KEY CITIES
UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

The Future of our Town and City Centres

IN:fusion

Salford Media City

Plymouth Hoe

About Key Cities

Key Cities are a group of 24 mid-size cities and urban areas across the UK. We have a combined population of nearly 6 million people and contribute over £132bn a year to the UK economy. This equates to around 8% of the UK economy, and is equivalent to the economy of Scotland.

Our current members are: Blackpool, Bournemouth, Bradford, Carlisle, Coventry, Derby, Doncaster, Gloucester, Hull, Kirklees, Medway, Newport, Norwich, Portsmouth, Preston, Plymouth, Salford, Southampton, Southend, Sunderland, Swansea, Tees Valley, Wakefield, and Wolverhampton.

Key Cities members represent all of the major political parties and places across England and Wales. We are a united voice for urban Britain, working to champion our places. We work with other cities, towns and organisations across local government and beyond to deliver prosperity and a good standard of living and environment for all.

About Infusion Research

Infusion is a research, consultation and evaluation service based at Blackpool Council but operating across the public sector. Our recent clients include Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, Southend Council, Disability First, and the NHS East Lancashire CCG, covering topics as diverse as economic impact assessments, staffing appraisals and access to service assessments through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. We are also responsible for the development and implementation of Blackpool Council's visitor research programme, using our in-house fieldwork resource. We operate on a not-for-profit basis, providing quality but affordable research solutions.

For further details, contact Scott Butterfield:
scott.butterfield@blackpool.gov.uk
Tel: 01253 477217

Cover image: The forum in Norwich, a Millennium project, has become a local landmark and meeting place since its completion.

Foreword

Delivering prosperous, sustainable and welcoming urban centres is a key task for cities and towns across the country. As civic leaders we work on a daily basis with communities, businesses and other local public service providers on meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities brought about by changing global and national trends - not just in retail, but in technology, and the changing expectations of consumers, residents and visitors to our centres.

This report sets out both those challenges and opportunities, and challenges us to respond. As this report demonstrates, we are already doing much, but we recognise in these changing times that we need to do more. This is not just as councils alone, but in closer partnership with business, investors and developers, local people and government.

Partnership and innovation are at the core of why our members have come together as Key Cities. Securing the future of our city and town centres will be a learning process - learning from experimentation and good practice. One of our core offers as Key Cities is to be a national testbed for new ideas and new approaches, and that applies as much to our urban centres as to other areas of our work.

I'd like to thank colleagues from Infusion Research for this report. It not only succinctly sets out the challenges we face for our city and town centres but also demonstrates what Key Cities leaders and councils, across both the UK and of differing political parties, are doing to guarantee a sustainable future for our places. There is much both we as Key Cities members, and places across the country, can learn from the ideas and good practices contained here.

I heartily recommend this report and look forward to continuing to work with colleagues across Key Cities and beyond to continue to make our urban centres work for all our residents and business communities, and be places we can take pride in.

Peter Box CBE
Chair, Key Cities Group.

Hull: City of Culture 2017 opening event

Introduction

Taking the 2018 "Grimsey 2" review of city and town centres (see https://goo.gl/AEUGb2) as a starting point, Key Cities asked Infusion to review the current state of play across our town and city centres. This report focuses on the context in which they operate, the challenges we face, opportunities open to us and some examples of how Key Cities are responding. It covers four main areas:

- A holistic review of trends relating to city centres, with a particular focus on the decline of retail;

- A high level analysis of indicators relevant to city centres, covering the challenges of developing a balanced view from existing data sets;

- A report of the findings of a bespoke survey of Key Cities influencers and decision-makers, exploring their views on emerging trends, local issues, and their plans and responses;

- Case studies with insight on how Key Cities projects are delivering real change.

Finally, we draw together discussion points and conclusions which aim to shape the Key Cities agenda in this area at this crucial time.

Background

Over the course of the last decade, the British high street has faced some of its biggest challenges in history. From a major economic downturn, through new retail methods and in conjunction with already-ongoing shifts in consumer spending and visiting patterns, some of the country's most recognisable names have disappeared from our city centres, with many more major retailers facing huge difficulties and undertaking seismic shifts in order to maintain their viability.

With the retail sector undergoing such major changes, there is a very real threat to the existing model underpinning the vibrancy and sustainability of our city centres. The retail sector has historically anchored much of our central area floor space, particularly at the visible and impactful ground floor level, and generated the bulk of footfall. With the convenience of newer methods of shopping likely to outweigh the convenience of central area shopping for the foreseeable future, city centres will either have to shift away from a dependence on retail, or look to add an extra dimension to the retail experience offered in the city centre compared to that available online.

Context:
The Current Challenges Affecting Our City Centres

City and town centres have always faced challenges, as all geographical spaces do, but the volume and complexity of issues and challenges currently affecting city centres could have the most profound impact to date. In addition to general issues affecting all places, the centres within our Key Cities also have some unique challenges of their own.

The most prominent and publicised issues affecting our city centres are those affecting the retail sector being brought about by changes to consumer spending habits, most notably in relation to out-of-centre shopping and supermarkets, and the technological advancements that have led to much-heightened levels of online and app-based shopping.

Whilst overall retail spend in the UK rose in 2017 by 4.7% to approximately £366 billion, online-only retail sales rose disproportionately by 15.9% in that period, when compared to a rise of 2.3% in-store[1]. Whilst the majority of retail sales still take place in physical stores, the percentage of all retail sales taking place online has risen from 4.9% in 2008 to 16.3% in 2017, and this had further increased to 18.2% by August 2018. Internet retailing is more popular in the United Kingdom than any other country in the European Union, with 82% of residents making at least one online purchase in 2017. As online sales continue to grow at a rate greater than overall sales, the potential for falling in-store sales becomes ever more real.

That said, over 80% of all retail sales still take place within a bricks-and-mortar outlet, and in-store sales did still rise by 2.3% in 2017. This does not, however, mean that the picture is particularly positive for shops in city centres. In 2016, 24 planning applications were submitted for out-of-town retail schemes in the UK, up from a single application in 2013 and a jump from the 14 applications received in 2015[2]. This indicates that the perceived ease of access afforded by out-of-town locations and flexibility offered by a reduction in spatial constraints continues to be attractive and is seeing a resurgence, in spite of efforts in the National Planning Policy Framework to encourage central retail. Retail chains entering administration in 2016 also had a deeper impact on city centres than they did on out-of-town retail space. Of the five major brand administrations in 2016

(BHS, Brantano, Store Twenty One, Blue Inc and Austin Reed), most focused their retail attention on centres. Of 7,808,000 sq ft of retail floor space put at risk of closure by these administrations, approximately 6,500,000 sq ft was in central areas, accounting for around 83% in total[3].

These trends in retail are likely to pose a key challenge in city and town centres across the UK, particularly with retail (especially large stores) having been so synonymous with central areas for so long. However, city centre challenges are not limited to those experienced in the retail environment. Leisure is another sector where dominance does not lie within city centres. Whilst 72% of leisure/retail schemes are developed in-town, 73% of leisure floor space is in the form of standalone units, the majority of which are located out-of-town. Because of this, 77% of all leisure floor space is in out-of-town locations, and reaps the benefits of a perceived ease of access, particularly for private vehicle users[4].

Housing in city centres remains a diverse picture. The number of housing units in Key Cities' principal city centres has grown steadily over recent years, from 115,450 in 2015 to 122,150 in 2017, a total increase of 5.8%. This is a big jump when compared to Key Cities boroughs (+1.5%), and England and Wales as a whole (+1.8%)[5]. In spite of this rise in housing numbers across our centres, though, there still remains a highly varied picture when it comes to the make-up city centre housing. In the majority of central area instances, housing falls at the two extreme ends of a spectrum: either very high land values in centres push the price of housing so high it is only affordable for a small percentage of the population, or there is such an abundance of low-quality accommodation available in a city centre that the market becomes dictated by Housing Benefit and there is no incentive to improve standards. Student housing also brings another scenario into play in certain centres, where variable quality, high-density housing can still generate fairly high returns in a captive market. The polarity in housing markets means it is often difficult for diverse, balanced communities to establish in centres.

Bradford's City Park opened in 2012

Current Thinking, Research and Policy

As the focal point of the majority of urban areas, city and town centres have been the constant subject of extensive research and expert literature, but strategic policy that has used the learning from research has been limited. With their ever-evolving picture, though, contemporary research sometimes does not remain contemporary for long, and this has become increasingly true with the speed at which centres are changing, and could have made the translation from research to policy difficult. That said, there are some key pieces that have helped to shape the direction centres have travelled in over recent years, and continue to look to do so.

The majority of wide-reaching literature addressing central areas focuses on retail and the issues brought by changes in retail patterns. Even where the diversification of city centres away from retail is touched upon, this tends to be framed in a way that shows the diversification addressing retail troubles, rather than setting an entirely new platform for city centres that purely identifies retail as one of a number of strings that need to be present to ensure a vibrant centre. This is possibly because of the backgrounds of those leading on some of the key research pieces that have been produced, or due to the fact that some pieces of research are a response to others. That said, some contemporary research does clearly address the need for the high street of the future to reach well beyond the retail sphere.

The Portas Review, published in 2011, remains a document referred to with regards the direction of city centres. Whilst the report touches on city centres broadening from being almost solely retail destinations to more universal spaces, particularly when looking at 're-imagining our high streets', it is not overly prescriptive about how this is to be achieved. A number of the recommendations outlined in the review, such as 'Government should consider whether business rates can better support small businesses and independent retailers', do not identify a clear desired outcome or any measurable indicators that would define success against the recommendation.

The initial Grimsey Review in 2013 was written in response to concerns that the Portas Review showed a lack of foresight and little identification of the key issues addressing city centres. From the outset, it makes clear that the future of the British High Street lies not in a solely retail-focused landscape, but as a 'complete community hub solution', incorporating health, housing, education, arts, entertainment, business/office space,

manufacturing and leisure functions. Grimsey also identified that a lack of defined targets and measures has contributed to a lack of effective development in central areas in line with initiatives that have been put in place. In spite of many of the recommendations having a sound basis and also being deliverable in many areas, however, a lack of central policy backing of the 2013 Grimsey Review has meant uptake of the ideas has been limited.

Grimsey 2 re-states this position, and perhaps because of the increasingly urgent situation, focuses on solutions to retail problems. The report was published shortly after the deadline for submissions to the House of Commons Select Committee on High Streets and Town Centres. Whilst it is too early to assess its impact, it preceded the establishment of the Expert Panel on High Streets in July 2018 - the interim recommendations of which gave rise to the creation of the Future High Streets Fund. The Fund gives city centres the opportunity to bid for financial resource that may not have previously been available, and could trigger the implementation of some of the recommendations outlined in the report.

Unlike the writing around think pieces produced focusing on city centres, the National Planning Policy Framework is much more prescriptive in what it expects to see in central areas, and provides an outline that central areas can use to hang development around. The NPPF specifically mentions a number of the key areas that are necessary in ensuring a vibrant and vital centre, and explicitly looks to permit development that encourages longevity of centres, rather than their demise. Specifically addressing areas such as retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development in overarching national policy around centres brings it to the fore when development is being discussed. However, the permission of this development, and its encouragement within the wording of the NPPF, does not equate to provision of funding to ensure these are the most viable options in each instance when they may be considered. Restriction on development outside centres is also only recommended for retail, leisure and office development, so whilst residential development in centres is encouraged, for example, policy can only encourage, rather than force it to happen.

The most recently commissioned data research paper from Central Government around the high street came from the then-Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2014. Produced by URS and GL Hearn, the Policy Implications of Recent Trends in the High-Street/Retail Sector identifies four types of city and town centres, with all of the Key Cities either fitting into Type 1

(large, homogenous, thriving) or, more likely, Type 2 (medium-large, diverse, struggling). Interestingly, unlike most think pieces on city centres, the report identifies homogeneity as a sign of a successful centre, whereas diverse centres tend to struggle. The majority of other research would state that a centre needs a unique selling point to compete against other centres. The report notes that Type 2 centres should look to extend their uses, to incorporate more leisure and cultural activity, and to encourage the evening and night time economy, in order to compete with out-of-town centres. It also notes that consolidating retail in the centre should be encouraged, allow the conversion of excess office space to residential where appropriate, and encourage temporary uses of vacant units, and events such as markets and festivals, to increase vibrancy.

In December 2018, the Expert Panel on High Streets chaired by Sir John Timpson published its final report. Citing Grimsey 2 as a key contribution to the debate, its recommendations reflect Grimsey's themes of improved support, better data and quality partnerships. The Panel scopes out the role of the High Streets Task Force as a driver of partnership working, based on the sharing of best practice and support, with the availability of better quality data seen as key. It deliberately looks beyond retail, saying "the town centre of the future should attract people to take part in a variety of services". To achieve this, the Future High Streets Fund will need to co-fund with other sectors, with the recommendations placing weight on supporting places which can demonstrate a cross-sector approach. It also makes some short-term recommendations, including a "National High Street Perfect Day", initiatives to encourage innovative empty property use, and a reflection on parking restrictions and charges – in short, an immediate focus on the basic "hygiene" factors which can detract from creating a pleasant and welcoming environment.

Whilst there is obviously considerable thinking going into the future of city centres, views and recommendations vary across every piece that is produced on the subject. One constant that does carry across all contemporary research, though, is that city centres can no longer rely

on retail to be relevant. It is clear that central areas need to be diverse in the way their space is used to maintain their vibrancy, and activity in centres cannot be confined to daytimes. Ideally, city centres should not only be locations people shop in, but also eat in, drink in, work in and live in.

What does this mean for our Key Cities?

For the Key Cities, the issues affecting centres remain diverse. Whilst some of the Key Cities have taken advantage of particular geographical or locational factors in order to create vibrant city centre living environments, or to create specific employment sector hubs that an industry can develop around, others are seeing the all of the issues adversely affecting all town and city centres, but magnified due to their size and scale.

Whereas the larger cities in the UK have historically had a wide mix of uses within their centres, acting as hubs for major regions throughout the country, many of the Key Cities were developed as a result of their proximity to key industries with specific purposes, a number of which no longer have the prominence they once did. Some of the industries that have reduced in prominence in today's service-driven landscape, such as those that have created brownfield waterfront sites, may have added attraction to their areas with regards future development potential. Others, though, that have left no discernible wide-scale physical assets, but have created a chasm in the local economy, may have simply added to the issues in their central areas.

For the most part, Key Cities are settlements or regions with large central area footprints and extensive city centre floor space. As issues continue to mount around city centre uses, such as retail, housing and leisure, the Key Cities will continue to be affected, and at scale, due to the sheer amount of space that will be impacted upon. Due to the scale at which the Key Cities will continue to be affected, they will have to be at the fore when it comes to innovative approaches to using city centres.

Case study 1:

Preston:
Liberalising development to maximise change

Contact: John Crellin, Head of City Development
Email: j.crellin@preston.gov.uk

Case study 2:

Doncaster:
Concentrating the town centre offer

Contact: Chris Dungworth, Interim Head of Service - Business Doncaster
Email: chris.dungworth@doncaster.gov.uk

The Approach

Preston had early experience of the decline of retail, when a large-scale retail-led redevelopment collapsed early this decade as it became unviable. Schemes like this marked the end for retail schemes seeking to catalyse growth in city centres, with only a handful – such as Bradford's Broadway shopping centre, making it beyond the planning stage. As one of three mid-sized urban centres in Lancashire under two-tier governance, with a small City Council without a substantial amount of land assets and a lack of borrowing capacity, Preston is reliant on catalysing private sector investment and shaping County Council projects. The City Deal under the guidance of the Lancashire LEP is funding a suite of highways and housing initiatives around the city and other parts of Central Lancashire, but so far intervening less in the city centre itself.

Purpose

Using Centre for Cities' 2013 report "Beyond the High Street" as a guiding statement, the Council formulated a plan that took a liberal approach. This sought to use limited staff resources to support private sector development, whilst working sequentially on Council-led projects aiming to prompt further investment. It also included the sale of assets such as the Guildhall and Bus Station where this would result in other organisations being able to deliver a benefit. The first Council-led project was the renewal of Preston Market, using the existing listed canopies to bring together a modern development encouraging quality local traders, improving a key site in the town, with the next phase being the demolition of the adjacent former Indoor Market and Car Park to facilitate a new cinema and restaurants (pictures).

Schemes delivered and in the pipeline

Significant private sector investment is taking place in Preston City Centre, including:

• A £200m transformation plan for the University of Central Lancashire's city centre campus;

• The re-invention of Preston Guildhall by the private sector as a leisure venue offering Laser Tag, Bowling, Crazy Golf, Assault Course and a dedicated live music venue in addition to the existing theatre, plus the introduction of restaurants in the accompanying shop units;

• The conversion of the landmark former post office building into a luxury hotel.

Work has also taken place on public realm via the County Council, with the Fishergate Central Gateway project improving the look of the centre on a key pedestrian access route from the station to the shopping area. Away from specific city centre projects, the model of Community Wealth Building devised by the Council with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies has sought to keep a greater proportion of public sector spend local, and advocate for worker-owned co-operatives to fill the gaps.

Future Plans

Preston has significant potential for further development, with multiple under-used land assets in public and private sector ownership, and a mainline railway station that will be adapted to receive HS2 trains. This connectivity opens up opportunities to appeal to various business uses, with the surrounding sites identified for potential use for high quality office space and conference facilities. Substantial investment in the Harris Art Gallery (adjacent to the Guildhall) is planned to improve the cultural offer, as is work with the County Council and University to improve the connection between the UCLAN campus and the city centre. Housing is a further area for focus, with a City Living strategy and prospectus highlighting the potential for a varied housing offer across six city centre sites, and new student accommodation close to UCLAN.

Desired Outcomes

• Maximising the development potential of sites, regardless of their use;

• "Right-sizing" of Preston's offer for its population;

• Local pride in the city centre and greater use by residents.

The Approach

Doncaster has significant numbers of empty retail units over a large area. From an initial approach that sought to increase the level of retail in the town, the Council has instead devised new retail and physical regeneration strategies which sought to divide the town into zones based on function, whilst condensing the retail offer into strategic locations. This will also create space for new town centre residential developments.

To achieve the step change required, the council is undertaking capital developments that seek to anchor the quarters, encouraging further development in line with the use identified. It is also accessing loan capital available at preferential rates to buy up properties with strategic importance, and is considering the development of a joint venture approach to facilitate the building of further offices. Like Preston, part of its approach rests on high quality transport links, in Doncaster's case through frequent, quick services to London and an airport, plus relatively low land values. Much of the financial support for infrastructure schemes comes from the Sheffield City Region.

Schemes delivered

• New civic offices acting as a "one stop shop" for Council services, bringing service-sector jobs into the town centre;

• Cast, a new arts and theatre venue with outdoor public space;

• Refurbished Council buildings rented out as private office space, which has brought 100 jobs from out-of-town locations into the centre.

Schemes underway

• Improvement of the railway station forecourt, providing a quality arrival point in the town;

• Redevelopment of the historic Wool Market (above picture), aiming to extend its use throughout the week and encouraging special events;

• Delivery of a new cinema and restaurants next to Cast, extending the leisure offer in the area;

• A cultural and learning centre, housing a library and a town museum (pictured right).

Future Plans

By the end of 2019, the bulk of projects in the masterplan will be complete. The Council intends to move further in the direction of creating flexible spaces and structures, allowing easy adaptation for newly-emerging uses and trends. This is reflected in the Council's approach, which is increasingly adaptive and looks to capitalise on funding or other opportunities as and when these become available. The Council intends to drive further major events towards the town centre, and has recently been awarded the Grand Depart of the 2019 Tour De Yorkshire.

Desired Outcomes

• Further footfall in the town centre and spin-off spend from office jobs;

• Making Doncaster an attractive place to locate;

• Reducing the number of vacancies and the number of properties used for retail purposes.

City/Town Centre Data Context

To generate specific insight into Key Cities' centres in light of the analysis above, the team undertook a review of available literature to establish a framework for analysis. Although a number of barriers prevent the development of an accurate, cost-effective, timely, geographically-specific analysis, sufficient data was available to develop an approach offering a broad insight into relative performance. This section of the report seeks to establish a basis for using a mix of existing published data with metrics from the private sector to assess the current situation, albeit whilst welcoming any future measures to gather and report more relevant data.

Swansea

Current town centre health/performance checks

Recent outputs such as ONS' 'Towns and cities analysis'[6], used demographic information, tenure, employment and commuting data to outline how town and city areas function. Despite the focus on key aspects of town and city functions, the majority of the data relates back to 2011 Census information and the town and city areas, in this case built-up areas (BUAs). These often encompass entire boroughs rather than retail cores and identified town centre areas.

Another issue is that current health/performance checks of town and city centre areas are limited in what they measure. A review of documents produced by Key Cities areas within the last ten years relating to assessing the health/performance of their town/city centre found that 18 Key Cities areas were using National Planning Policy Guidance indicators, DCLG (2014)[7], which suggest using the following indicators to measure the health/performance of centre areas:

- Diversity of uses
- Proportion of vacant street level property
- Commercial yields on non-domestic property
- Customers' views and behaviour
- Retailer representation and intentions to change representation
- Commercial rents
- Pedestrian flows
- Accessibility
- Perception of safety and occurrence of crime
- State of town centre environmental quality

The majority of these are arguably retail-focused. This ideally requires commercially gathered data to give a picture of an area, which can be potentially unaffordable for smaller or struggling areas. The 2014 BIS research paper referenced earlier[8] highlighted this issue, suggesting that many of the current indicators are not relevant to small town centres, and there can be a limited understanding in how to interpret some of the findings of health checks. Another prominent report, 'Successful town centres: developing effective strategies'[9] suggests using 12 KPIs for towns to measure their current function. However, it is only possible to measure three of these via open source information, with the rest requiring commercial data or the commissioning of local research. Key Cities members such as Stockton-On-Tees[10] (Tees Valley) have highlighted the need to extend the range of measures used, such as measuring the extent of digital/broadband coverage.

Additional metrics

The BIS report highlighted the need for indicators to be 'simple', 'consistent', 'cost-effective' and to be able to provide the basis for comparison. Given the current state of the retail sector, as described in the rest of this report, it will be increasingly important to understand the performance of a town through non-retail metrics. Parker et al (2016)[11] have suggested the top 25 priorities for towns from 201 factors that influence the performance of high streets. Amongst the non-retail factors identified were: vision and strategy, the evening economy, liveability, recreational space, accessibility and footfall. We have examined aspects of these in the Key Cities through the survey of influencers reported on pages 20-23.

Norwich:
Enhancing and protecting liveability through a long-term vision

Contact: Sara Martinez, Communications Officer
Email: saramartinez@norwich.gov.uk

Norwich Market

Background

Norwich is the economic driver for the Eastern Region and fourth largest UK regional economy. It is one of Britain's great historic cities, with a Norman Castle and 12th century cathedral amongst 1500 listed buildings, but is also a top 20 UK city for the concentration of creative and innovative professionals. Despite enjoying a strong economy, quality of life and vibrancy, there is another side to Norwich – which harbours pockets of inequality, with some of the poorest wards in the country and low social mobility.

As a Council, Norwich has benefited from its status as a regional centre, and significant land and property assets accumulated over 1000 years of city governance. Like Bournemouth, Norwich has created a development company (Norwich Regeneration Limited) which is using its land in new development schemes, although it retains the option to develop sites directly itself or through other private sector approaches. There are strong links with two neighbouring district councils that include some of the city's suburbs, and positive joint working with the County Council, which includes direct delivery of highways maintenance and a shared committee. The city's BID is pro-active and has previously supported Norwich Lanes to win the High Street of the Year competition for its independent shopping offer.

The approach

The process of creating the new Norwich 2040 City Vision brings the Council together with residents, businesses, institutions and community groups to agree a bold, ambitious vision that protects, preserves and develops the city's positives, while addressing its challenges.

This vision is based on five themes: creative, liveable, fair, connected and dynamic. 'Liveable' for Norwich, in terms of the built environment, means adapting and undergoing renewal while protecting green and open spaces. New schemes have measures to protect and augment the heritage assets of the city, maintaining the delicate balance between enabling developments that generate economic growth, whilst preserving the urban grain that defines Norwich and makes it a unique place to live and visit. The vision document talks about developing alternative approaches to energy and creating efficient, good quality low emission transport and housing options.

But the concept of liveability also goes beyond the environment, cross-cutting with other themes, and includes working to support independent and small businesses while ensuring the city's offer is attractive to larger enterprises. Encouraging and investing in culture and creativity, understanding the value it brings to

people's wellbeing, how a city feels about itself and how others perceive it. On this basis the Council works with partners to champion the innovative and creative use of spaces – examples including the conversion of medieval buildings Dragon Hall into the National Centre for Writing and the Guildhall, home to a café run by a social enterprise employing serving or ex-offenders.

Schemes delivered

Examples of built schemes delivered in partnership include:

- The award of £15m of Cycle Ambition City funding to build a new cycling network, bringing the suburbs within easy non-motorised reach of the centre. Since 2013, cycling is up 40% in the city with 9.5% of people travelling to work by bike compared to the national average of 3.1%;
- £3.5m of traffic management to boost bus, cycle and pedestrian access and transform the street quality around Westlegate – the latest chapter in a pioneering initiative that started in 1967 with the pedestrianisation of the first street in the country.

Schemes in the pipeline

- £13.5m of Heritage Lottery Funding to transform Norwich Castle in association with the British Museum;
- Initiating the largest Passivhaus building programme in the country, including 105 new social housing units on a site adjacent to the centre. These homes generate income, demonstrate our eco-credentials and commitment to tenants to provide quality homes that are economical to run;
- DfT Transforming Cities funding to invest in clean and smart transport.

Desired outcomes

- A higher profile for Norwich on a global basis – to be seen as an example for medium-sized cities across the world, consequently increasing the profile of Norwich as a world leader in creative tech, culture and life sciences;
- Attracting private investment bringing jobs to the centre, through preserving a unique urban environment and acting as an enabler for office developments;
- Improving health and wellbeing and air pollution by introducing sustainable transport schemes.

Key Cities Town/City Centre Performance Assessment

In line with the data needs identified by BIS and using themes and indicators identified via the review described above, Infusion Research has created a bespoke basket of indicators to assess town centre performance and health:

Footfall and Access
- Key Cities footfall data
- % of population who can access the town centre in less than 15 minutes
- Average minimum journey time to town centre

People and Place
- Reported crime change
- * Ultrafast Broadband Accessibility
- Housing stock changes
- * Access to Hazards and Health Index

Socio-economic
- Night-time economy
- Number of claimants
- Household Income
- Population composition - age categories
- Mobility of young people moving to Key Cities areas

Consumer, business and retail perception
- Vacancy rates
- Composition and balance of retail properties
- Store births/deaths

To ensure the analysis focuses on the current context within Key Cities town/city centres, the data used in this study comes within the last five years, with different time frames used within this depending on the source of the data. All data used is open data and freely available, with the exception of data on retail and footfall, provided by the Local Data Company and Springboard respectively. Town and city centre areas have been defined by taking the areas identified as such in relevant Local Authority documents, then relating these to the statistical geographies at which data is available, principally LSOA and MSOA (Lower and Middle Super Output Areas). The remainder of this section uses this to assess Key Cities principal town/city centre areas against their whole local authority area and the national average. More information about the methodology regarding the town centre areas and indicators used is available on request from **infusion@blackpool.gov.uk**

Results summary

As Key Cities were analysed at a town centre and borough level, Tees Valley has been analysed via its constituent boroughs. This means that for analysis purposes, there are 28 separate Key Cities locations. Unless referenced otherwise, the national average refers to the combined average for England and Wales. This analysis takes each of the factors in turn, before drawing conclusions about that the direction of travel in the indicators means for the Key Cities.

Footfall

Footfall in Key Cities areas (from areas with available data) has increased in the last two years following a decrease in footfall from 2014 to 2016. Elsewhere, footfall for the UK High Street has decreased annually at an average rate of 1.6% and in regional cities by 0.9% between 2014-2018.

Demographic context

On average, Key Cities town centre populations make up around 4.3% of an entire borough's population. Key Cities borough areas, on average, have a slightly larger working age population (+0.7%) than the national average and a slightly smaller 65 plus population (-0.1%), but their centres are significantly different - on average, they have smaller 0-15 (-5.1%) and 65 plus populations (-6.7%), balanced by a significantly larger working age population (+11.7%) than the average for Key Cities boroughs[12].

Access to Healthy Assets and Hazards

The Index of 'Access to Healthy Assets and Hazards' is a multi-dimensional index measuring three different domains. It covers accessibility to retail environments with likely unhealthy health outcomes (fast food, tobacconists and gambling outlets etc.), access to health services, and the physical environment as linked to health and health-related behaviours (i.e. air quality and access to green space). The domain was developed by the Consumer Data Research Centre[13] and was published in 2017, and mirrors the methodology of the Index of Deprivation.

In terms of the overall index score, only Preston city centre had a more positive score than the England and Wales average. The main reason for the general poor performance being high scores in both the retail and environmental domain, indicating issues such as easy access to unhealthy retail outlets and likely poor air quality or lack of access to green space in the centre. Although, all centres do have better access to health services than the national average, and in eight Key Cities areas the physical environment domain was ranked better than the national average, with Carlisle having the best environmental score amongst the Key Cities.

Ultrafast Broadband Availability

Ofcom's Connected Nations 2018 report[14] highlights the change in digital performance and availability across the UK. Looking at the percentage of Ultrafast Broadband (UFBB) availability on premises in a local authority area, the average availability in Key Cities areas is 24.6 percentage points higher than on average in England and Wales. In terms of availability across the UK, Wolverhampton has the second highest UFBB availability in the UK, with Plymouth having the tenth highest availability. The largest increase in UFBB within the Key Cities was in Newport with a 65.6 percentage point increase from 2017 to 2018. The growth in UFBB availability for Key Cities areas (10.4 percentage points) was broadly similar to the average change in England and Wales (10.1 percentage points).

Housing Stock

As of 2018[15], the total stock of properties nationally has increased by 0.9% for the last three years, compared to 0.8% in Key Cities boroughs, with Key Cities areas having a larger stock of Council Tax Band A Properties (41.6% of total stock) compared to the average for England and Wales (23.9%). Key Cities town centre areas have a higher proportion, with 62.8% of all stock being in Band A, reflecting historically lower property quality and prices, and the prevalence of smaller property types such as flats. Key Cities Town Centre areas have significantly outstripped national growth, increasing their stock at nearly three times the rate of the national average (2.5%). The largest increase was from 2016 to 2017, with stock increasing 3.1% in this time, compared to the national stock increase of 0.9%. Seven town centres have increased their stock by over 10% in the past three years, with the largest increase in stock occurring in Huddersfield (30.2%), with the other top five levels of increase seen in Key Cities hosting universities. In 21 of the Key Cities areas, the proportion of properties in the borough located in town centres has decreased, indicating significant challenges remaining for places seeking to increase urban living. The largest increase in the proportion of town centre properties was in Southampton, where the number of properties in the town centre as a proportion of the overall borough grew 1.4 percentage points from 2015 to 2018. Whilst this gives opportunities to centres by increasing the numbers of residents, the wider growth elsewhere means that the extra benefits of this may not be realised to the greatest extent possible.

Reported Crime

For this analysis data on reported crime from data.police.uk for November 2016 to October 2017, an open data source for crime across the UK, was compared to the same period across 2017 and 2018. Across 20 Key Cities, reported crime increased in the boroughs and in 18 areas, reported crime increased in the town centres. In 13 Key Cities, the proportion of all reported crime being committed in the town centre increased from 2017 to 2018. Reported crime in Key Cities town centre areas increased 1.4% from the previous 12 month period, whereas crimes reported in the rest of the boroughs increased 2.9%.

The Forum, Southend-on-Sea library and learning facility

Ultrafast Broadband Availability

Key Cities with the highest rate of Ultrafast Broadband Availability for premises (%)

93% Wolverhampton

89% Plymouth

86% Redcar and Cleveland

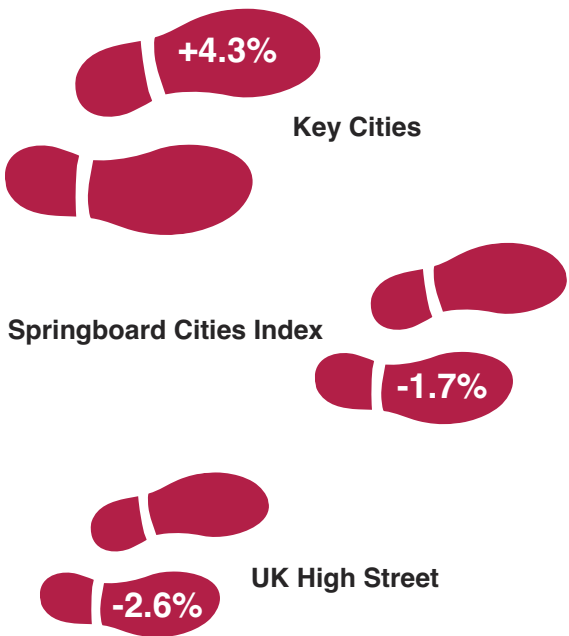**86%** Middlesbrough

85% Norwich
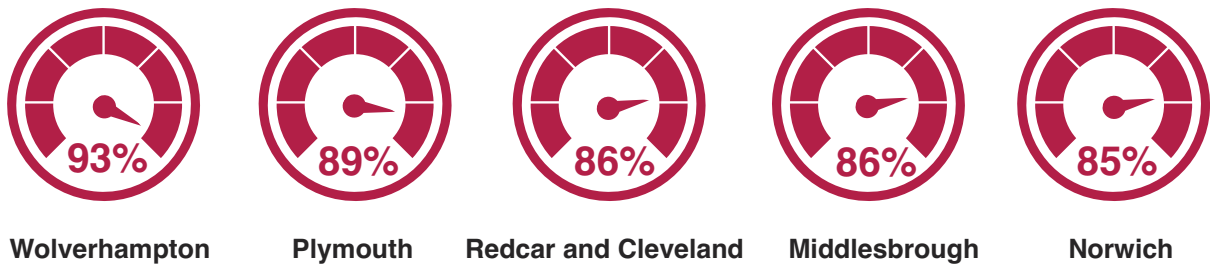
Key Cities, 68%
England and Wales, 43%

Source: Connection Nations Report 2018, Ofcom

City Centre Footfall

Footfall year-on-year percentage change 2018 (Monday to Sunday footfall data)

+4.3% Key Cities

-1.7% Springboard Cities Index

-2.6% UK High Street

Source: Springboard

Housing Stock

Housing Stock increase from 2015 to 2018

+30% Huddersfield town centre

+25% Derby city centre

+22% Bournemouth town centre

+21% Bradford city centre

+21% Southampton city centre

Key Cities boroughs, +2%
Key Cities centres, +8%
England and Wales, +3%
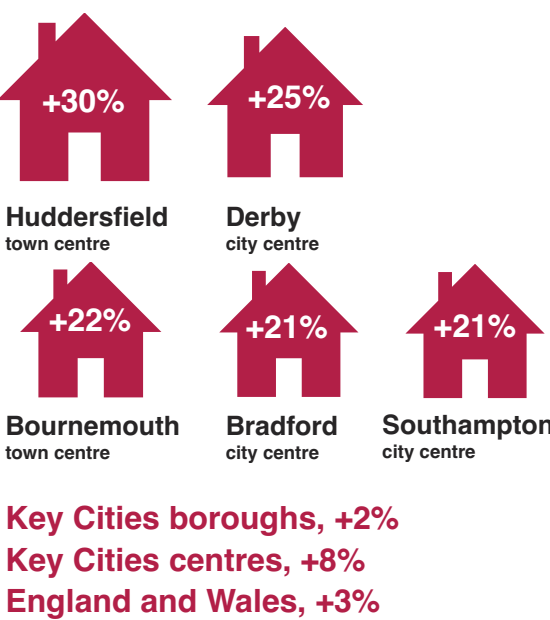
Source: Council Tax: stock of properties

Journey Time

Percentage of borough population who can access the City Centre within 15 minutes by cycling (2016)

Portsmouth	89%
Southampton	83%
Bournemouth	78%
Salford	69%
Southend-on-Sea	69%
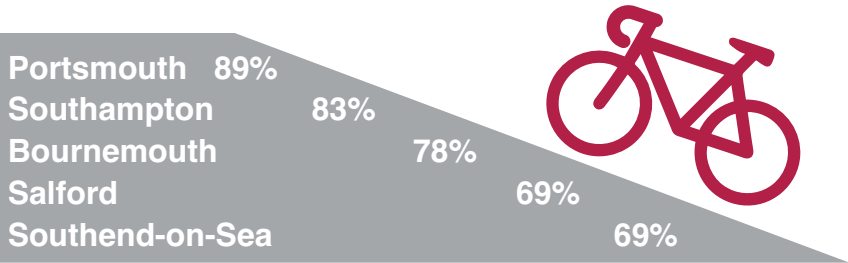
Key Cities, 49%
England, 52%

Source: Journey Time Statistics (Department for Transport)

Median Household Income

Median household net income annual difference at tax year ending 2016

England and Wales £23,834

Key Cities boroughs £22,528

Key Cities centres £19,130
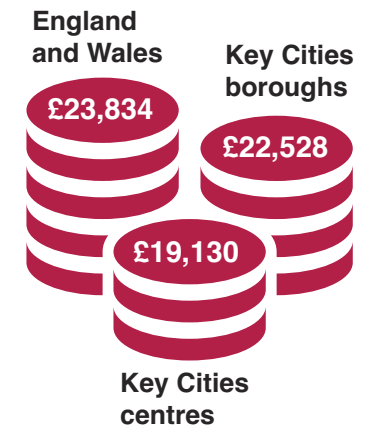
Source: Admin-based income statistics

Reported Crime

Top five decreases in reported crime in City Centres from November to October 2016/2017 to November to October 2017/2018
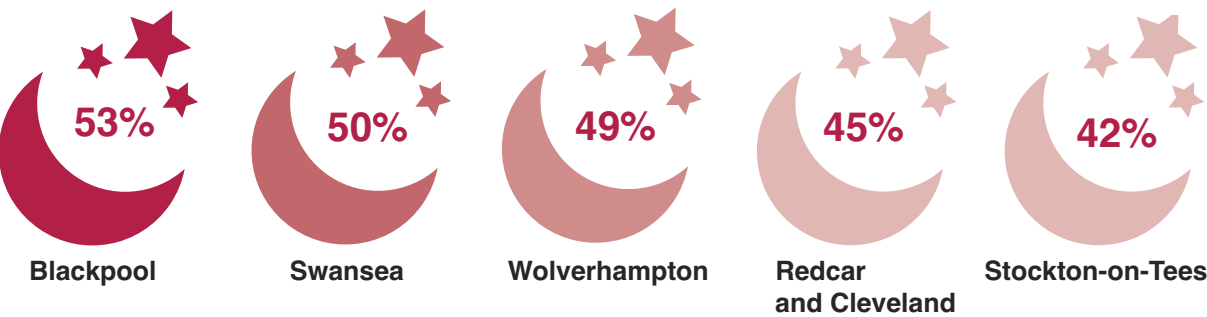
Source: Data.police.uk

-16% Portsmouth

-14% Southampton

-14% Gloucester

-11% Salford

-5% Norwich
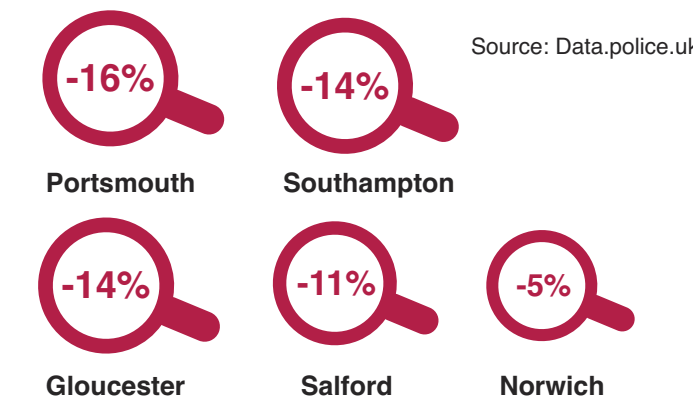
Key Cities Boroughs, +3%
Key Cities Centres, +1%

Night Time Economy

Percentage of people employed in the Night Time Economy (2017)

53% Blackpool

50% Swansea

49% Wolverhampton

45% Redcar and Cleveland

42% Stockton-on-Tees

Key Cities Boroughs, 36%
Key Cities Centres, 34%
England and Wales, 33%

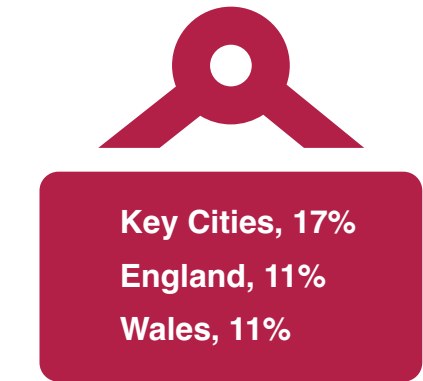Source: Business Register and Employment Survey

Store Births/Deaths

Net difference in store openings and closures (2018)

Key Cities -409

England -3,959

Wales -265

Source: Local Data Company

Vacancy Rate

Vacancy rate of retail units (2018)

Key Cities, 17%
England, 11%
Wales, 11%

Source: Local Data Company

Housing affordability and net income

Houses in the town centres of Key Cities areas are generally more affordable than those in the borough[16]. In 20 Key Cities areas, housing is more affordable in the town centre than the borough, with seven areas where housing is more affordable in the borough and one area where housing affordability is the same[17]. Only two Key Cities boroughs are ranked as less affordable compared to the national average, and none of the town centres are considered less affordable than the national average[18].

Looking at the latest average household net income data[19] on differences between Key Cities town centres and boroughs, there was an average 16.7% deficit in net income for those living in town centres compared to those living in the wider borough. In 27 areas, net household income was greater for those living in the borough, whereas in Norwich it was 3.2% higher in the centre. The Key Cities borough average net household income was 5.6% less than the national average.

Retail performance

Vacancy rates decreased from 2013-2018 in 18 Key Cities, with the remainder increasing. Overall, Key Cities locations decreased their vacancy rates by 1 percentage point, which is comparable to the changes in England and Wales (-0.9 percentage points each). Just over half of Key Cities areas (15) have decreased the number of vacant units from 2013-2018, with the rest having an increased number.

In terms of the total units in an area (excluding vacant units), 23 areas have increased total unit numbers from 2013 – reflecting a continued focus on retail growth which stands in contrast to the macro-economic position. Key Cities areas have increased the total number of units by 1.9% since 2013, England increased by 0.9% and Wales 0.1%.

Looking at unit use, the biggest change is in comparison retail units as a proportion of overall units. This has fallen in 27 of the 28 Key Cities areas, with an average 3.7 percentage point decrease across all Key Cities areas. In contrast, convenience units grew in 24 areas as a proportion of overall units, although only four Key Cities areas had convenience units increase by two or more percentage points as a proportion of their total units from 2013 to 2018. Service units as a proportion of overall units has increased in 25 areas, with an average 2.1 percentage point increase across the Key Cities. In 22 Key Cities areas, leisure units as a proportion of total units has increased, with an average 1 percentage point

increase across the Key Cities. This change in composition suggests that the environment outlined in the wider analysis pieces is also being seen at a local level.

Demonstrating that Key Cities are at the heart of the shifting town centre environment, ten Key Cities locations had a greater number of store openings in 2018 compared to 2013, whilst the number of store closures increased in 18 locations. Only four Key Cities areas had a positive net difference for store births/deaths in 2018, compared to 12 in 2013. Overall, Key Cities saw a 15.7% decrease in store openings from 2013 to 2018 and an 11% increase in closures in the same timeframe. Compared to England and Wales, where store openings decreased by almost 19% and closures increased 12.3% in Wales and in England, there was 0.1% decrease.

Working age benefits claimants

In England and Wales, the proportion of the working age people receiving benefits has remained the same (8.9% of the working age population) from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018. Within Key Cities areas, the average difference in the proportion of the working age population claiming some form of benefit[20] in town centres compared to the wider borough has increased from 1% in 2013/2014 to 1.7% 2017/2018. Across 2017/2018, 10.2% of the working age population in boroughs were claiming some form of benefit, whilst in town centres this figure was 12%. In 24 areas, the difference increased between the people receiving benefits in town centres and those in the borough, with the average increase rising by 0.7% from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018. In 11 Key Cities town centre areas, the proportion of the working population receiving benefits reduced from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018, with the greatest decrease occurring in Wakefield (-2.2%). Conversely, in 17 areas the proportion of people receiving working age benefits has increased from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018. In a quarter of Key Cities borough areas, the proportion of the working age population receiving some form of benefit has increased from 2013/2014 to 2017/2018. On average, the proportion of working age people receiving benefits slightly decreased by 0.1% on average across the Key Cities as a whole.

The Night Time Economy[21]

The number of people employed in the Night Time Economy (NTE)[22] increased in both Key Cities boroughs and town centres, with steeper growth in boroughs (2.8% on average) compared to town centre areas (1.2%) from 2015 to 2017[23]. However, in town centres, the proportion of people employed in the NTE as a proportion of overall

employment fell by 0.3% from 2015 to 2017. Half of Key Cities town centre areas experienced an increase in people employed in the night, with the largest increase in Newport (49.9% increase from 2015 to 2017). 21 borough areas had an increase in the number of people employed in the NTE. In England and Wales, the number of those employed in the NTE increased 3.5% from 2015 to 2017, in Key Cities boroughs there was a 2.8% increase and in town centres a 1.2% increase.

Transport access to Town Centre

In only 12 of the Key Cities (English boroughs only) can at least a quarter of the borough population access their town centre[24] by public transport or walking in under 15 minutes. For England, the proportion is higher at just under 30%, although the gap is narrowing. There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of people in Key Cities areas that can access the town centre by public transport or walking (-0.8 percentage points) in under 15 minutes or under from 2014 to 2016, whereas in England, the rate of decrease was double (-1.6 percentage points). Generally, coastal towns have better access to their town centres across different modes of transport, potentially reflecting their relative density. They make up four of the top five KC locations for having the highest proportion of the population who could access the town centre within 15 minutes. Additionally, the average minimal time to reach these locations by cycling or by car was lower. Average minimum time to travel to the town centre by cycling or car was slightly lower on average in the Key Cities (17 minute cycling, 12 minutes by car) than for England (18 minutes cycling, 13 minutes by car). Access to Portsmouth town centre was the quickest in the Key Cities (11 minutes cycling, 9 minutes by car).

Young Person's mobility, 2011-2015[25]

From 2011-2015, the largest portion of young people (18-29) moving into Key Cities borough areas on average are classified as highly skilled[26] 24.5%) relative to the local population, those classified as upper middle skilled 19.7%, low skilled made up 19.1% and 17.8% as lower middle skilled. The largest disparity in the Key Cities between high and low skilled young people coming to a Key Cities borough was in Newport, where 27.6% of young people who moved to the area were considered high skilled, compared to 16.5% of young people who were considered low skilled. In the 2011-2015 period, 17.5% of movers coming into Key Cities boroughs were aged 25-29 relative to the population of that age group in a local area, 10.9% were aged 30-45 and 5.7% of movers were aged 46-64. Key Cities areas with the highest proportion of highly skilled young people moving

into the area were those that can be considered regional centres e.g. Norwich, areas with significant technology-based development e.g. Salford and Bournemouth and sub-regional centres, particularly those within proximity of London e.g. Portsmouth, Southampton and Southend-on-Sea.

Using this holistic analytical framework, Key Cities compare favourably to the national average in a number of areas over the past few years - enjoying increased footfall, a larger proportion of the population with access to ultra-fast fibre broadband, greater housing affordability on average, larger proportionate increases in housing stock in Town Centre areas and greater access to healthcare assets. Areas where the direction of travel is less favourable are access to Healthy Assets and Hazards, average net income, employment growth in the Night Time Economy, the proportion of working age claimants, vacancy rates and store closures. Across the rest of retail performance and journey time, overall, the Key Cities largely mirror the trends seen at a national level.

This would indicate that, whilst Key City centres are clearly highly liveable (particularly through the evidence provided by the data on housing stock and affordability, access to ultrafast broadband and access to healthcare), the performance of the centres with regards average net income and the proportion of working age claimants shows that these areas are not necessarily the chosen residential areas of professionals and those who are more affluent. The Healthy Assets and Hazards data may point to some of the reasons behind this. Positively though, whilst retail indicators tend to be below or similar to national levels, footfall has increased, showing that people are still engaging with Key City centres, and are still finding reasons to visit.

The Hepworth Art Gallery, Wakefield

Bournemouth:
Accelerating change through partnership working

Contact: Martin Tiffin, Town Centre Vision Programme Leader
Email: martin.tiffin@bournemouth.gov.uk

The Approach

Given the lack of investment during the so-called property boom of 2002 to 2007, Bournemouth moved away from using Development Agreements with private sector companies. The Council developed a new holistic town centre vision, working with landowners and developers to co-ordinate development across the town centre. It then set up the Bournemouth Development Company joint venture with Morgan Sindall Investments. This is a local asset backed vehicle, which matches the value of surplus Council land with private sector funding and expertise. The land consisted of 16 surface car parks in, or adjacent to, the town centre, generating revenue until developments are "oven ready". Accompanying car parking and transport strategies aim to reduce pressure on transport infrastructure by concentrating sites at key nodal points in the town.

Purpose

This method allows the Council some control over the quality and type of schemes put forward; ensuring it can shape development across the town in a way that best serves competing needs. Further plans include the development of a masterplan for a new cultural quarter on a prominent site. No retail projects are planned currently – illustrating a move towards schemes such as housing and leisure, which will potentially have an economic benefit to the retail sector, but which do not seek to grow it.

Schemes delivered and in the pipeline

Bournemouth is on the verge of a transformational change, having completed £300m of development, with £200m in the construction phase and a further £450m to come, including:

- The Citrus Building – 62 high quality apartments for sale with a ground floor restaurant

- Madeira Road – 380 units of student accommodation with a 400 space carpark

- 113 homes for rent plus replacement parking spaces at Berry Court

- Planning approval for the Winter Gardens (pictured) – 352 quality contemporary town centre apartments and an additional 369 parking spaces, with associated cycling infrastructure and landscaped grounds

- An office and residential-led scheme in the heart of the town centre business district

Development by the private sector includes 500 bedrooms across two hotels, a cinema with 15 restaurants, 5 student accommodation schemes, and 30,000 sqft of office accommodation.

How it progressed

The model took 2 years to develop, partly due to the lack of previous progress. The Council took time to bring stakeholders on board, particularly the gatekeepers of public and private finance. Initial schemes were relatively small scale and used to prove the concept, before starting bigger projects. One leisure project required liaison with the planning team to balance the scale of feasible projects with planning policy. The Council has had to respond to comments around the level of transparency and value for money.

Advantages

The Council's stake in the company allows it to bring forward projects with smaller margins, which would otherwise fail to attract private sector interest. Given the long time span for regeneration and development, creating a separate organisation allows for greater continuity between political administrations should there be a change. The model could be extended after the creation of the new Local Authority combining Christchurch, Poole and Bournemouth. The flexibility of the mechanism has ensured access to funding from multiple public and private sources depending on the scheme, whilst the Joint Venture delivery route gave the Council a voice at the table for all of the key development decisions.

Desired Outcomes

- A catalyst for change, bringing in more spend to the town centre and releasing land for development;

- Delivery of town centre housing units to meet planning targets, and student accommodation to reduce pressure in the suburbs from student numbers;

- Making the town centre more "liveable" through improved design and landscaping, providing a platform for public transport improvements, and the relocation of car parking to strategic locations;

- Freeing up land to bring in more valuable asset classes, which in turn drive better job opportunities;

- Increasing pride amongst all who use the town centre;

- Ensuring a 7 day a week, 18 hours a day economy.

Blackpool:
Building a modern resort

Contact: Mark Gillingham, Delivery Development Officer
Email: mark.gillingham@blackpool.gov.uk

Background

Blackpool is a town that was founded on the visitor economy. Changes in holiday trends and easier overseas travel saw its fortunes decline since the late twentieth century, and the town centre's intrinsic link to the visitor economy has seen this mirrored in the central area, even before the national decline brought about by the economic downturn. Entering the twenty-first century, it was clear a shift was required in Blackpool's town centre in order to maintain its relevance in a modern world. An initial bid for a headline 'super casino' in 2006 was unsuccessful, but established a desire to significantly invest in the town centre.

The Approach

Regeneration has manifested itself in two stages. The first was to invest in order to improve the environment and secure key assets. The second is ongoing and aims to invest (or facilitate investment) in projects bringing people to and keeping people in the town centre all year round. The seasonality affecting the visitor market also has profound impacts on town centre usage, and efforts are being made to reduce these impacts.

The Council has used Business Loan funding, sale of assets and catalytic negotiations to trigger regeneration activity, with projects either completed or agreed reaching £700m in investment. It has recognised that it has to be integral to key schemes that will provide significant regeneration in the town centre, even if they are private sector-led.

Schemes delivered

- The purchase of the Blackpool Tower and Winter Gardens complexes for £40m, the establishment of an arm's-length company to manage Winter Gardens operations, and the partnership with Merlin Entertainments to operate the Tower;

- A £100m investment in upgrading the seafront adjacent to the central area, creating a more modern environment linking the town centre with the sea;

- The development of a new Central Business District, with the first phase bringing the Council's main offices and around 2000 jobs into the town centre, and creating new retail and commercial space;

- Numerous town centre public realm schemes, including the partial pedestrianisation of the main square, creating a central outdoor events space;

- Land and property acquisition in key locations across the town centre;

- The introduction (and expansion) of Selective Licensing for private sector landlords.

Schemes in the pipeline

- The further development of the Central Business District, including provision of a new four-star hotel and transport exchange adjacent to Blackpool North railway station;

- The extension of Blackpool's tramway from the Promenade to Blackpool North railway station, bringing it into the Central Business District and connecting heavy rail to the area's light rail system;

- The development of a new conference centre adjoining the historic Winter Gardens, expanding the complex's conference capacity to 7,000 delegates, and opening up new opportunities in the visitor market outside the summer season;

- The creation of multiple new quality hotels in and around the town centre, including Blackpool's first five-star hotel, to provide year-round, high quality accommodation;

- An expansion of the Houndshill Shopping Centre, to include two new restaurants and an IMAX style cinema, to increase leisure footfall from residents and visitors;

- The sale of the former Central Station site to private developers for the creation of Blackpool Central (pictured), a £300m mixed use scheme incorporating "world class" visitor attractions, retail, food and beverage, hotel and residential properties;

- An aspiration to further expand the Central Business District to incorporate a public sector employment hub, consolidating a number of public sector functions across the Fylde Coast on one site in the heart of the town centre;

- Further conversations about ways of using the Housing Benefits system to drive housing improvements.

Desired Outcomes

- Bringing in greater numbers of staying visitors year-round, whilst reaching new markets;

- Concentrating office-based professional jobs in the town centre to generate greater economic impact;

- Changing perceptions of Blackpool as a place.

Southhampton's Westquay shopping centre

The Local View: Survey Responses

Methodology

In order to develop a picture of perceptions "on the ground" in our Key Cities, we ran an online survey over a four week period, closing on December 10th 2018. Key Cities distributed the survey via their mailing list for cascading to appropriate personnel, aiming it at those in senior roles influencing the development and future direction of town and city centres. The questionnaire asked respondents to focus on their principal city/town centre for the survey, although at least one polycentric area chose to provide a blanket response. The survey asked about the strategic approach, issues, priorities, infrastructure, the importance of certain use types, and work being undertaken to improve the centre.

19 of the 24 areas responded. Some areas also invited stakeholders from beyond the Council or BID to complete the survey, giving 34 responses in total. For consistency, and to ensure all areas were weighted equally, the analysis that follows uses the responses of the most senior Council official, with the other responses providing further data for the analysis of open-ended questions.

Strategies and Plans

13 places reported having a specific strategy focussed on the centre, with further research suggesting that six of these date from 2014 onwards, and that they included a diverse mix of document types, including Strategies, Improvement Plans, Vision Documents, Regeneration Frameworks, Masterplans and so on. Each of these suggests a different emphasis on the activity being undertaking, with timescales varying from a mix of short-term action planning through to long-term strategic land allocation and place-shaping, supported by a shorter action-planning cycle.

Positively, all respondents have a strategy, or are intending to produce one, positioning themselves well for the likely bidding requirements of the Future High Streets Fund. Timescales vary, with some being long-term documents with a shorter action planning cycle. This suggests a diverse mix of responses to town centre management, development and regeneration, focused on local needs.

Priorities

The survey asked about 21 potential priorities, with the development, improvement or delivery of Housing said to be a priority for 18 cities, and the Night Time Economy (17), Public Realm (16) and Events (15) all cited by more than three quarters of respondents. Whilst this appears to show a degree of consensus, on average cities identified 13 priorities – reflecting the diversity and scale of work on which local authorities must deliver to make progress. It also raises thoughts about the most effective way to marshal wider support and resources, co-ordinate effort, and partnership delivery. This all points to areas delivering a holistic approach, but needing to maintain a clear strategic focus and sequence projects effectively to build momentum. Responses to questions later in the survey suggest that projects in the delivery or planning stage align with these priorities.

Basic Issues

Turning to look at tangible issues facing centres, the survey sought views on some of the "hygiene" factors associated with a positive town centre environment – the basic elements which must be in place to provide an effective platform for place shaping. Other than the availability of climate control measures (suitable shelter; air-conditioning etc), over half of respondents felt that all of the factors cited were at least partial issues:

Most cited as a major issue	Most cited as a major or partial issue
Public Perception (12 replies)	Begging (19 replies)
Perceived Personal Safety (7)	ASB (18)
Anti-Social Behaviour (6)	Public Perception (18)
Vacant Units (6)	Vacant Units (17)
	Street Cleanliness (17)
	Lack of Footfall (16)
	Street Homelessness (16)

As shown in the table (left), public perception – both of the level of safety and the experience to be had in the centre – is more likely to be cited as a major issue than some of the drivers of perception (such as the actual level of crime, Anti-Social Behaviour and so on). All of the cities citing street cleanliness, begging, perceived personal safety, neglect of the built environment, weather protection, a lack of footfall and place making as major issues also cited perception as a major issue. For cities where these are issues, it emphasises the importance of both improving these hygiene factors, but also in driving further footfall to lessen their impact.

It is also important to highlight that the perception of safety, neglect of the built environment and place marketing are all cited as some level of issue by more than 3/4 of respondents.

Infrastructure

The survey then asked about improvements to six different categories of infrastructure - digital and environmental, transport, public (such as pedestrian areas and wayfinding), housing and services, leisure and culture, and retail – with subcategories to explore these topics in detail. The responses again suggest a broad spread of activity across different types of project:

Category	Subcategory	Number of Key Cities delivering improvements
Private Housing	Housing and Service Facilities	14
Free Wifi	Digital and Environmental	12
Restaurants, cafes, coffee shops	Retail	12
Car Parking	Transport	11
Concert and Theatre Venues	Leisure and Cultural	11
Special events and festivals	Leisure and Cultural	11

Based on the responses received, Key Cities are most likely to be delivering housing improvements, in order to deliver their priorities, but also to meet challenging targets and deliver positive economic impacts arising from capturing this local spend on retail and leisure. Although Private Housing is the primary focus, all 19 areas were seeking to deliver improvements in either this regard or to student, social, or supported housing. Some, including Newport and Swansea, were delivering all four types of housing, with Bournemouth, Doncaster, Norwich and Darlington delivering on three.

This is also borne out from the case studies included

throughout this report, with places seeking to make their assets - whether land or built - work harder to deliver more people spending more time in and around the centre. Within the Key Cities, there is a spectrum ranging from places like Bournemouth and Norwich who are seeking to replace existing land use with types likely to generate greater economic benefits directly or indirectly; and those seeking to make better use of empty space or assets. This plays particularly well into the growth in ad hoc, temporary, flexible spaces and novel experiences driving footfall on an occasional basis – whether through events animating the city centre, or a varied programme of cultural and entertainment events.

There is an opportunity to bring Key Cities together for mutual support on schemes that are in the planning stages. Although spread across multiple categories, most had or could have a digital dimension. Topics most likely to be of interest are Electric Vehicle Charging Points (planned by 12 places), improvements to shopping centres (10), and improving 4/5G mobile phone coverage, signposting and way finding - including via digital tools, and leisure facilities (all 9). It is interesting to note the level to which places still feel the need to focus on shopping centres, potentially reflecting the need to guard against further decline caused by the convenience of on line shopping with a higher quality physical retail experience.

Management and Partnership Tools

The questionnaire included a list of tools, facilities and other ways of working, to assess the extent to which Key Cities are making use of these in developing city centre growth. These are presented in ascending order by how many cities reported benefitting from them:

Tool	Value
City/Town Centre Commission	3
Register of landlords	4
Evaluation to review the impact of projects	5
Community interest Companies or charities	5
An agreed dashboard of performance indicators	5
Regular performance monitoring arrangements	5
Partnership of businesses (not BID's)	8
Business Loans and Financing	8
JV's or Wholly Owned Companies	8
Supportive local interest groups/voluntary organisations	9
Live/near-live football and sector trend data	9
Integrated Marketing approaches/teams	10
Town Centre Manger	12
Business Improvement District	12
Council team focussed on the centre	15
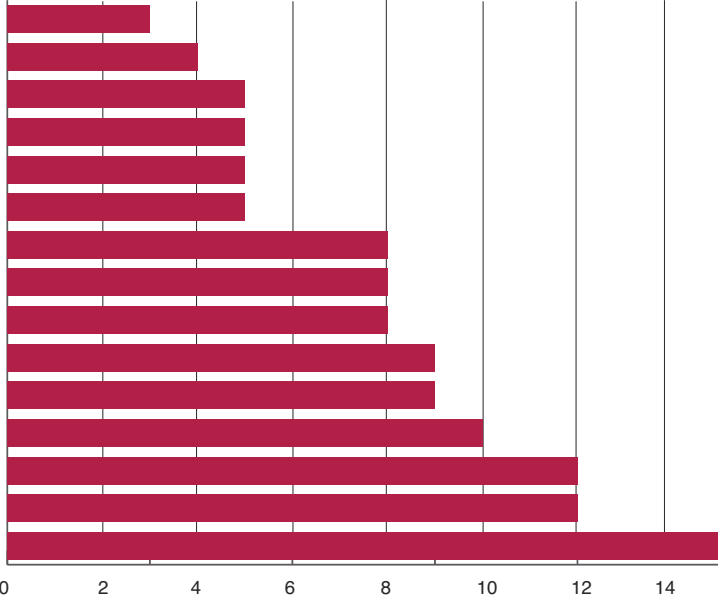
Fewer than half of responding areas had performance management arrangements in place, with relatively few adopting a performance management and review approach to the monitoring the centre's vital signs, - although it should be noted that this data comes mostly from a Local Authority perspective and the availability of footfall and sector lead data was higher. Positively the majority of places responding had town centre specific management resource in place. New tools and sources of data are coming to market that will allow Councils and BIDs different to find different ways of exploring change.

Finally, although the development of office space does not feature on either the "delivering" or "planning" lists – when both categories of responses were added together, this was the most likely type of development to be at least in the planning stages of the entire list.

It is important to note that the bulk of the responses are still tilted towards delivering development and change, and in particular developments for the private sector, undertaken on an economic basis. In part this reflects the focus of the survey, but a key message from this analysis is the need to consider footfall and town centre dwell time data for reasons of perception, rather than just the anticipated economic benefits – vibrant centres, as well as economic powerhouses.

Importance and change

When asked to look at a range of factors for their contribution to the future vitality of city centres, respondents cited Culture and Events, Food and Drink and Arts and Heritage as the most important offers, followed by transport development and independent retail offer. Manufacturing spaces and supported housing were the factors least likely to be rated as important.

Friars Walk Shopping Centre, Newport

Reviewing the likelihood of change over the next ten years, respondents were most likely to cite Private Housing, Transport, and Culture and Events as delivering significant growth, in line with the responses given previously around infrastructure. Student housing was cited by areas with existing Higher Education institutions.

A cross-tabulation analysis was undertaken to rank by the proportion of respondents who identified them as both important and where there was some expectation of growth. Responses with fewer than half of respondents citing them as important are excluded. In order, the topics ranked as: Private Housing; Food and Drink; Transport; Office Space; Active Leisure facilities; Arts and Heritage; Culture and Events; Services – Independents; Retail – Independents; Services – Chains; Retail – Chains. Should growth levels fail to meet expectations, particularly for those sectors requiring significant capital investment in fixed assets, this could create significant issues for the delivery of the relevant strategies in these cities.

Threats and Opportunities

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were given free rein to comment on the main threats to their city centre's vitality, and the opportunities on which they could capitalise. Thirteen broad threats were identified, with the most common being the changing nature of the retail sector, a lack of investment and the high cost of redevelopment, and negative perceptions of begging and related street activity. The twelve opportunities included building a stronger leisure and culture offer, with infrastructure development and residential living also popular, but cited by fewer respondents. Only two commenters cited the development of a Smart City infrastructure as an opportunity. The principal barriers to achieving change were seen as a lack of funding or investment, and macro-economic factors. When the handful of private sector respondents to the survey were included, problems within the Local Authority tended to be cited.

Wider Support

The autumn budget included measures to alleviate some pressures on businesses paying business rates, the introduction of a digital services tax, the introduction of the Future High Streets Fund, and other measures. In this context, the survey asked about the likely impact of the autumn budget. Respondents were least positive about the potential impact on the number of vacant units. The measures included on business rates attracted a limited number of comments, with one respondent calling them a temporary bailout, but another saying it would encourage new entries to the market. Positively 15 of the 19 respondents did feel that the Future High Streets Fund would have some impact on their city centre's ability to meet the challenges faced, respondents cited concerns about the size of funding and its distribution. One respondent wondered how the fund would be able to impact large private landlords which effectively control property use and lease terms, and another commented on the lack of incentives for landlords to fill shops. This was balanced by another comment suggesting the fund would enable site assembly. Multiple commenters considered that the impact would only be maximised if a Council has a clear vision, and if the funding bid were linked to existing strategies and programmes.

Conclusion

The findings of the survey portray places with a firm finger on the pulse of change, fighting on a number of fronts to sustain or gain momentum. A degree of commonality appeared in the form of housing, which is seen as key to generating the level of regular footfall needed to sustain centres, and a wider leisure and cultural offering also needed to increase day and year-round use. However, it also highlights some of the key issues also brought forward by wider work in the sector – with the need for partnerships to ensure effective progress against multiple priorities, and better data particularly apparent.

Wolverhampton:
A holistic approach to city centre transformation

Contact: Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration
Email: richard.lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Background

One of the main cities in the West Midlands Combined Authority area, Wolverhampton has a population of over 250,000 people, with 3 million within a 20-mile radius. Birmingham is 17 minutes away, with Manchester 70 minutes away and the journey time to London set to be halved by HS2. Despite a decline in manufacturing, this strong tradition continues and provides potential to grow high-end industry, whilst significant growth is also happening across multiple sectors, particularly with the professional and financial sector. And whilst some of these are located on the perimeter of the city centre, the jobs they provide will help to deliver benefits in the centre, as the city's economy grows. The city is continuing to seek future investment through the regeneration of brownfield sites for future development.

Approach

The approach seeks to use Wolverhampton's connectivity as a basis for developing the city across every front, with large-scale city centre housing, office developments, transport, higher education, leisure and public realm improvements all in advanced stages of planning or delivery. This is aided by affordable land and market rents, and a university embarking on a substantial capital build programme. The Council has used a variety of approaches, including joint ventures and partnership with developers, in line with scheme requirements, stimulating the market where needed, and facilitating development where developers are already seeking to undertake work pro-actively.

To achieve this, the Council has used "lease-wraps" to mitigate the risk to developers of new property. The Council, which has a AAA credit rating, uses Public Works Loan Board funding to take out leases, which are then sub-let to tenants who may not wish to take the risk of a long-term lease (an approach also used by a handful of other Key Cities, including Salford). Where these arrangements are successful, the Council benefits directly from income through the sublease that can be used to repay the original loan early, as well as further benefiting from additional income from business rates.

Purpose

By intervening, the Council is seeking to stimulate the market, allowing development to take place at a scale commensurate with the city's potential. The i9 office development financed by the council, completed in 2016 and fully let in 9 months confirmed this. The need for a vibrant city centre is key, with the

Council's 2018 City Centre Investment Prospectus showcasing both completed projects and future opportunities. Site-specific projects are highlighted whilst demonstrating their relationship with other city centre locations and the overall vision for the centre. Private sector investment is starting to come in to the city, whilst the Council continues to drive an ambitious regeneration plan.

Schemes delivered and in the pipeline

• i10, a Grade A office development sited next to the Train Station, with plans underway for a second development i9 (pictured above)

• A remodelling of the transport interchange, with a recent bus station and recently-completed car park to be joined by a new railway station in 2020 (pictured below)

• Westside, a development including cinema, leisure, a hotel, and carpark, with homes to be delivered in phase 2

• The Canalside Quarter. A large mixed use development directly adjacent to the city centre, this includes the University's expansion into the former Springfield brewery, turning it into a European Centre of Excellence for brownfield regeneration and reconstruction, with an accompanying school of architecture. It will incorporate an additional 600 homes, adding to the 900 completed since 2008

In addition, Wolverhampton is eBay's first Retail Revival city in the UK. This partnership, the first in the UK, supports independent retailers, distributors and manufacturers on Wolverhampton to enhance their online presence, driven by the growing online shopping from consumers. Launched in November 2017, the scheme is already showing some promising progress. Recent news has highlighted that the cohort of business on the programme have achieved over £1m turnover, with some reporting 41% growth since trading on the platform.

Desired Outcomes

• Creating sustainable residential communities through increasing the city centre population;

• A more diverse, sustainable city centre economy

• A revitalised city centre

• Improvements to the quality of life for residents, including improved skills, employment and environment

Recommendations:
The Future of our Town and City Centres

The preceding analysis leads towards recommendations on two fronts – firstly, the nature of arrangements aimed at delivering change, and secondly the nature of change required. Although primarily focused on Key Cities, these are more widely applicable to many similarly-sized towns and cities across the country.

Delivery Arrangements

The first conclusions concern delivery arrangements – the means by which lasting change and development is achieved. These can be broadly broken into the following areas:

Strategic:

• Closer collaboration is needed between towns and cities, with the focus being on co-operation and complementarity, not competition;

• Finding new ways to "sweat the assets" – using space, buildings and resources more efficiently to drive and maintain town centre footfall day, week and year-round;

• Councils need to use their central co-ordination role to enable the delivery of a holistic approach which includes consideration of the "liveability" of centres, bringing all interested parties together in new partnership arrangements;

Data:

• Centres need to move away from a primary focus on retail metrics, maintaining footfall as a key measure but bringing in a wider basket of indicators covering quality of life and vibrancy;

• As part of this, centres should commit to sharing data across partners more openly, and finding new ways of working in partnership to unlock data for the greater benefit of all;

• To use the potential of new technology to showcase the potential for Key Cities to be smart cities, with our size and agility enabling us to move towards better realtime information shared across stakeholders, vastly improving marketing and event management as part of helping people engage with towns/activities via software tools.

Organisational:

• The development of new styles of town centre teams, working across disciplines, with an equal weighting given to all aspects of place-shaping;

• The greater use of design teams, focussed on engineering civic space for new, mixed-use purposes.

These also prompt reflection on the specific situation of Key Cities, with some questions arising which demand attention both at, and beyond, the conference:

What is the current position of the Key Cities as a whole in relation to the broader picture in city centres, and how can the Key Cities find common ground to undertake a co-ordinated approach to addressing city centre issues?

How can the Key Cities influence central policy so that it becomes beneficial to city centres of the scale seen in Key Cities?

What makes the Key Cities unique, and how can the uniqueness of the Key Cities be used to ensure their city centres remain vibrant?

How do Key Cities look to remain relevant in a polycentric region, particularly one that is home to a regional centre? How can connectivity and proximity be an opportunity rather than a threat

Are stakeholders in city centres making evidence-based decisions, and using data, when considering the futures of their city centres?

Does the data already available for city centres provide enough information to be the basis of evidence-based decisions, or does more data need to be gathered to aid with decision making processes?

What is the best approach to maximise the value of events in city centres

A holistic approach

The second conclusions concern the purpose of city centres, and the strategic decisions made to bring these about. As we have seen from the preceding policy, data and survey analysis, in order for city centres to maintain their relevance, they not only need to remain key hubs for their local regions, but must adapt to host demographically balanced communities of their own in order to generate a round-the-clock, all-year vibrancy. In order to do this, as well as city centres being a focal point for retail, they need to become areas in which people live, work in a variety of sectors and spend their leisure time, with a variety of new architecturally-stimulating leisure spaces and creative events giving regular

reasons to visit. A focus needs to be on the means by which people are brought into this space, and the creation of a distinctive offer which fits with the core purpose and rationale on which the towns were founded. Although space may be at a premium in city centres, the continued decline in city centre retail will allow for the repurposing of commercial space, creating new premises for services and employment at ground floor level, and opening up underutilised space above ground floor level for residential and office development.

Whilst city centres should look to establish a community of their own, they need to maintain their importance to the wider region they serve, and retain functions that are important to those who travel into the area. Many of the functions required of city centres in their capacity as regional hubs, however, such as extensive hospitality and entertainment options, good quality employment, key services, strong transport links and a functional retail centre, also make them attractive areas to live in. The benefits brought about by this proximity are often outweighed, though, by a lack of suitable housing options and a perceived lack of suitability of an area as a residential setting.

In the urban landscape, Key Cities centres, and other similarly sized centres across the country, could be the most at-risk from the changing picture we are currently seeing. City centres of this size do not hold the same level of significance as regional centres, and do not have the historically established central area office employment and residential space found in these larger urban areas. This could make them more likely to lose some of the key functions found in large urban centres. However, the amount of vacant commercial space left vacant in a Key Cities centre after a downturn will be considerably greater than in smaller town centres, giving it a bigger impact on the centre as a whole. This could mean that Key Cities will have to be particularly active in maintaining the vitality and vibrancy of their centres.

In order for the Key Cities centres to maintain their relevance, they need to ensure the functions they host provide positive experiences for those visiting and those living in the space. This could involve taking a pro-active approach to consolidating the retail offer, making it work as part of the new vision for centres. With regards visitors, it is essential that those making their way into the centre are encouraged to undertake return visits as a result of their experiences. In relation to those residing in city centres, if it becomes clear from the outset that living in the area is primarily beneficial, this will encourage further in-migration of residents.

Conclusion:
Repurposing our city centres

This report sets out not only the issues facing our city and town centres, but also what Key Cities, individually, collectively and in partnership with other national and local stakeholders, are currently delivering in their city and town centres.

It should not be forgotten however, that city and town centres exist primarily for people - to meet their needs and provide social, and economic opportunities for all. In drawing up a vision, and actions, for the long term sustainability of a city or town centre, genuine community engagement and dialogue is invaluable to shaping a new sense of place, jointly building this new focus together with those with the biggest stakes in its future. At its heart, understanding the role which city centres can and do play in people's lives could start from a simple set of questions asked of local people, communities and businesses about what they want from their city or town centre. These could include:

"What would make you want to spend time there?"

"What do you need to be there to help you?"

"What would make you be proud of there?"

The answers to the questions are not only likely be about facilities, both public and private, they are also likely to be about design, accessibility, affordability and distinctiveness, as well as heritage.

A city or town centre is also a living and evolving entity. The answers to the questions above will change as the economy, technology, design, demographics and people's and communities' expectations evolve and change, reminding us of the importance of ongoing dialogue. A glance at the history of any city or town centre will show that over time the composition of that place, whether people, businesses, transportation modes or facilities has changed, sometimes substantially.

The task for all us is to make sure that city and town centres evolve for the better, and are resilient in times of downturn or radical change. Continuing to listen to, and work with, those who use our city and town centres is vital for guaranteeing that centres remain welcoming, sustainable and cherished by those who use or visit them.

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"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

Jane Jacobs
Urbanist and Activist

in:fusion

KEY CITIES
UNLOCKING POTENTIAL