

Re-opening High Streets Safely

Ten Point checklist for Hertfordshire Stakeholders

April 2021



[Placemanagement.org](https://www.placemanagement.org)

Introduction

The volume of news about the decline or even death of the high street has grown exponentially in recent months as a result of the pandemic. The media is full of stories about major retailers closing, towns being left behind, growing levels of retail vacancy, and the rapid growth of online retailing. Although this decline is part of a long-term trend on the high street, changes in consumer behaviour have been accelerated by the pandemic and are profoundly impacting our centres. As we look to the future, we have to consider additional economic and environmental impacts from the climate emergency as well as further technological developments. In this current climate, local place management and leadership are more important than ever before. In addition to combatting the pandemic's short-term impact, all stakeholders need to proactively consider the longer-term future of their locality, identifying ways to adapt and change as the 'new normal' begins to take shape.

On 17th March 2021, Herefordshire Growth Board (See appendix 1) invited a team from the Institute for Place Management (IPM) (See appendix 2) to lead a workshop supporting 35 Hertfordshire stakeholders. This brought colleagues together to develop local knowledge about placemaking and place management and highlight different actions stakeholders can take at the local level in a post-covid era.

Following the workshop, IPM produced some additional guidance to help colleagues develop a strategy for reopening the county's town centres in a consistent, evidence-based way. This ten-point checklist will guide stakeholders that have a role to play in delivering town centre measures, on safely reintroducing footfall. The checklist identifies small interventions that can be made at a local level, enabling and empowering stakeholder to improve their own places.

Every place has different resources, political landscapes, economies and people: what works for one high street may not work for another. One of the focal points for the discussion was the Institute for Place Management's 25 priorities for town centre vitality and viability¹, a framework which stakeholders can use to improve town centre performance over the long-term.

¹ <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/frameworks/25-vital-and-viable-priorities/>

Welcome back fund

Although other funds may be allocated, one of the principle sources of funding to deliver measures to encourage town centre footfall across the summer of 2021 is the Government’s £56m Welcome Back Fund. Allocations for the boroughs of Herts are shown below:

Welcome Back Fund Allocations: Hertfordshire

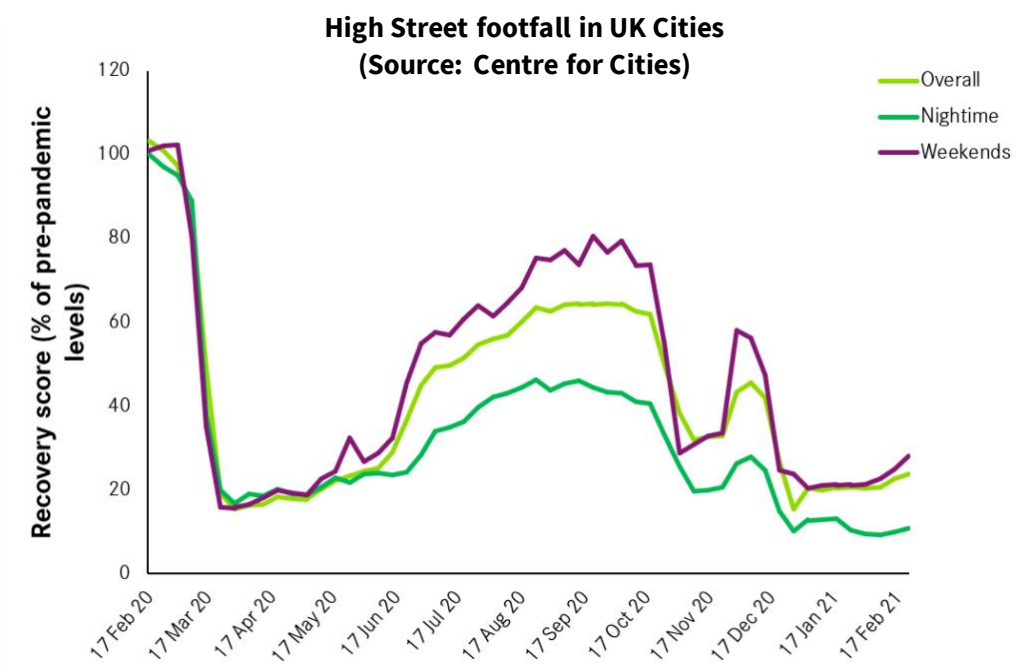
Broxbourne Borough Council	£85,548
Dacorum Borough Council	£137,473
East Hertfordshire Council	£132,170
Hertsmere Borough Council	£92,495
North Hertfordshire District Council	118,251
St Albans City and District Council	£130,464
Stevenage Borough Council	£77,818
Three Rivers District Council	£82,174
Watford Borough Council	£85,636
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council	£109,901
TOTAL	1,051,930

With a total allocation of over a million pounds, it may be cost effective to work collaboratively County-wide on those measures which can be appropriately introduced in all town centres. Such interventions might include marketing collateral, safety barriers and signage. Measures which address the important but under-resourced common priorities (see appendix 3 for examples of workshop participants' priorities) may also be suitable for co-funding, although will have to meet the eligibility criteria for Welcome Back Funding.

What is happening to footfall?

Whilst footfall nationally declined by 5% between 2015-2019, in part due to the rise of online shopping and out of town retail centres, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a very profound impact on high streets and town centres, causing a massive and unforeseen further reduction. Following lockdown in March and April 2020, footfall volumes in UK high streets fell by 84% compared to the same period in the previous year, and by over 90% in larger city centres.

The Centre for Cities graph below shows how footfall has affected UK cities overall, at night time and at weekends, though there are additional disparities from place to place which can be understood only with consistent footfall data. Disparities may come about due to the uses in town centres – for instance, shopping destinations may recover footfall more quickly than office-heavy commercial centres.



Springboard, data partner of the High Streets Task Force, has been measuring footfall for ten years and has recently forecast an increase in high street footfall of nearly 48% across the UK when retail reopens. The recent report states:

“The forecast increase in footfall means that footfall will be +128.5% higher than in the same week in 2020, although it will remain -61.8% below the 2019 level”

This provides an additional pressure on local authorities and other stakeholders to ensure the safe management of this increase, particularly as we move into the warmer months. Luckily, we can learn much from efforts in the late summer of 2020, in relation to the easing of lockdown measures for retail and hospitality, with tactical urbanism, temporary signage, positive messaging and considered activation of our town centres. This means collaborating with key stakeholders, including local business, property interests, and communities. Places that work together will be in a better position to recover quickly and drive footfall back to the high street.

The 10-point checklist

The checklist takes into account some of the key factors identified above, considers some best practice examples and makes suggestions for other projects and programmes that are deliverable via the Welcome Back Fund. It is important to consider the applicability of the ten-point plan in different high streets across the county and this should be the starting point for local conversations.

The principal objective which underpins the checklist is the **safe revival of footfall in Hertfordshire’s town centres**. A general High Streets Task Force Learning Journey on Driving Footfall to the High Street is available to provide context.²

The Checklist is below. Go through it and tick the relevant box. If you have answered ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’ on any of the points, read the relevant part of the 10-point plan listed in the section below.

Tick the relevant box for each of these tasks		Yes	No	Don't know
1	Do you have an effective recovery plan?			
2	Do you have the right partnership to deliver the plan?			
3	Do you have a communications strategy that will encourage people back to the high street?			
4	Do you have the evidence you need to take remedial action quickly?			
5	Are you doing all you can to make the town centre experience the best it can be?			
6	Do you have the necessary place management capacity and expertise to coordinate town centre delivery?			
7	Are you supporting your evening economy and other vulnerable businesses?			
8	Will your long-term plans for transformation build on your recovery?			
9	Are you engaging landlords and developers?			
10	Does your recovery effort strengthen place identity, participation and inclusion?			

² <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=5b2fae26-44b4-4967-8255-2e1b2405c237>

The 10-point plan

1. Develop or improve your recovery plan

The High Streets Task Force provides a wealth of resources and best practice examples for town centres looking to develop a recovery plan, which can also be funded by the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund until June 2021, and likely by the Welcome Back Fund. This plan will provide some pointers but there is more detail to be found on the website.³ The immediate recovery of town centres is distinct from longer term transformation but immediate plans should pave the way for this (see step 7).

Footfall will increase sharply from 12th April but measures still need to be in place to manage social distancing. This involves the collaboration of businesses and a clear strategy - which they are signed up to - to manage a system enabling a balance of queuing, deliveries, space to walk and expanded hospitality. This needs to be delivered safely and in a welcoming manner.

Partners including Business Improvement Districts, Chambers of Commerce, local authority officers and others can assist in developing the reopening plan and may be able to lead on important recovery activity such as:

- a. Ordering and installing floor decals, providing welcome ambassadors, and liaising with businesses.
- b. Running campaigns which encourage shoppers to return to 'shop small' or 'support the high street'
- c. Developing a town centre strategy for the temporary expansion of hospitality sector businesses, allowing them to trade outside
- d. Using markets and 'pop-up' as a way to strengthen the town offer and replace any key traders that might be temporarily or permanently closed (see Point 4).

According to MHCLG communications, The Welcome Back Fund can help councils boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups – giving people safe options to reunite with friends and relatives. The funding can also be used by councils to:

- Boost the look and feel of their high streets by investing in street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets as beautiful and welcoming as possible
- Run publicity campaigns
- Hold events like street markets and festivals to support local businesses and encourage new ones
- Install signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety
- Improve high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti.

An effective recovery plan will boost the town centre's *attractiveness* – one of the issues that was identified in the Herts workshop as an important but under-resourced priority. You may want to

³ <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/>

cross check your recovery plan against the priorities in Appendix 1 to see how many your plan can address.

Best practice and resources

- Maldon's Covid19 Recovery Strategy:
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=dbaddca0-93b5-46cc-b7de-4ae216091c3c>

2. Form or refresh a partnership to deliver the plan

Strong partnerships were made in the summer of 2020 as plans for the easing of the first lockdown were drawn up. These consortia are now being reformed to address the latest easing of restrictions, using many of the lessons learned in 2020. The focus of the reopening plan requires some or all of the following partners:

- County Highway Authorities
- Borough Regeneration / Economic Development Team
- Parks and open spaces
- Communications (County / Borough / DMO / BID)
- Relevant service delivery partners (e.g. Ambassadors / street cleaning / refuse collection)
- Enforcement (parking, health and safety, licensing)
- Police and security professionals (e.g. incl. Pub Watch)
- Community leaders (where they can mobilise volunteers)
- Business representative groups

A Terms of Reference should be drawn up which provides clear lines of reporting and enables the plan to be delivered expediently. Where roles and responsibilities are confused or overlap, the situation should be clarified and agreed to ensure that every agency is aware of their role. You may consider establishing working groups to address specific themes within the overall plan, which are attended by relevant leads and contributors. Recovery requires a much more lateral approach than many local authorities are accustomed to and this involves entrusting external partners with the power to take action.

It is advisable to set a general structure which ensures that specific tasks such as campaigns/communications, streetscape modifications, security etc are organised by sub-groups, with an executive body (including key partners) retaining an organisational overview and able to address obstacles.

An effective partnership will lead and deliver the recovery – which goes a long way to addressing the ‘*adaptability*’ priority in Appendix 1.

Best practice and resources

- Town Centre Partnerships, Association of Town and City Management
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=b2b095eb-f534-4266-9cd6-0dbd551c890e>

3. Agree a communications strategy

Communications is a complex but vital part of the recovery strategy. There are several channels for communication, including:

- a. Communications between bodies responsible for delivering the strategy
- b. Practical communications between the responsible authority (including where responsibilities between different delivery authorities are not necessarily clear) and town centre businesses, transport operators, service providers and contractors
- c. 'Positive message' multichannel campaign to the general public to encourage a return to the town centre
- d. 'Safety message' multichannel campaign to the general public ensure rules are understood and adhered to, including in situ signage, local media and household email.

Public messaging is an opportunity to reassert (or launch) the place brand and must be both positive and place-specific. BID Leamington's proactive campaign at the end of lockdown in 2020 saw the installation of floor decals across the city centre which featured floral imagery intended to provide a welcoming and considered message to encourage social distancing. Other places have printed and distributed maps showing new layouts, promoting independent businesses or providing download codes for shop local campaigns (see *Shop Appy* as an example of an 'online high street' provider, one of many that can help develop a 'shop local' campaign⁴).

This is also an opportunity to consider whether the use of merchandise can encourage a return, linking pride of place and place identity to useful products which facilitate the experience – maps, masks, umbrellas and tote bags are being introduced in some places to welcome visitors back.

With potential problems such as queue clash or crowding at hospitality venues arising quickly and in unforeseen locations, the public should be aware of the channels they can use to raise any safety concerns, including on-street ambassadors, or relevant hotlines or online forms. Such services should be adequately staffed to enable rapid reaction.

Good communications can address many of the important but under resourced priorities in Hertfordshire. They can augment and reinforce a positive *experience*, through *merchandise*, and they can promote the *retail offer*, *necessities* and *diversity* in the town.

⁴ <https://shopappy.com/>

4. Build a robust evidence base

Evidence is a vital tool to assist those responsible for delivering the recovery to assess the efficacy of the strategy and adapt it, where necessary. There are three key measures that can be used, and these are described below.

- *Footfall*

Monitoring footfall is key to understanding and improving performance. This can be done through automatic footfall counts (e.g. those provided by [Springboard](#)), or through a manual footfall counting regime.

The manual footfall counting regime is for local authorities and other place management organisations like BIDs or community groups, who do not have automatic footfall counting technology but who want to use footfall as an indicator of the health and attractiveness of their town centre. The High Streets Task Force has published a guide to manual footfall counting regime.⁵ Footfall counting was funded by the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund and it's expected this will remain the case for the Welcome Back Fund, however confirmation is awaited via official guidance.

- *Vacancy*

As lockdown is eased and furlough and other forms of business support are scaled back, many industry commentators predict a new wave of retailers and other high street businesses entering administration. As a result, it is important to monitor vacancy in your town centre, for two reasons. First to see if any important parts of the offer are likely to be missing. For example, perhaps your local butcher has gone out of business. Whilst there may be plenty of packaged meat available in the supermarket, or local convenience stores the butcher may have been part of a 'linked trip' with a greengrocer, local deli and so on. With no butcher available then people shop elsewhere, somewhere where they can still fulfil all the elements of their 'linked trip'. This obviously has a very negative impact on the businesses that are still trading. Monitor specific sites to see if your town is at risk of losing any key traders. You can check Google maps to see which businesses may be listed as temporarily or permanently closed.

Secondly, you should compare your vacancy rates against regional and national averages and town types, to help develop an informed strategy for inward investment where retail continues to contract. The British Retail consortium and the Local Data Company publish a Retail Vacancy Tracker⁶. Springboard also have a quarterly vacancy survey and monitor, that you can join free of charge⁷.

- *Sentiment*

Well run town centres with plenty of activation, welcoming messaging, managed queues and good facilities attract positive social media comment which can be recorded and measured, including via the use of sentiment analysis as used by companies such as Maybe*.⁸ This is a useful tool to understand whether changes to town centre management regimes are needed, to measure shopper demand, perceptions of safety at night etc. Over

⁵ <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=6f3927fa-cff9-457d-a93e-980fba22ef4e>

⁶ <https://www.localdatacompany.com/blog/topic/vacancy-rates>

⁷ <https://www.spring-board.info/faqs/vacancy-rate>

⁸ <https://www.maybetech.com/social-media-sentiment-analysis-tool/>

time it will be possible to measure changes in overall positivity or negativity about the town centre and attribute this to measures in the recovery plan.

A robust evidence base is a foundation for all the under-resourced and important priorities across Hertfordshire towns.

5. Use what levers you have to improve the town centre experience

Although there are limited powers to create a particular mix of uses within the town centre, local authorities may wish to consider the levers they have in their areas to effect change, including through events, local plans, reorganised services, small parcels of public land, derelict buildings and underused assets. Recovery and longer-term transformation plans should include consideration of the methods public bodies can use to improve the town centre experience (one of the IPM's 25 priorities identified by the Herts team⁹), with some examples below:

- *Ambassador welcome*
Many local authorities and BIDs have developed or modified existing street warden services, including providing training to act as welcome teams or ambassadors. With reconfigured streets, relocated facilities and some apprehension among town centre visitors (some of whom will have been shielding since March 2020), a friendly face may prove an important investment, even if a temporary one. The resources section below includes an article detailing Croydon BIDs use of volunteer ambassadors, successfully rolled out in 2020.
- *Artwork and visual appeal*
Street art, shutter painting schemes, shopfront renewal and town centre sculpture trails have been used to great effect to draw people back into the town centre in a controlled fashion. Bristol's Light Festival launched for the first time during 2020 lockdown and its considered execution ensured that the flow of people was managed and predominantly outdoors. Such interventions also provide an appealing motivation to return to the town centre where the retail offer has diminished. Greening, street furniture and general improvements can also improve the visual appeal of the town centre and reinforce the perceptions of a managed environment, safe for visitors to enjoy.
- *Events, markets and animation*
The Welcome Back Fund can pay for temporary interventions that enable food concessions and small events to take place in the town centre. The recovery delivery group would provide a useful discussion body to develop the right interventions to ensure the town centre is activated safely and meets demand without unduly competing or interfering with the offer of local hospitality or retail. Consultation with local businesses, via a BID and/or directly, is vital to ensure that concerns are taken on board before delivering measures of this kind. Also consider how the community can be involved in running or leading on the delivery of such initiatives. West Norwood Feast market is a useful case study to illustrate the power of community driven markets.

Markets are also a good way of addressing barriers to entry, one of the key issues identified by Herts colleagues, as they provide low cost low risk access to a sales

⁹<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=7f3570a3-de84-433f-ab22-99815def84d5>

environment for new businesses.

- *Accessibility and facilities*

Another of the issues identified for Herts town centres is the issue of accessibility.

Depending on control of bus services and other transport modes, there may be powers to improve, even on a temporary basis, access to the town centre. Park and ride, limited free parking, cycle facilities and mapping for walkers are all being used to encourage access. Reopening plans must have consideration for those in wheelchairs, with sight, hearing or other impairments, or with prams, particularly as a familiar town centre may be reconfigured. The planning process must also consider *necessities* for these groups and others accessing the town centre – facilities such as access to toilets, improved wayfinding and access to information.

Best practice and resources

- Croydon BID ambassadors
<https://croydonbid.com/news/street-ambassadors-debut-croydon>
- Bristol Light Festival
<https://bristolightfestival.org/>
- Toolkit for Parish Councils considering opening a market
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=139d6e59-a993-4418-96b5-c82ee6231470>
- West Norwood Feast
<https://westnorwoodfeast.com/>
- Five fantastic parklet designs and why we need more of them
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=438cc9f4-4698-4d31-bdd5-13cb27c2fb98>

6. Increase place management capacity, coordination an expertise

In working collaboratively on a bespoke town centre delivery group, many local councils have been able to increase place management capacity, to understand how public services interface, particularly in parallel with other services delivered by volunteers or via BIDs (such as graffiti removal, street wardens, deliveries, litter collection, door security and camera surveillance). A pooling of resources can ensure that they are deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible. This can include *necessities*, such as car-parking, cycle storage, even toilets.

Radio link schemes run by borough-wide Business Crime Reduction Partnerships are a good example of the pooling of resources and knowledge. In parts of London and elsewhere, pubs and/or retailers hold radios that link both to police radios and local wardens' radios, ensuring that security concerns such as problems with queuing outside shops or overcrowding at pubs can be addressed by the nearest available resource. The schemes are supported by robust reporting systems and a committee of businesses and public bodies to oversee activity, training and news.

From further afield, Helsinki is proving an exemplar of the 'functional city' model, and the approach is scalable to a town or county level. Functional cities are those in which the different systems work seamlessly together through a combination of the use of smart technology and service design and clear objectives, in Helsinki's case towards inclusion, participation, safety and culture. During the pandemic, a Special Operations Group and a Special Coordination Group have met daily to manage service provision, including managing volunteers from faith groups and

elsewhere for efficient deployment. Daily information sessions are live streamed to the public from the Mayor's office.

What is important is that the place management capacity is understood, mapped and coordinated. Often it is the role of the local authority to coordinate this. Do you know who is responsible for this? Do they have the necessary place management skills, knowledge and expertise to do this effectively? Place management capacity, coordination and expertise provides the bedrock to *adaptability*.

Best practice and resources

- Institute of Place Management Membership
www.placemanagement.org <https://www.placemanagement.org/membership/>
- Helsinki Functional City – Pandemic response
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/functional-citys-response-covid-19-pandemic>
- BedfordBID RadioLink Scheme
<https://www.lovebedford.co.uk/retail-radiolink-exclusion.php>

7. Support the evening economy

Hospitality is one of the sectors worst affected by the pandemic and alongside government support, many places have established specific measures to protect the presence of evening businesses in their town centres. These measures, many of which can be funded via the Welcome Back Fund, include:

- Relaxation of local licensing conditions to enable trading
- Temporary widening of footways or claiming of parking spaces to provide space for outside tables, and installation of outdoor seating areas with consistent look and feel
- Campaigns, supported by apps and local loyalty schemes to encourage patronage, perhaps not immediately, but once restrictions are lifted
- Additional security staff to provide a presence in the evenings and assist door staff in managing queues or overcrowding
- Additional cleaning staff to manage litter

Some town centres have installed temporary toilets in town centres where local hospitality businesses are unable to provide adequate capacity.

It is recommended that the delivery group develop a specific response to the needs of the hospitality sector in town centres, in consultation with them and their representatives. The approach must be business friendly and developed with the support of all responsible departments, from licensing to highways. Hospitality is one of the key sectors extending the *diversity* of town centres.

There are other vulnerable businesses and sectors. For example, the self-employed and cultural organisations. The Additional Restrictions Grant should help to sustain those businesses not covered by other grant schemes, or where additional funding is needed. According to the guidance “councils have the freedom to determine the eligibility criteria for these grants. However, we expect the funding to help businesses that are severely impacted by the restrictions.” This might include market traders and other businesses that add to the town centre offer, but who don't pay

rates. Or nightclubs and other types of businesses that continue to be severely impacted by restrictions.

Best practice and resources

- Liverpool without walls
<https://www.liverpoolbidcompany.com/liverpool-without-walls-pilot-scheme-to-help-restaurants-reimagine-outdoor-eating/>
- Cardiff / Yoello campaign
<https://vimeo.com/470576981>
- Westminster's typology for outdoor dining
<https://indd.adobe.com/view/e0a8c827-a5a7-44e1-a5fe-3b1019f42008>

8. Use evidence base to develop a plan for the longer term

In the context of the longer-term structural issues facing the high street, the IPM has been advising places to consider how the pandemic response gives way to a longer-term plan for town centre transformation (adaptability), and this is being considered in different ways, including:

- Adoption of more integrated technology to enable coordination of town centre functions, the collection of data, and flexible uses
- Use of temporary interventions or modifications to the streetscape as a test bed for making permanent changes, including pedestrianisation of town centre areas
- Maintenance of temporary town centre governance structures on a more permanent basis, with power sharing among the community and better dialogue with businesses and landlords
- Integration of services for greater efficiency

Developing a longer-term plan for the transformation of the town centre relies on having adequate data, strong partnerships and a good understanding of the direction of travel. The IPM has developed a framework which guides places through the process, including an interactive road map that can be jointly developed and widely communicated to achieve maximum buy-in from stakeholders.

The framework is based around the 'Four R's of Regeneration', four strategies for transformation which start with identifying the main barriers to change. For instance, if you have no data or insight about what is happening in your town, how it is being used and what the trends are, you need a repositioning approach, to rectify this lack of information. If your town is not meeting the basic needs of the catchment or visitors, a reinvention approach will help you change this and improve the chances of success locally.

Where you have good data, and a plan for transformation, but it is not understood by enough people, you need to rebrand. Finally, if there are fundamental issues around local governance structures or other structural issues, including the physical configuration of the place, you need to think about restructuring. A template and further resources are provided in the links below.

The Hertfordshire Stakeholders survey suggested there were a few other pressing problems which point the way to a strategy for the future. These include:

- *Mix of uses*
Herts stakeholders felt in the survey that a greater mix was needed in the town centre, including the desire for a non-retail offer. Many places are grappling with this issue and are establishing good links with landlords to develop a joint strategy to meet local need through innovative letting. A best practice resource is included below.
- *Barriers to entry*
Where many places are improving dialogue with landlords, there are still town centres that provide few opportunities for new entrants, independent shops or services and innovation. There are ways to deal with this, including the development of shelf share schemes, the provision or expansion of markets, or the use of publicly owned property to encourage entrepreneurs to launch with minimal risk.
- *Adaptability*
Examples like Brixton Market in London have demonstrated that town centres can provide one offer during the day, and flip the offer in the evening, operating from the same premises. Other businesses such as Glitch in Bristol are uncategorisable – outwardly a hairdresser, they also put on gigs and sell pizza and plants. New rules on Use Class E helps businesses like these to come forward, but local authorities must create the conditions to encourage entrepreneurship, including in its messaging, strategy and support mechanisms.

Best Practice and resources

- Make your own Transformation Route Map
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=e65cffe8-0923-4943-861c-f47150c55bec>
- New Dawn for UK High Streets: Change or Die
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=5b2d3a01-130d-4020-a86f-6eeabd20c58d>
- Creating resilient town centres
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=6374abea-eb0d-45fc-8796-aae55e75083a>

9. Involve landlords and developers

One of the missing pieces of the puzzle in recent years has been the involvement of developers and landlords in the strategy-making process for our town centres.

Absent or disinterested landlords are a problem in every town centre. Many shops are owned by opaque, offshore-registered organisations with no presence in the place, or by landlords with no sense of responsibility for the wider economy, even as the high street declines. However, retail landlords - which include our own pension funds - are facing their own existential pressures at the moment and demonising them in public is not a good way to bring them to the table, whatever the political temptation.

There are no easy answers to this but opening a dialogue with those that are interested in helping develop strategy is working elsewhere, particularly as units become more difficult to shift. Shopping Centre owners are noticeably changing in this regard and where local authorities or town centre partnerships have not made contact in a while, the promise of a collaborative town centre strategy making process may bring more to the table than it did a few years ago.

Involving the private sector in discussion will be a learning process. For instance, landlords in shopping centres often understand much about the mechanics of retail and how things are changing. They can help local authorities develop a strategy for the town centre which compliments activity in shopping centres, to ensure a good retail mix. This may help address some of the issues raised by Herts in the workshop.

The Statement of Community Involvement is a key tool for the local planning authority. It sets out clearly what will be expected of developers when it comes to talking locally about what is needed and the requirements of the consultation process should be town centre friendly, even with smaller developments.

Protecting retail frontage where data suggests retail is likely to contract is likely to have the unintended consequence of higher retail vacancy – open dialogue with service providers, institutions such as healthcare and universities to provide for demand. Consider the town centre as an ecosystem, with a range of interlocking systems and interests. Many town centres provide only for shopping at the moment, but the objectives of inclusion and participation (see point ten below), the encouragement of innovation (one of the key issues identified by Herts, which can be addressed through partnership with the private sector), the strengthening of community ownership and the development of an evening economy or culture are likely to be important in years to come.

Better engagement with landlords will improve the *appearance* and *attractiveness* of town centres.

Best Practice and Resources

- Engaging landlords
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=c62adaf0-9f07-4aa5-a0b7-73e6171a472c>
- Example of groups connecting arts and culture organisations with empty spaces
<https://www.artquest.org.uk/how-to-articles/accessing-empty-spaces/>

10. Strengthen place identity through participation and inclusion

Long term transformation of the high street must be delivered on the premise that the retail monoculture – itself a relatively new idea – fails to serve the needs of communities. If town centres are to work in the future, they need to be more *diverse*, will need to have a strong identity, supported by the pride of the catchment in their place. A strong identity is based on an agreement on what makes the place unique, and this is often wrongly assumed to be limited to a historic building, a traditional foodstuff or a famous former resident.

But identity can also coalesce around an inclusive outlook, this too can improve the *experience*: St Ives in Cambridgeshire has led the way in developing a place-based approach to dealing with isolation following a spate of suicides, in reinventing itself as a ‘CALM town’. In Liverpool, one of the key benefits of a community-owned business there has been the development of social infrastructure, community and local identity. Places are only ever the people that live and work there and their aspirations for their town should form one of the central pillars of the strategy.

Therefore, plans and processes should be underpinned by the principles of participation and inclusion. These terms are subtly different but are often confused. Participation includes the devolution of power and ownership to enable communities to participate in decision making rather than acting as consultees. Processes such as citizens panels and participative democracy as well as community ownership are proving to be successful models in the UK. Inclusion involves the particular process of ensuring that as many voices as possible are heard.

Most of those involved in local consultation will recognise the familiar picture of a room of retired local residents, all highly valued for their experience, but often providing views from a similar position. Engaging communities that are less frequently heard, young people, ethnic minorities, the time-poor and deprived communities provides an essential and much richer picture of the problems that need to be tackled. Where people feel excluded from town centres, excluding them from the process of developing the new strategy compounds the problem. On the other hand, inclusive and participatory processes will help develop a diverse high street which meets the needs of more people in the town and addresses the concerns of the local authority.

Best Practice and Resources

- St Ives CALM Town
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/11/calm-town-st-ives-mental-health>
- Impact of Community Ownership
<https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research-category/impact/>
- Youth engagement toolkit
<https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=23bfd7f2-577d-4600-909c-940c129dca85>

Appendix 1 – About the Hertfordshire Growth Board

Hertfordshire Growth Board is the way the county is now working together to manage growth. With the Hertfordshire population expected to rise by up to 175,000 by 2031, at least 100,000 new homes and jobs will need to be created over the same period. This brings opportunities and challenges. Hertfordshire Growth Board is ready to respond.

Hertfordshire Growth Board is made up of the County Council, the 10 district and borough councils and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Working together is how we continue our 'joint' success and create opportunities for everyone, now and in the future.

Appendix 2 - About the Institute of Place Management and Authors

The Institute of Place Management is the professional body for people involved in making, maintaining and marketing places. As part of Manchester Metropolitan University, the Institute of Place Management is dedicated to supporting people who serve places, providing them with unbiased research, continuing professional development, qualifications, conferences, events and networking opportunities.

Authors

This report has been written by an interdisciplinary team of academics and practitioners from the Institute of Place Management.

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Appendix 3 - The 25 Factors for Vitality and Viability in Hertfordshire

In the workshop on 17 March, participants were asked to identify which of the IPMs 25 Factors were a priority in Herts' town centres. We also asked respondents to mark which of these factors were under-resourced. These factors represent areas of delivery for place partnerships, including BIDs, Destination Management Organisations, Local Authorities, LEPs, Town Councils and County Authorities, in addition to individual residents and businesses. A summary of each of the factor is below:

1. Barriers to entry

What can be done to provide opportunities for new businesses to open in town?

2. Adaptability

Places will need to be physically redesigned and strategically adaptable to recover well from coronavirus. What plans are being made?

3. Experience

How do place managers present the correct visitor experience, and how does this change as recovery progresses?

4. Accessibility

With continuing reticence concerning the use of public transport, the challenge for place managers is to increase accessibility, without encouraging a return to polluting private vehicles.

5. Innovation

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to recovery and transformation, but we can learn lessons from other places as they innovate.

6. Necessities

From car parking to public toilets to visitor information, all places benefit from having the right facilities, though these aren't the same in every place. What do Hertfordshire's Town Centres offer and what should change?

7. Merchandise

How can merchandise be used to engender a sense of local pride and support?

8. Attractiveness

What attracts investment and interest in places? What is distinctive that can be capitalised upon to encourage new businesses to establish, new customers to visit and new settlers to put down roots?

9. Retail offer

Town centres these days are not necessarily just about retail, but shopping needs to reinvent and update to stay relevant. How is this being done?

10. Diversity

'Clone Town' syndrome, where one high street looks very much the same as the next is still a reality in too many of our town centres. Strategies for providing an appropriate mix of retail (as well as non-retail offerings) are being put in place.