt and a clear limit to development to avoid sprawl; a well balanced population; and a staged development approach with a full range of facilities provided at each stage. Development Corporation wound up 31 March 1985.

Housing, deprivation and health:

- Proportions of privately rented and owner-occupied housing are lower than the UK New Towns and UK averages. 27.8% of households in Skelmersdale are in social rent, compared with UK New Towns and UK averages of 21.4% and 18.1%, respectively.
- Skelmersdale is a significant 'hot spot' for deprivation, with 14 of its 23 Lower Super Output Areas featuring in the top 20% of most deprived areas in England. In particular, the Digmoor area is ranked among the top 1% of most deprived areas in the country. Some of the town's more severe problems are linked to low income, high unemployment, poor health, and low educational attainment.

- The 2011 Census reported that 46.0% of Skelmersdale residents declared themselves to be in 'very good' health and 32.8% in 'good' health – 0.7%-1.5% below the UK New Towns and UK averages. 5.8% declared themselves to be in 'bad' health, which is around 1.5% higher than the UK New Towns and UK averages. 1.9% declared themselves to be in 'very bad' health, which is less than 1% above the UK New Towns and UK averages.

Employment/economic profile:

- The town supports around 43% of the Borough's total employment base. Skelmersdale has seen a 13% rise in the total number of jobs in the town over the last decade.
- PepsiCo Walker is the biggest employer in the town today.
- A significant proportion of residents are employed in the town, particularly in retailing and in manual work in manufacturing industries.
- Within Lancashire Enterprise Partnership LEP.

Development Corporation legacy:

- There are significant areas of green space running through the town – 56% of the area of Skelmersdale is green space.
- Some of the older Development Corporation housing suffers from poor design and layout as a result of the use of new construction techniques (prefabricated concrete) and the use of Radburn-style layouts. There is an over-reliance on the manufacturing sector for employment.

Key issues for the future:

- Town centre regeneration – delivery of a night-time economy and an improved retail offer within the town centre.
- Public realm improvements.
- Improving public transport connectivity.
- Expanding the town to increase the housing and employment offers and to develop its role as a strategic location on the Liverpool-Manchester corridor and motorway network.

¹ Totals for the following wards: Ashurst, Birch Green, Tanhouse, Moorside, Digmoor Ward, Skelmersdale South, Skelmersdale North, Up Holland

Did you know?

In 2000, a £4.3 million image improvement project for the industrial road corridors, highlighting the town's manufacturing and industrial base, saw the installation of innovative public artworks which created new points of identity and interest.