

The Changing Face of the High Street: Decline and Revival

A review of retail and town centre issues in historic areas
June 2013



ENGLISH HERITAGE



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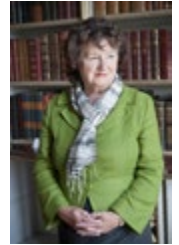
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foreword



Much has changed since English Heritage published *Retail Development in Historic Areas* in 2005. We now have a very different and much more challenging retail environment. Social, demographic and technological trends are all combining to clear effect on retailers and town centre character. It would appear we are witnessing permanent and structural changes to the way we as shoppers behave, with all the consequences for high street uses, vitality and vacancy that these may bring.

English Heritage is not expert on the worlds of retail and town centre management. But the health of our high streets and town centres matters to us. They are the heartbeat of their local communities, but in many places the historic character embodied in their buildings, their range of uses and street patterns and layout have been put under pressure in recent years.

This report is the product of research to understand what has changed since 2005. It looks in detail at the current policy and retail context and what these might mean for historic high streets and town centres over the next few years.

This has been a valuable exercise for English Heritage, not least in helping us engage with retailers, developers and other stakeholders with an interest in historic high streets and town centres. We are very grateful to all those who gave their time and advice throughout the process, including those who attended our seminar in March 2013 to discuss the issues raised in the draft report. Much of the insight we gained from that event is reflected in this report.

We are clear that no-one should underestimate the challenges involved in reviving many of our historic high streets and town centres. But at the same time, the case studies contained within this document demonstrate what can be achieved with an innovative approach that makes the most of the local historic environment, even against a backdrop of testing economic times. At a time when people are increasingly looking for a leisure experience rather than simply a range of shops to visit, such an approach can help in creating a greater sense of 'destination' and potentially competitive advantage.

A number of key themes have recurred during our work in this area, notably the continued evolution of the high street and the consequent need for a new flexibility in helping to retain vibrancy and sense of purpose. These ideas are something that English Heritage will bear in mind in our future work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Andrews". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Baroness Kay Andrews, Chair of English Heritage



Harbour Street, Whitstable, during the Oyster Festival Parade
image courtesy Tim Stubbings Photography/timstubbings.co.uk

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overview

Our town and city centres are representative of wider economic and social dynamics and there is a renewed commitment to the identification of strategies to support their renewal and vitality in the current challenging economic landscape.

Many centres are defined by a distinctive historic character which plays a crucial role in creating an attractive setting for retailing and reinforcing competitive advantage.

Recent experience and research highlights that the future context for retailing in town centres will be very different and that centres must therefore adapt to the changing policy and economic landscape.

This report considers emerging trends to renew high streets and town centres and identifies key messages to reinvigorate the heart of our communities.

Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners was commissioned to undertake case study research and develop a report outlining lessons of good practice in response to the shifting policy landscape in relation to retailing and town centres. The report revisits the original English Heritage report, *Retail Development in Historic Areas* which was published in 2005. The publication provided case studies and guidance in relation to the process, design and opportunities for the conversion and reuse of historic buildings.

The 2005 document reflects retail and development trends of the property market boom in the early part of the last decade. The transition in retail development from shopping malls to streetbased retailing was only just beginning to come to fruition when the research for the previous guide was undertaken and there were few examples of more sensitive, innovative schemes. Clearly, there have been a number of fundamental economic shifts as well as changes in retail trends and the national policy framework.

In addition, a wide range of different interventions are beginning to gain momentum in terms of retail development and town centre initiatives. These include improved and more widespread town centre management programmes, the managed reduction in retail outlets and more sensitive and successful examples of large-scale street-based retail schemes.

The brief for the research evolved from a series of round table discussions involving English Heritage, the Historic Towns Forum and other stakeholders.



PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the original research was twofold as outlined below:

1. Examine the state of the retail sector and development trends within it through analysis of case studies of 'in town' retail development, in order to provide further guidance for local authorities in delivering successful retail development in historic areas.
2. Explore wider town centre management issues in historic areas with a view to identifying key principles for success.

The research was underpinned by five key aims and objectives:

1. Provide a national overview of current retail trends together with an analysis of the implications of these trends for the management of the historic environment;
2. Consider the local planning authority view on how they can promote town centres through their statutory local plans;
3. Select and analyse a number of recent retail development projects in historic areas, identifying best practice and principles for success;
4. Consider emerging trends in town centre management as they relate to historic cores and set out the implications for local planning authorities and other stakeholders, together with an analysis of a number of case studies with transferable lessons as guidance;
5. Revisit a number of the case studies included in Retail Development in Historic Areas and provide a qualitative analysis of their success.



Opposite: independent shops in Warminster (top), a specialist market in Horsham (bottom)

past, present and future

Challenges for historic town centres and high streets

Towns and city centres are at a critical point, needing to reinforce and redefine their role and function in response to huge economic shifts and new national policy for retail development.

These challenges have a particular resonance for historic town centres where the sustained and successful stewardship of historic shopping areas, streets and spaces is intertwined with the health and future trajectory of retail activities.

This section provides an overview of recent and emerging retail and town centre trends, and summarises the policy context.

Together they provide a backdrop to the case studies and themes of the report.

Britain has lived up to its reputation as a “nation of shopkeepers” and the art of trading goods and services has been honed as successive generations have embraced new materials, technologies and innovations. The form and character of many historic town centres is intrinsically connected with the evolution of shops and trading.

The process of change has sometimes been slow and gradual, but, occasionally, shifts in the spatial form, function and location of retailing have been rapid and dynamic. These periods have often coincided with wider changes in society such as technological advancements, greater social mobility, and changing tastes, needs and economic fortunes.

The growth of out-of-town shopping, compounded by the impact of on-line retailing has created enormous challenges for the traditional high street. These challenges have been exacerbated by a prolonged economic downturn which has hindered both public and private sector investment. The result is an increasingly polarised spectrum of centres and high streets, ranging from successful destinations which continue to attract shoppers and visitors from within and beyond their natural sphere of influence, to failing centres and high streets with increasing vacancy rates.

The economic downturn has resulted in significant reductions in local authority budgets, therefore constraining the extent of investment in major regeneration projects. However, town centre management initiatives and partnerships have continued to operate during this period, and there are many examples of effective projects which have played a key role in improving town centres with relatively modest budgets. These include marketing and branding exercises, wayfinding and signage schemes, pop-up shops and events, market promotion, community safety projects and night-time economy improvement initiatives. A number of schemes can have particular relevance to historic areas including Empty Properties Initiatives and Shopfront Improvement Schemes.

“...the increasing domination of large chain stores left our communities and high streets vulnerable to economic shocks.” The 2010 Clone Town Britain Report

Despite the bleak economic position there continues to be a strong commitment to the traditional high street. High streets and town centres have historic significance as a focus for social and communal activities, from Roman and medieval marketplaces to high streets and parades. Our high streets and town centres often form an important part of a community's identity, and the recent interest amongst academics, policymakers and the general public in the future prosperity of high streets is indicative of the position that town centres occupy in the national psyche.

“Why does it matter that our town centres increasingly all look the same?”

“Is the spread of clone towns and the creeping homogenisation of the high street anything more than an aesthetic blight? We think so. Yes, distinctiveness and a sense of place matter to people. Without character in our urban centres, living history and visible proof that we can in some way shape and influence our living environment we become alienated in the very places that we should feel at home.”
New Economics Foundation, Reimagining the High Street, 2010

Some might argue that the traditional view of high street retailing has been romanticised and is an anachronism in the current technological and economic climate. Yet there is a clear will to protect and enhance town centres, or, at the very least, manage the forces of change by reinventing the town centre, without losing the essence of the high street. In addition to the current policy agenda, studies such as Clone Towns (2005) and the Portas Review (2011) reflect a growing desire to establish a framework to understand the issues facing town centres, to distil the characteristics that make shopping areas successful and appealing, and to structure the strategic and local interventions that

might be implemented to enhance high streets and town centres.

New Economics Foundation (NEF) published the Clone Town Britain Report in June 2005 which drew attention to “the increasing domination of large chain stores” which has “left our communities and high streets vulnerable to economic shocks.” The 2010 Clone Town Britain Report highlights that the recession has prompted the closure of many chain stores in less profitable, traditional retail locations with some closing or moving to larger out-of-town centres. NEF undertook a survey of high streets in Britain in 2009 as part of this report, to assess which centres were “clones”, “border” or “home” towns, reflecting a spectrum of town centre characteristics, ranging from generic (clone) to distinctive/independent (home). The report indicated that 41% of the towns surveyed were clone towns, 23% border towns and 36% were home towns. Although the methodology and statistical approach for the evaluation of the clone effect could be debated, the issue and implications of homogeneity are a reality for retailers, local authorities and policymakers.

Multiples continue to be a powerful force within the retail sector, both as marketable brands, and in their ability to secure the prime locations in our town centres. It is beyond the scope of this report to take a political view on the cloning phenomenon. However, the relationship between the creation of floorspace, retail-driven place-making and the impact on historic character, values and assets is an important issue which this report seeks to explore.

Following this overview, this section explores the current economic trends in more detail and summarises the policy guidance and initiatives which underpin the Government's response to the threat of decline. In assessing interventions and activities in a number of historic town centres, the report considers impacts on the historic townscape and built environment, and the wider issue of economic prosperity in historic town centres and high streets.

policy context

Localism Act, 2011

The Localism Act decentralises a wide range of decision-making responsibilities to give communities and local government greater powers and freedoms. One of the most significant provisions of the Act is the emphasis on “Community Rights”.

The Act places a greater onus on genuine public and Third Sector involvement (and in some cases ownership) of assets and decision-making authority. The Act makes provisions for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans which will also have an impact on the way communities are involved in the plan-making process in historic areas.

National Planning Policy Framework, 2012

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) identifies planning guidance and principles to inform the local plan-making process and planning decisions. In broad terms, the NPPF seeks to promote sustainable development and identifies the need for a balanced approach to the role of planning in implementing social, economic and environmental improvements.

The NPPF continues to place significant emphasis on the need to ensure the vitality of town centres known as the “town centres first” approach which tests the appropriateness of sites according to sequential locational preference. The NPPF indicates that local planning authorities should define policies which support the vitality and viability of town centres at the heart of the community. It also encourages LPAs to define a hierarchy of centres which has a degree of resilience to anticipated future economic changes.

The NPPF promotes a diversity of retail offer and the enhancement and creation of markets as part of the town centre experience. It continues to require the sequential testing of applications for main town centre uses. Development of these uses should be located in town centres, in preference to edge of centre locations. Out-of-town locations are only considered suitable if town centre and edge of centre sites are unavailable.

The NPPF also encourages high quality design, including sensitive and innovative responses to local historic development and urban character.



“The need for branding strategies, partnership activities and business support is well-established as an effective way of delivering quick-wins and a sustainable platform for change.”

Temporary changes to the use classes order

As of 30 May 2013, the Government has introduced further temporary reforms to the planning system in order to aid attempts to stimulate economic growth.

Notably, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has brought in a temporary relaxation of the regulations that control changes between different use classes. This makes it possible to permanently convert offices to residential, and, for up to two years, change a range of town centre buildings to alternative uses including shops, finance and professional services, restaurants and cafes, and offices.

The 2013 Budget contained proposals for further changes that would allow retail uses to convert to residential without express consent.

These changes are significant, in that they may shift the emphasis in terms of balancing the mix of uses away from traditional planning controls and towards more active town centre management.

The Portas Review and beyond

Following her appointment by the Prime Minister, retail expert and television presenter Mary Portas published the Portas Review in December 2011. The purpose of the report was to identify recommendations for the future of the high street.

The recommendations provide a good summary of the spectrum of interventions which could be taken forward. Although many of the recommendations rehearse topics which have previously been promoted or endorsed, the report has been particularly effective in moving this policy debate into the mainstream. It reflects the shift in attitudes towards town centre management issues. The need for branding strategies, partnership activities and business support is well-established as an effective way of delivering quick-wins and a sustainable platform for change.

In 2012, the DCLG ran a competitive process for local partnerships to become “Portas Pilots”, offering local partnerships the opportunity to test the “Town Team” approach and pilot some of the other ideas and recommendations set out in the Mary Portas Review. A total of 27 town centres were selected as Portas Pilots in two waves. In May 2013 the Government announced that the High Street Renewal Fund would award funding to seven areas to recognise innovation and efforts in their efforts to revitalise their high streets. These are Herne Hill in London, Northam Road in Southampton, Altrincham, Ipswich, Rotherham, Gloucester and Market Rasen

The Government’s recent *The Future of High Streets* publication provides an overview of progress and successes so far, and discusses future measures that will build on the foundations of the Portas Review.



Above and opposite: Margate – The Turner Contemporary Gallery demonstrates the transformative role of cultural attractions in town centres

retail trends and town centres

Retail development and new investment in town centres remain the most vital elements of the urban regeneration agenda, across the whole country, although cohesion and pride in the quality and economic vibrancy of our town centres arises from much more than just shopping. This is especially true in those locations which also have a strong business identity or offer wider attractions for entertainment, leisure, cultural and tourism activities. These centres are also often those with the greatest heritage qualities.

High street retail investment is still being sustained in or close to prime pitches in most cathedral cities, but the broad retail trends described in the overview continue to provide a very challenging context which affects the prospects for securing successful outcomes elsewhere. Against this background, what are the most significant trends and emerging factors which will influence where and when new retail development and town centre management initiatives take place in the future?

KEY FACTS ABOUT RETAIL

Other reports provide a useful snapshot of the importance of the entire retail economy. The following data is taken from the BIS website (December 2012):

UK annual retail sales are around £330bn, the third largest in the world, after the USA and Japan. The retail sector generates 8% of the GDP of the UK and 5.3% of the Gross Value Added.

The retail industry employs around three million people. One in ten of those in employment currently works in the retail sector – the highest proportion of UK private sector employment.

- There are 450,000 shops in the UK, owned by 300,000 enterprises.
- Shops account for more than a third of all consumer spending.
- Following recent strong growth, internet sales currently account for around 9% of total sales.



450,000
shops in the UK owned by
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enterprises

Commercial Property – Understanding the Wider Context, In Town and Out of Town

According to the Property Data Report 2012 (produced by the Property Industry Alliance – eight leading bodies, including the British Property Federation, British Council of Shopping Centres and Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors – the capital value of retail floorspace, at £227bn, is the largest UK commercial property sector, out of a total of £717bn. It is also a very significant investment asset for the pensions industry. A highly significant finding in this 2012 report relates to the shift of institutional retail investment away from town centres over the last 20 years. In 1993, the proportion of investment held out of town was less than a fifth of that in town centres; the value of property owned out of town has now overtaken that held in town centres. This perhaps helps to explain why the recommendation in the Portas Report to put a temporary ban on all new out-of-town retail development was one of the few which was rejected by the Government.

In November 2010, BIS produced a “health check” guide for high streets and town centres, which highlights many of the questions which need to be asked, especially when taking steps to avert decline in the smaller UK centres. It also identified that the UK has more than 5,400 places named “High Street” and that many more are high streets in everything but name – clearly not all of those will face the same heritage and retail challenges, but most will find that the retail trends described in this section and in the case studies later in this report have resonance with the particular issues to be faced in the future.

Key Drivers of Town Centre Change – Brakes, Challenges and New Opportunities

The key drivers of town centre change over the next decade were highlighted in a recent ATCM/Experian report as being a struggling economy and a multi-channel world, combined with an ageing society and other changing consumer demographics.

Growth in retail sales volumes is predicted to be significantly weaker in the period up to 2018 than during the past decade – and slower than both the long and ultra-long term (that is looking right back to 1970). This will potentially mean that the economic rationale for new floorspace in many town centres is much reduced – and the focus will increasingly be on enhancing and updating the existing town centre fabric. There are risks that town centre footfall will remain static or fall and many consumers will be highly price-conscious, as their discretionary expenditure falls. After a period of negligible (or even negative) real sales growth since 2008, at best forecasters are predicting that real increases (probably of less than 1%) in sales during 2012 will mainly go to on-line sellers and multi-channel e-commerce retailers, with sales through “bricks and mortar” stores continuing to fall. (See Centre for Retail Research.)

Vacancy levels in town centre retail stock have increased threefold over the last five years and although the Local Data Company (UK) estimates have shown a more stable picture during 2011 and 2012, the national average has stood at over 14% for some time. These national average figures for vacancies also hide the reality in two important respects – in many centres, there are also as many as 25–30% of the occupied shops on temporary short-term lets, with little or no rent being paid, whilst there is also significant variation in vacancy levels, according to LDC, between the generally more “healthy” centres, closer to London and the south-east (often with vacancy levels of less than 10%) and the more challenging conditions in centres such as Blackpool, Grimsby and Bradford, where vacancy levels are well over 25%.

The weak UK retail economy, the low growth in retail sales volumes in the high street and the adverse impact of vacant space have all combined with the absence of development finance to create a very difficult climate for new shopping centre development and investment in town centres during the last five years. BCSC has identified that 2012 was the first year since its records

began in 1983 that no significant new shopping centres of over 50,000 sq ft have opened. Retailers are adapting to the challenging economic environment and changing consumer shopping patterns. The impact of e-commerce is particularly significant. According to ONS data, by July 2012, average weekly internet sales were over £500m – an increase of 14.2% on the previous year. Forecasts for the future rate of growth of internet sales vary markedly; the Boston Group has forecast that 23% of UK sales will be on-line by 2016, whereas Deloitte has suggested that this could grow from around 9% now to 14% by 2015, while also suggesting that one major impact of this is that 4 out of 10 high street shops could close.

In some respects, high street retailers are responding to the challenge presented by the growing significance of e-commerce. One such response is through the adoption of “Click & Collect” services, whereby customers can order a product on-line and then collect it from a local store at their convenience. This not only addresses the major weakness of on-line shopping, which is that customers may not be at home when their goods are delivered, but also offers an opportunity for the successful adaptation of traditional high street retailing. John Lewis has led the way in this field and Argos has recently reported that sales through its “Click & Collect” service now account for 31% of the company’s total.

These trends are increasing, leading also to the polarisation of the presence of certain high street retailers in key locations only, with smaller towns facing even greater pressures as they cannot offer the range of comparison shopping that many customers are seeking. Equally, people will travel further to visit those centres which also offer the range of restaurants, cinema screens and other leisure attractions in an environment which reflects their own style or aspirations. If this is not available, other options and e-commerce channels will be considered instead.

Over the past decade, consumers have also generally become more mobile and their attitudes and preferences have changed. They now seek more “experience” and a greater range of choice when shopping. As a result, trips are now longer – many are made beyond local centres – but fewer in number. Accordingly, there has been a steady but increasing shift in retail activity towards the larger destinations, which has impacts in terms of numbers of trips, the amount of spend and the stores generating the highest level of profit.

Against this background, the opportunities in the future for creating developments like Princesshay, in Exeter, or the Arc in Bury St Edmunds, will be relatively few and far between. The exceptions will usually occur in locations where local authorities help to promote deliverable solutions in attractive retail environments and where retailers are still finding it difficult to secure the larger-sized units they need. Even with internet growth, additional floorspace remains one of the primary mechanisms which retailers use to grow profit and if they cannot occupy or adapt existing space, they will often look elsewhere. This means that new retail development solutions are likely to need to become more imaginative in the way in which existing properties (including listed buildings) are altered in order to help prevent further diversion of trade to out-of-centre locations. It is also likely that the average scheme size will be smaller (generally less than 200,000–300,000 sq ft, other than in the largest cities), while a greater level of change than before to the layout of a town’s historic fabric may potentially need to be embraced, following careful consideration and justification, in order to secure the benefits of new investment. All this will help to prevent further diversion of trade to out-of-centre locations.

In terms of the number of new shopping centres, the UK saw an average of nine new centres opening in each of the first 10 years of the 21st century. In 2011 however, there were only three; in 2012 there were none and in 2013 there will again only be three. In 2014 it looks as if only one new project will be completed – in Hereford, where the Old Market is being built via a partnership between the Council, Stanhope and British Land, and will accommodate, among other pre-lets, Debenhams, Waitrose and Odeon in a 300,000 sq ft project. This and other new projects planned for the years ahead exhibit two important retail trends, described below.

Adapting to a Changed Climate – Modern Town Centre Foodstores and New Leisure Space as Stimuli to New Development

Many of the emerging, smaller town centre development schemes are now expected to be anchored by foodstores, leisure space or both. Food operators have become more adept at altering their standard requirements, recognising the benefits of securing new space, while accepting some compromises to their ideal trading or parking formats. In regard to the leisure element, Land Securities recently reported that leisure space had grown four-fold in their new development schemes over the last 10 years. In their major scheme in Leeds, which opens shortly, they are expecting to have 20–30 leisure and catering units. Even in relation to much smaller proposals, such as those in Hereford and Salisbury, there are between 5 and 10 restaurant units now planned as part of a 300,000 sq ft scheme. Such demand is especially true in those town centres which have wider tourist or other attractions and offer the potential for longer stay shopping. Furthermore, leisure space is particularly significant where a new cinema is a key component, but it is especially the trend towards more eating out and more informal restaurants and catering outlets across town centres that is now very much here to stay.

Other Emerging Challenges and Opportunities

In a brief introduction such as this, it is only possible to dwell on some of the main trends and other factors which will either inhibit or stimulate town centre retail growth in the decade ahead. There are many other elements, including the following, which will need to be recognised or responded to – depending on local circumstances. Among the more significant are currently:

- The underlying financial “health” of some multiple retailers, whose debt levels have led to widespread store closures and several “pre-pack” administrations.
- The continued rise of “value” retailing stores, with the main operators often seeking larger unit sizes.
- The strong growth, even in times of economic stress, of many restaurant groups and certain popular fashion retailers, whose demand for new floorspace continues largely unchecked.
- The decline in the number of bank branches and post offices, especially in smaller centres, potentially prompting the need to find new uses for vacated prominent and/or listed buildings.
- The weakness in interest in the investment sector in town centre shops – partly caused by reduced average lease length (down from 25 years to 7 years) and low forecast levels of rental growth.



Borough Market – an independent retail unit helping to animate the street

- The importance of emerging successful independent retailers, whose understanding of local and regional markets can help to foster stability and growth in smaller centres. (Local Data Company reports suggest that independents have seen growth in floorspace in the last year, compared with a decline for national multiples.)
- The limited availability of public sector funding support for public realm, transport or other infrastructure improvements, combined with the underlying lack of economic viability of most new projects. This absence of viability is felt in most locations, due to falls in retail rental values (combined with a lack of rental growth, due to high vacancy levels and low retailer demand) and an absence of development finance.



Herne Hill, which hosts a vibrant street market and uses public space to stage events, such as an open-air cinema, has been praised for empowering local people and rewarded with a share of the Government's £1 million High Street Renewal Award

THE WAY AHEAD

All of these retail trends – negative and positive – have been clearly perceived for much of the recent recessionary period. The fact that they have endured and been persistent for many years in most town centres has led to the need to find a new range of solutions and ideas. Many smaller-scale solutions are emerging and often the successful smaller centres are those which recognise the need to enhance local distinctiveness.

Above all, the retail sector still exhibits many of the characteristics of a dynamic and competitive environment. Those centres which are not able to adapt to new challenges and respond to ever-increasing competitive pressures are likely to lose trade to those centres which can. Clearly, many historic centres have the advantage of an attractive and interesting town centre and environment – but on its own, this may be insufficient to ensure that they have a viable economic future in the years to come. If historic centres are starved of new investment, then it is likely that their built environment will suffer alongside their economic vitality and viability. The sensitive development of new retailing therefore is of vital importance.

The next section sets out 16 case studies which demonstrate ways in which new retail development and town centre management initiatives have been introduced into historic areas.



Old Market, Hereford – An early concept model showing proposals for a sensitively integrated retail and leisure development on the site of the Old Livestock Market.

image courtesy Stanhope PLC/Allies and Morrison Architects/
Leslie Jones Architecture



JONES
BOOTMAKER

TOPMAN

TOPSH

OPMAN

SHOP

Newbury Parkway – a newly completed retail-led commercial and residential scheme, which integrates well with Newbury's many 17th century buildings
image courtesy Standard Life Investments

themes and case studies





overview

A wide range of case studies have been identified to illustrate good practice in retail development, high street renewal and town centre management. The case studies have been organised under three main themes and a series of sub-topics.

Theme 1: Smaller-scale development in historic areas

1A

Renewal of the high street

Rotherham,
South Yorkshire
Bold Street, Liverpool

1B

Refurbishment and reuse of historic assets

Brixton Village, London

1C

Refurbishment or redevelopment of shopping centres

Market Hall, Bolton

1D

Rejuvenation of the town centre visitor economy

Whitstable, Kent
Paignton, Devon

Theme 2: Successful integration of large-scale development with existing historic areas

2A

Creation of a new town centre retail destination alongside the historic city centre

Liverpool One
Princesshay, Exeter

2B

Integration of retail development with the existing historic retail core

Arc, Bury St Edmunds
Chapelfield, Norwich
N1 Centre, Islington

2C

Integration of a supermarket with the existing historic core

Neston, Cheshire

Theme 3: Entrepreneurial involvement and partnerships

3A

Regeneration led by entrepreneurs

Holt, Norfolk

3B

Town centre management and Business Improvement Districts

Horsham Unlimited,
West Sussex
Heart of Hitchin,
Hertfordshire

3C

Town centre management and Townscape Heritage Initiatives

Darwen

THEME 1

Smaller-scale development in historic areas

Theme 1 considers smaller-scale examples of retail development. These examples illustrate the transformative effect of focused investment. The case studies illustrate a wide range of scales from building to street and highlight the role that sensitive improvements can play in creating a rejuvenated and successful retail environment without comprehensively altering urban grain or historic fabric.

These case studies range from high street renewal projects where the local authority and other partners have intervened to reinvigorate historic shopping streets, such as Rotherham and Bold Street in Liverpool, to schemes where specific heritage assets have been sensitively refurbished and equipped to accommodate and reflect modern retail trends.

Increasingly, consumers are looking for a leisure 'experience' and a greater sense of destination, where once they would have been simply visiting a range of shops. Projects such as the revitalisation of the listed Brixton market have tapped into this trend, reflecting a wider shift from a purely retail function to a wider emphasis on the visitor economy. The historic environment can often provide a characterful and distinctive backdrop to this type of end-use.

Market Hall, Bolton image © Nick Kane





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Clockwise from top:
1. Imperial Buildings
2. Rotherham Town Centre Shoppers' Directory
both images courtesy Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

“ We worked hard to understand the needs and preferences of our existing shoppers and to identify those people who could shop in the town but who choose not to, with the aim of finding out their reasons and working to overcome them. This feedback shaped the strategy for the town’s regeneration.”

Bernadette Rushton, Retail Investment Manager, Rotherham

1A. Renewal of the High Street

ROTHERHAM, SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Town Centre Renewal–Rotherham Renaissance 2001–2010

Rotherham is a striking example of a town that has overcome formidable odds to revive its retail and town centre fortunes. Rotherham is a historic market town that grew rapidly in the 19th century and is indelibly associated with the heavy industries of the Don Valley, principally coal mining and steel manufacture. With the decline of these industries in the 1980s unemployment rose and the town's economic base was severely weakened. Shopping in the compact town centre was already facing heavy competition from Sheffield's Meadowhall Centre and the Parkgate Shopping Centre, both offering a wide range of national multiples and the added inducement of free parking. By 2000 Rotherham residents were spending less than 1 pound in 10 in the town, especially amongst those with higher disposable incomes. It was clear that Rotherham needed to redefine its role as a shopping destination, concentrating on what was unique and distinctive.

In 2001, and with the help of Yorkshire Forward, the former Regional Development Agency, the Council embarked on its Renaissance programme. The Local Strategic Partnership has also been active in its support. The strategy adopted was wide reaching, combining environmental measures, financial help for investors, incentives for shoppers and a vigorous marketing campaign. Government assistance also came in the form of the Empty Shops Initiative.

The historic character of the town's compact centre was used as a positive asset in promoting the town, and Imperial Buildings, an Edwardian arcade, was restored. A Townscape Heritage Initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund has progressed with gradual investment in the repair and maintenance of the older buildings and investment in the public realm. In recognition of the importance of public transport, the bus and railway stations have also been improved. A shopper's discount scheme was introduced; the Shop Local card (with the slogan "something different on your doorstep") has been taken up by 15,000 people, providing a valuable direct marketing database. British Land, the owners of both Meadowhall and Parkgate, agreed to support a free bus service into Rotherham

Local Authority Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

thereby offering a free park and ride facility for the town centre. The Council used its role as a property owner to kickstart investment and supported a Business Vitality grant scheme providing capital grants and subsidised rents for specialist and niche businesses that would help to raise the quality and profile of the town centre. This initiative has recently been extended to selected national multiples.

The retail effort has been complemented by wider town centre initiatives, including a programme of outdoor events and public realm works, the latter funded by Yorkshire Forward. The Council's retail team is currently working on incentives to stay in the town centre in the "twilight" hours of 5pm to 8pm, encouraging family restaurants. The retail effort has been complemented by wider town centre initiatives, including a programme of outdoor events, floodlighting landmarks like Rotherham Minster and public realm works. Rotherham's success is evident in its recent performance – 44 new businesses in 2010 and 29 in 2011, vacant units reduced by 5% and footfall up by 6% in one year. Another mark of this success is that Rotherham received a large share of the DCLG's 2013 High Street Renewal Award, which rewards places that are already delivering effective and innovative plans to regenerate their town centres.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Understanding shopper behaviour.
- Forming a comprehensive strategy.
- Combining physical regeneration, retail investment and development, transport and accessibility, and a safe and welcoming environment.
- Supporting the strategy with marketing and promotion.
- Judicious use of public funds from Yorkshire Forward, the Heritage Lottery Fund and others.
- Using heritage to play an effective role in the Council's multi-faceted approach.



SuttonWorsh
To Let
0151 207 9339

Bold Street offers a range of independent shops
image courtesy McCoy Wynne Photography

1A. Renewal of the High Street

BOLD STREET, LIVERPOOL

Historic shopping street in the heart of the city, rejuvenated as part of the Ropewalks Investment Programme

Bold Street lies at the eastern edge of Liverpool’s city centre shopping area, climbing uphill as a secondary extension of the primary Church Street retail axis. Anchored at its bottom end by Central Station, the street terminates with the striking landmark of St Luke’s, the bombed-out church at the top of the hill.

Bold Street was laid out as part of a grid in the 1780s as a Ropewalk, making ropes for sailing ships. The area to the south took the name Ropewalks in the 1990s as part of a major regeneration project, precipitated in part by the designation of a new conservation area a few years earlier. Bold Street was one of the first places in the country to benefit from Townscape Heritage Initiative funding. The scheme was allocated £1.5m in 1998, with key developments in the area already having attracted regeneration funding. Bold Street was a case study in English Heritage’s 2005 report, chosen as an example of a city district using its historic distinctiveness as an asset to nurture retail investment. Since that date, the retail centre of gravity in Liverpool has shifted west with the enormous Liverpool One development.

Bold Street, once Liverpool’s most fashionable shopping street, has evolved and is taking on a role as a location for specialist and independent traders, complementing the mainstream multiples elsewhere in the city centre.

Local Authority Liverpool City Council

An annual festival in the Ropewalks area celebrates the creative aspects of the quarter.

A report for the City Council in February 2011 by consultants Drivers Jonas Deloitte, A Strategy for the Main Retail Area, sets out a framework for the next 10 to 15 years. The report recommends stepping up the promotion of Bold Street and the neighbouring Renshaw Street area as an independent quarter, fully pedestrianising Bold Street and capitalising on links between the Knowledge Quarter, the universities and the other parts of the Ropewalks. The Central Village development will integrate directly with the refurbished Central Station, bringing new hotels, a cinema, new city centre homes and 240,000 sq ft of mixed commercial floorspace to the Bold Street area.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Using the historic character of Bold Street and Ropewalks to establish an independent offer, complementing the mainstream multiples that are located elsewhere in the city.
- Taking advantage of the nearby student population to provide an alternative retail offer.
- Opportunity for environmental improvements including traffic-free shopping.



Bold Street’s creative culture is celebrated with an annual festival
image courtesy City Central BID

1 B. Refurbishment and Reuse of Historic Assets

BRIXTON VILLAGE, LONDON

Renaissance of historic market buildings and nurturing of a contemporary market offer

The Granville Arcade and Market Row were first refurbished as part of the Brixton City Challenge programme in the 1990s. The Granville Arcade was later earmarked for demolition and replacement by flats. Changing market conditions and a decision by the Secretary of State to list the building in 2010 prompted a change of direction and a decision to reinvest in the market itself. Rebranded as Brixton Village, the stalls spill out into the adjacent Market Row, another listed market building in the town centre.

The listing acknowledged the historic significance of Brixton Market as the commercial and social heart of the Afro-Caribbean community that settled in Brixton after the Second World War. This heritage is still evident in the way the buildings and streets are used today. The open shopfronts and fluidity between indoor and outdoor spaces is the most obvious manifestation.

The market now includes around 25 new restaurants, cafes and clothing/gift shops, all of which are relatively compact with a fresh, modern design. Due to the enclosed character of the market, the covered streets have a unique quality and host live bands and stalls selling cakes and street food. The renaissance of the market was undertaken by the landowner, London & Associated Properties Ltd who brought in Space Makers Agency to turn around this part of the market which had historically high voids. A key element in the early stages of the project was flexibility in letting, allowing the more remote back row units to be used as incubators for new traders and pop-up stores.

London Borough of Lambeth
London & Associated Properties Ltd
Business and Marketing Support Space Makers Agency

Brixton Village is full of character and is drawing in visitors from far afield. It has a growing reputation for shopping, socialising and eating and it is clear that the imaginative strategy to improve occupancy and the reuse of the market adopted by the landowners and agents has played a part in turning around perceptions of the wider area. Although this has achieved a great deal and has created some momentum in terms of regeneration initiatives, it is important that the existing culture, which is such a vital part of Brixton's character, is not undermined.

"The growing popularity of the revamped Granville Arcade, also known as Brixton Village market, is making it a destination for young professionals and graduates." Evening Standard, 11 April 2012

An attractive shopfront



LESSONS LEARNT

- Refurbishment of historic asset in contemporary market and creative uses.
- Celebrating the cultural and social history of the area.
- Flexible rent policy by landowner to nurture new businesses and innovation.

Brixton Village has become a popular destination for eating and drinking



“ We put out an open call for ideas, offering shops for up to three months rent free to temporary creative and community projects, or business start-ups with an ambition to become long-term tenants. The response was huge.”

Space Makers Agency website



Dramatic transformation of the interior of Market Hall, Bolton, with retail outlets on two levels image © Nick Kane

“ In design terms, our lucky break was the discovery that the original cast iron frame suited a ‘normal’ shop unit width of 7m. This allowed us to slot units between the column and the whole two storey unit is completely independent of the cast iron, sitting on the existing vaults. We used 3D modelling to test and develop the design so we could understand its impact on the character of the hall, including views of the roof.”

James McCosh, Partner, van Heyningen and Haward Architects

1C. Refurbishment or Redevelopment of Shopping Centres

MARKET HALL, BOLTON

Revitalisation of Town Centre Shopping through Restoration and Adaptation of a Flagship Listed Building

Bolton's Market Hall was built in 1854 to designs by G.T. Robinson and is listed grade II. In the 1980s an indoor shopping centre was developed by Grosvenor immediately to the north. The stallholders were decanted to the town's other central market and the indoor space was given over to small kiosks. In this way, the old Hall effectively became the vestibule for the new shopping centre.

Warner Estate Holdings Ltd bought the shopping centre and negotiated with the freeholders (Bolton Council) for a major overhaul of the centre, including the market. Drivers for the project included increased competition from Manchester and concern about the generally run-down appearance of the kiosks in the Hall and the state of the perimeter units on the surrounding streets, a conservation area. There was also an acute awareness of the shortage of standard format high street retail units in the town centre, which was constrained by the Victorian plot widths and heavy masonry construction.

Chapman Taylor, the lead architects for the shopping centre, sought another practice to work with them on the Market Hall. Following a limited competition, Van Heyningen and Haward Architects were appointed to repair, adapt and upgrade the listed building. Working closely with English Heritage and Council planners, the team ensured that their design was both tested and inspired by extensive historical research.

New retail units were slotted in between the original columns and facing into the hall. This allowed the shops around the perimeter to face unequivocally outwards once more, into the streets and thereby considerably improving the public realm. Particular care was taken to make the new interventions reversible wherever possible and to develop servicing, fire, mechanical and electrical strategies that respected the significance of the historic fabric. In the event, the energy figures at the design stage were rather better than in a conventional new build scheme.

Warner Estate Holdings Ltd
Van Heyningen and Haward Architects/Chapman Taylor
Bolton Council

The consent also included a new independent building next to the hall. This was prompted by the discovery of evidence of a former fish market building, demolished in the 1930s to widen the road. This investment has helped the viability of the restoration project

Since the Market Hall reopened the national and local conditions have had an impact and the quality of Bolton's shopping may have declined a little. Nonetheless, the Market Hall project has not only restored a fine Victorian centrepiece but it has also rejuvenated the adjacent streets and extended the range of units available in the town centre.

The exterior has been faithfully restored

image © Nick Kane



LESSONS LEARNT

- Commitment to architectural excellence underpinned by historical research.
- Recognition of modern retail needs in the brief.
- Public realm benefits by restoring the functionality of the street frontages.
- All major interventions reversible in the listed building.

1 D. Rejuvenation of the Town Centre Visitor Economy

WHITSTABLE, KENT

Revival of Town Centre Shopping and Businesses 1991–2005

Whitstable is a small and characterful fishing port on the north Kent coast. It is also a seaside resort, particularly popular for windsurfing. Whitstable has been extremely successful in responding to its historic context and re-establishing the town centre as a popular destination for cultural and culinary attractions. The historic harbour, beach setting and charming historic grain have created an ideal context for the sustained growth of markets, galleries, restaurants, independent shops and craft.

Despite its attractiveness it had suffered from a decline in its fortunes, partly because of changes in holiday-making and partly because of its relative isolation. Symptoms of these problems were high vacancy rates, low property values and buildings in disrepair. Although the main landowner in the town centre, the Whitstable Non-Ecclesiastical Charities, was content to receive modest rents from its local tenants there was widespread underinvestment.

By the 1980s it was evident to Canterbury City Council that the town required a focused programme of support, planning and investment. Initial grant programmes operated on a small scale for many years (town scheme, Section 77 and Conservation Area Partnership) and these achieved a slowing of the rate of deterioration.

Single Regeneration Grant funding from the Regional Development Agency SEEDA was combined with a new Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) for a major push on town centre investment, coupled with work around the harbour. A new body, the Whitstable Improvement Partnership, was set up in 1990 with support from the Whitstable Oyster Fishery Company and the City Council. A physical catalyst for the project was the redevelopment of the City Council's own Horsebridge site, a miscellany of underused property in the heart of the town. The site was chosen as the Critical Project for the THI and put to a range of public uses including a new community arts venue.

Principal landowners Whitstable Non-Ecclesiastical Charities, Whitstable Oyster Fishery Company
Local authority Canterbury City Council

The conservation grants were used to repair building fabric and improve shopfronts, eventually assisting 148 properties. The programme was complemented by an active marketing campaign and the Whitstable Festival, championing the towns' restaurants and shopping alongside a programme of cultural events.

Whitstable's combination of self-promotion and investment has been helped by a new high speed rail connection to London that together have enabled it to turn the corner. The building stock is in good condition and retail vacancy rates are around 5%, well below the national average. Supermarkets on the outskirts of the town on the Thanet Road have not impeded the town's economic vitality. The harbour area, the economic and historic heart of the town, is the next major conservation challenge.

Opposite – clockwise from bottom left:

1. Independent retail on Harbour Street
2. The Horsebridge Arts and Community Centre
3. Royal Native Oyster Stores

images 2&3 courtesy Tim Stubbings Photography/timstubbings.co.uk

LESSONS LEARNT

- Long-term commitment to repair programme – 10 years or so to achieve the grants take-up.
- Combination of capital works with a marketing strategy and cultural investment.
- Successful redevelopment of a key town centre site as a catalyst to investment in the existing fabric.
- Enlightened patronage by major landowners and the City Council.





Gadgets "N" Things image © Holly Smith

“ One can now look at the early photographs of Winner Street in the 1880s and clearly recognise the street today. The street is looking forward and is no longer lined with empty shops. Trade is improving and the activity in the street is lively and attractive.”

Torbay Council, Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme at Paignton, Final Report 2009, page 5

1D. Rejuvenation of town centre visitor economy

WINNER STREET, PAIGNTON, DEVON

Heritage-led regeneration of secondary shopping street combined with imaginative rebranding English Heritage HERS project 2001-4

Paignton on the South Devon coast has Celtic origins and had borough status in the 13th century. It remained little more than a fishing village until the 19th century when, with the creation of a new harbour and the arrival of the railway, Paignton took on a new role as a holiday resort.

Winner Street was old Paignton's high street and still has traces of narrow medieval burgage plots. With the growth of the Victorian town its commercial heart moved towards the seafront and the Esplanade and Winner Street was steadily eclipsed. By 1999 there were numerous warning signs about Winner Street's future; fifteen vacant shops, poor building maintenance, vacant upper floors, the impending closure of the Palace Theatre and an increasing number of applications to convert shops to flats. The local area had a very low economic base, with the Coverdale ward being one of the poorest in the country.

The District Council approached English Heritage for financial assistance, who acknowledged the severity of the problem but wanted to be sure of long term solutions, recognising that it would not be enough to repair the historic fabric without addressing the underlying causes. A specialist marketing consultant was appointed, who identified the problems and saw the way forward for a complementary retail offer that would capitalise on Winner Street's historic character.

Following agreement on the method, Torbay Council successfully applied for a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS), with an initial budget of £900,000 over four years.

Local authority Torbay Council

The Council initiated the project with a meeting with the Paignton Preservation Society and local traders. Survey work established the condition of the properties and was combined with an examination of vacancy levels, including upper floors. Signpost Housing Association joined the scheme and sought opportunities for creating flats for older people and new family homes, replacing houses in multiple occupation.

The scheme had a dramatic effect, reducing a formerly high crime rate by two thirds. A target area between Palace Street and New Street was identified and a pilot project was undertaken, involving the repair of a typical shop and reuse of the upper floors. On the advice of the marketing consultant, traders were encouraged to adopt a common theme (based on childhood) and use a distinctive motif, a sculptural copper projecting sign.

Over the lifetime of the scheme 29 shopfronts were repaired or reinstated, 10 vacant commercial buildings were brought back into use and some 25,000 sq ft of commercial floorspace was improved.

Since the scheme ended Winner Street has managed to retain its special market position, and although there are continuing concerns about building maintenance, overall vacancy rates are low.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Clear identification of problems.
- Marketing strategy based on the historic character of the street and comprehensive investment strategy.
- Housing investment and over shop projects complementing the retail investment.

THEME 2

Successful integration of large-scale development with existing historic areas

Theme 2 considers the largest and most significant examples of retail development, ranging from schemes such as Princesshay and Liverpool One which involve the creation of major new pieces of city alongside the historic core, to development where new retail floorspace has been integrated within the existing urban fabric, such as the Arc in Bury St Edmunds and Chapelfield in Norwich.

In many of these examples, the scale of development has been driven by a commercial imperative to transform the quality and format of retail and commercial floorspace available to tenants in the existing town centre. Often, the available supply of retail floorspace simply cannot meet the demands and aspirations of the modern retailer. Without a decisive response, it is conceivable that investors and retailers may begin to look at alternative locations, including competing centres or out-of-town destinations.

Although investment of this type is a positive economic outcome, this degree of transformation can have a damaging effect on the existing townscape if the design of the scheme is not carefully managed.

Since the publication of the 2005 *Retail Development in Historic Areas* report, a number of innovative retail schemes have come to fruition which reflect a shift in the approach to the design of major retail schemes within and adjacent to historic cores. From a heritage perspective, these schemes have been successful in cloaking the scale of development. This is achieved by prioritising a contribution to the City rather than the scheme in isolation; by achieving continuity with the past rather than focusing purely on the present; and by placing greatest strategic design emphasis on the public realm rather than buildings.

This theme also considers the successful integration of foodstores in historic urban settings such as Neston in Cheshire.





Arc, Bury St Edmunds photograph © Graham Portlock

2A. Creation of a new town centre retail destination alongside the historic city centre

LIVERPOOL ONE

Regional Shopping Centre, more than 1m sq ft substantially let by 2009

In the early 1970s Liverpool was third in the country amongst prime retail locations. By the mid-1990s, faced with competition from its rivals, its national position had dropped to 17th. The city had fewer shops than Manchester or Nottingham, and barely half the number to be found in Glasgow. There was poor provision for major anchor stores. Furthermore, because of the way the city had developed from the river and postwar replanning, the shopping area was excessively linear.

In 1999 the City Council aimed to reverse Liverpool's retail fortunes through comprehensive development of a swathe of underused land around Paradise Street. It prepared a planning framework for the Paradise Street Development Area that envisaged 1m sq ft of retail development including two department stores, supported by a mix of other uses, sustainable transport and strong pedestrian links to its surroundings. This document was underpinned by the Council's Urban Design Study, which focused on the character of the area and proposed the retention of historic buildings and, where possible, the preservation and reinstatement of the historic street pattern. There was also an ambition for a mix of high quality architecture that would have its own identity but also reinforce the character of the area.

The resulting development for Paradise Street (later rebranded as Liverpool One) was to become Liverpool's largest single building programme for a century. With Grosvenor appointed as the lead developer, a masterplan was prepared by BDP that envisaged five distinct, but overlapping, character areas. Some 26 architectural practices were engaged in the final project which included offices, housing and a new public park alongside the retail development. The design and construction challenge was formidable, not least because of the need to assimilate with the rest of the city centre and to be an appropriate contribution to the newly inscribed Liverpool World Heritage Site.

Developer Grosvenor Developments Ltd
Masterplanners BDP
Local authority Liverpool City Council

Development started before the recession and Liverpool One was substantially let by 2009. It has put the city back on the map as a regional shopping centre and has generated 5,000 jobs, in addition to a substantial hike in rateable value and ground rent returns.

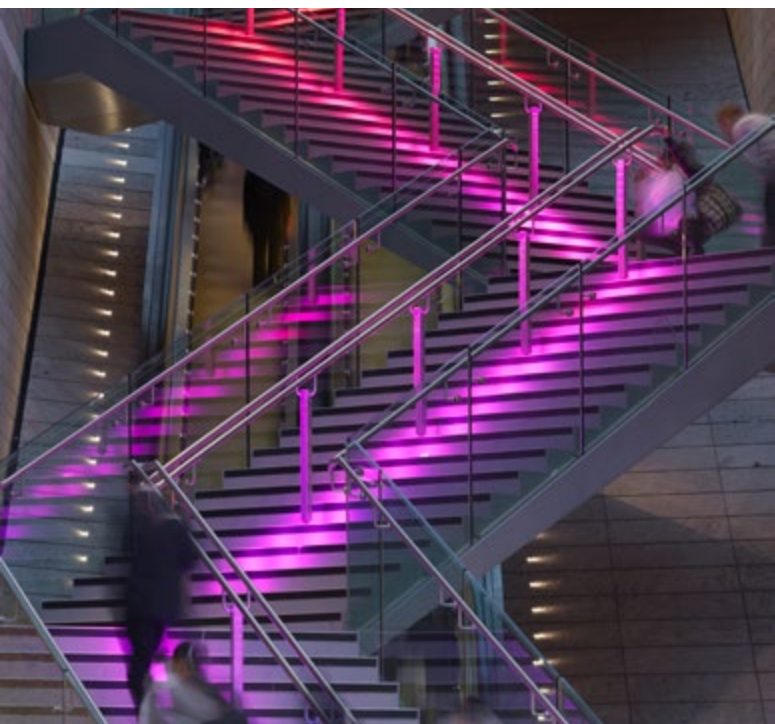
“Instead of a US-style mall, imposed as though it were an alien invader, Grosvenor took the enlightened decision to create a retail experience based largely on the street patterns and grain of the existing city. The result is a series of street blocks, most designed by a different architectural hand, that gives huge character to a substantial new quarter.”

Paul Finch, architecture critic
Liverpool One Remaking A City Centre,
David Littlefield p165

LESSONS LEARNT

- Long-term commitment of Grosvenor as the lead developer.
- Comprehensive planning studies by Liverpool City Council.
- Mixed uses.
- Maximum permeability and development woven into the historic city centre.
- Mix of architects.

Opposite – clockwise from bottom left
1&3. Details of the Paradise Street scheme
2. The scheme has been successful in creating walking routes
which respond to the existing city
images 1&2 © Dennis Gilbert/VIEW



DEB

Looking towards the Cathedral
image courtesy Land Securities and
The Crown Estate



2A. Creation of a New Town Centre Retail Destination alongside the Historic City Centre

PRINCESSHAY, EXETER

City Centre redevelopment – 5.25 hectare, 390,000 sq ft retail, 510 parking spaces and residential use, opened 2007

Exeter's centre was bombed during the Second World War, as one of the cathedral cities targeted by the Luftwaffe in the Baedeker raids. The part of the city most affected was the High Street and the area to the east of the Cathedral. The quarter was rebuilt in the 1950s to the designs of the pioneer town planner Thomas Sharp and renamed Princesshay. It included covered arcades and open space around the city's Roman walls.

By the 1990s the area was in need of renewal. Sharp's civic design principles had endured, but the architecture was jaded and the retail floorplates were inadequate and could not meet the city's shopping needs. In 1998 Land Securities put forward an ambitious plan for comprehensive redevelopment and a new shopping mall. This triggered fierce opposition and although the City Council was minded to grant consent, the Secretary of State called in the application for a public inquiry. At this point the developer, faced with a lengthy delay and an uncertain outcome, withdrew the scheme. Still committed to Exeter, however, Land Securities began a new collaborative approach, working closely with the English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), as well as the City Council and local organisations.

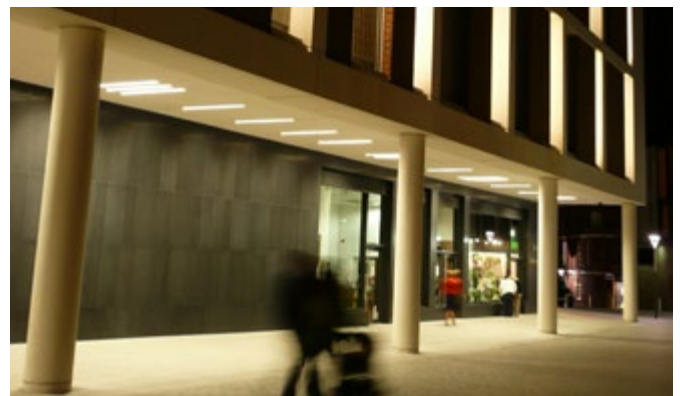
The starting point for the new approach was a new conservation area appraisal that evaluated the Princesshay area in its context, including the archaeological significance of the site. This was underpinned by a thorough analysis of the retail and commercial imperatives. A new brief was produced that identified the best aspects of the Sharp plan, including views to and from the Cathedral. Three distinct sub-areas or quarters were identified and it was agreed that different architects should be engaged to design the buildings. The ambition was for a resilient masterplan that would cope with future needs and allow incremental change. A new public space was created at Princesshay Square, animated by cafes and restaurants, and a particular effort was

Architects Chapman Taylor with Panter Hudspith, Wilkinson Eyre
Landscape architects Livingston Eyre Associates
Local authority Exeter City Council

made to maintain the connectivity with other parts of the city centre.

One important side-effect of the new Princesshay scheme was that by meeting the demand for standard-sized units for high street retailers, it has not been at the expense of the fabric or the viability of traditional shopping streets elsewhere in the city. On the contrary, in Fore Street the older properties have been taken on by specialist retailers and the street has developed a niche role that is complementing the mainstream offer in Princesshay.

Contemporary Architecture image courtesy Panter Hudspith Architects



LESSONS LEARNT

- Underpinning historic research and townscape analysis.
- Complementary relationship with Fore Street.
- Collaboration with partners and community engagement.
- Mix of architects.
- Adaptable plan.

2B. Integration of Retail Development with the Existing Historic Retail Core **ARC, BURY ST EDMUNDS**

£100m scheme with approximately 380,000 sq ft of floorspace, 62 residential units and a new theatre as part of a reinvigorated town centre retail circuit, completed in 2009/10

Following the relocation of the old cattle market, the site was redeveloped as a surface car park to serve the town centre. St Edmundsbury Borough Council identified a significant opportunity for redevelopment and prepared a planning brief for comprehensive redevelopment of the site. Centros Miller were selected as a developer partner and appointed Hopkins Architects to prepare proposals.

The size of the site and the contentious prospect of the loss of car parking spaces led the team to the conclusion that only half the site should be taken forward initially. The design process was characterised by a significant amount of dialogue between the developer, the architects, planners and Councillors to ensure the early involvement of the planning authority. Other groups such as English Heritage were also regularly involved, which helped to establish a good degree of consensus at a political and stakeholder level. The scheme also involved extensive community consultation.

Arc has delivered 62 residential units, 33 retail units, a 80,000 sq ft department store (Debenhams) and 212 underground parking spaces.

The scheme has generally succeeded in its aim to integrate with the historic urban fabric and townscape. In particular, the development has achieved a balance in tying into the existing network of tight medieval passages and openings, whilst creating new streets and a public square.

Local authority St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Architects Hopkins

Developer Centros Miller

Arc has extended the existing shopping experience in Bury St Edmunds without compromising the offer or vitality of the existing units on St John Street. Indeed, the scheme has actually reinforced the pattern of independent shops in other parts of the town centre by providing sufficient prime, modern space to facilitate the retention and rejuvenation of smaller retail units. The strengthened retail offer has enabled Bury to sustain its catchment area, making it more competitive with regional centres at Cambridge and Ipswich. New residential development has also played a key role in bringing greater life and vibrancy into the town centre.

The architecture of the scheme is unashamedly contemporary but makes extensive use of timber and in this respect nods towards the Suffolk vernacular, sometimes in an idiosyncratic way. The roofline is a strong point. The Debenhams building has a more flamboyant style adjacent to the square.

Hopkins was also commissioned by the Council to design the Apex theatre alongside the main scheme. Apex offers a flexible space for a wide range of different uses and functions. This versatility is important for the viability of the operation, but it also ensures a wide community appeal and in this way contributes to the overall character and vibrancy of the town centre, which appeals to the whole community.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Positive response to existing urban grain and historic character.
- Creation of a complementary offer and an extended retail circuit, rather than a competitive alternative shopping destination.
- Out-of-hours life and vibrancy achieved through new dwellings in the town centre and a new theatre.



Clockwise from bottom left:

1. Apex theatre image courtesy Morley van Sternberg

2. New retail development with dwellings above photograph © Graham Portlock

3. View of new shopping street from apartment balcony photograph © Graham Portlock





The scheme has set a positive precedent for the area and newer buildings, such as the Marks and Spencer store adjacent to Chapelfield, have been designed to relate to the existing historic fabric in terms of their size and scale



The scheme includes some street-based retailing and public space

2B. Integration of Retail Development with the Existing Historic Retail Core **CHAPELFIELD, NORWICH**

530,000 sq ft retail, Anchor store (House of Fraser), 118 apartments and 1,000 car parking spaces, completed in 2005

Norwich is a cathedral city of renown and was one of the largest cities in medieval England. It remains an important centre for employment and education, as well as being a regional shopping centre with a hinterland across rural Norfolk and beyond. The challenge of accommodating new shopping development into a tight-knit medieval core had been a continuing challenge for the city.

The Chapelfield development was completed in 2005 and was included in the original Retail Development report. The scheme is the latest of a series of interventions in the heart of Norwich, aimed at widening the retail offer. Like the smaller Castle Mall development in 1993, Chapelfield faced the challenge of how to insert a large shopping centre into the midst of a major historic city. For many years a chocolate factory – latterly Nestlé – had stood on the site on the south-western edge of the city, but its closure left a sizeable hole in the urban fabric. To mitigate the bulk of the new centre and to respond appropriately to the surroundings, the design team were encouraged to carry out an appraisal of the history of the area and its buildings. The resulting design moderated the bulk of the new centre by screening it with 118 single aspect apartments.

The development by Capital Shopping Centres of some 530,000 sq ft included 90 shops, a House of Fraser department store and 1,000 car parking spaces. In conventional retail terms Chapelfield appears to have met its expectations and the scheme won a British Council of Shopping Centres Gold Award in 2006.

The centre fits in with its surroundings acceptably on its north side, but interior design and appearance is unexceptional, with conventional high street stores and nothing to distinguish it from many similar centres. It is almost too self-contained and some consider that it does not feel part of the city centre. The greater concern at present is that the anchor store (House of Fraser), which inevitably has a large footprint, blocks off the prospect of a link through to the historic

Developer Capital Shopping Centres/Lend Lease
Architects BDP (Peter Colman)
Local authority Norwich City Council

area to the south. St Stephens Street, a secondary and struggling shopping street, would be the main beneficiary of improved permeability through the area.

The City Council has recognised the problem and in 2009 commissioned an outline masterplan of the St Stephens area that places particular emphasis on pedestrian connections and suggests new ways of managing servicing and deliveries.



LESSONS LEARNT

- Strengthened retail offer without harming the heritage assets of the city.
- More to be done to integrate with its immediate surroundings including other primary but relatively vulnerable shopping streets.

Shoppers are encouraged to use existing routes, which are integrated with new areas of public realm

2B. Integration of Retail Development with the Existing Historic Retail Core N1 CENTRE, ISLINGTON

A skilful mixing of retail and leisure uses that supports cultural activities and urban vitality, including the evening economy, in an open street-based scheme

As noted, the past four years have been a testing time for town centres and retailers alike. The growth of internet shopping, the economic downturn and the threat of civic unrest have all left their scars on the fabric of the city. Any town centre development that can survive these pressures can indeed claim to have been successful.

N1 in Islington, originally considered in the 2005 publication was a combined retail and leisure development undertaken by Centros Miller. When opened it combined high street names such as GAP, HMV and Borders with a Vue multiplex cinema, restaurants, including Yo Sushi and Wagamama, and a music venue. It was carefully integrated into the street environment of Upper Street and provided a public (open 24 hours) route to connect to the shops in Liverpool Road and Chapel Market. Its architectural style was undemonstrative and contemporary, referenced to the scale and character of the surrounding area.

Seven years on N1 Islington is still a successful development. Despite changes in occupation, the blend of retail, food, drink and leisure continues to work. Significantly, although the main anchor, Borders, has closed, it has been replaced by clothes retailer H&M, and the centre is still fully let and occupied, even on the upper levels. The public realm in the centre has become established as part of the wider circulation routes within the Angel Islington and is actively managed. Stalls, markets, events and festivals happen regularly and all add life to the wider area.

There is strong evidence that the N1 centre has made a very positive contribution to the continuing economic success of the wider area. The relationship of the Centre to both Liverpool Road and Upper Street has been well thought out with shops presenting display

Local authority London Borough of Islington
Developer Centros Miller

windows and entrances to both the streets and the pedestrianised precinct. Servicing is unobtrusive. Rather than form a break in the street frontages, the N1 centre reinforces the streets within which it is set and it has now blended seamlessly into the wider urban fabric.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of the success of the centre has been its impact on the wider area. The new through route forms an important link to the street market in Chapel Market, which is an important facility in the local area. One of the casualties of the changes was Woolworths, though this has been replaced by a Waitrose whose position, right opposite the end of the pedestrianised street, further underpins the wider offer of the area.

N1 Islington was designed to fit into the historic grain of The Angel, and it has done this successfully. It is thriving as a centre in its own right, has become embedded into the urban fabric and provides an important diversification of the local retail offer. It has become a valued facility for local people.



LESSONS LEARNT

- Careful consideration of scale and mass, masking the bulk of development from the most sensitive areas of historic townscape.
- Street-based scheme increases permeability, which makes a positive contribution to the town centre environment.

Public space encourages shoppers to linger image courtesy N1 Centre



Clockwise from bottom left:
1. Street-based retailing that connects with its surrounds
2. The scheme's design cleverly hides its bulk
3. Events draw in local people and visitors
images 1&3 courtesy N1 Centre





2C. Integration of a Supermarket with the Existing Historic Core NESTON, CHESHIRE

Town Centre Supermarket, edge of conservation area, 35,000 sq ft, Opened November 2010

Neston is a small town on the western side of the Wirral peninsula. Outwardly prosperous, its historic character masks pockets of deprivation and the town's shopping has lost out in recent years to the competitiveness of larger rival centres and out-of-town superstores. Of particular concern to the planners at Ellesmere Port and Neston Council was the loss of food shopping. The amount of food shopping by local people in Neston had fallen over a 10-year period from an already low 50% to below 30%. This was having a severe effect on trade generally, including non-food outlets. With a Government grant through the Market Towns Initiative, resident surveys were conducted. Following a thorough analysis of shopping needs, the local authority decided that Neston needed a medium-sized supermarket in the town centre to stem the loss of food shopping. The store needed to be big enough to be a powerful attractor, yet without competing with the non-food offer in Neston. A retail impact analysis suggested that a foodstore of around 35,000 sq ft combined with a car park serving the town centre would be appropriate.

The next step was to find a suitable location in Neston, close enough to the High Street to stimulate its shops but without harming the character or appearance of the conservation area. A capacity study was undertaken of a site behind the town hall and established that it could accommodate a store of the required size, using the slope of the site to take two decks of car parking below the store and leaving enough room at the street level for an outdoor market. A bespoke design was called for and there was a determination to avoid architectural clichés. FaulknerBrowns architects supported by Buttress Fuller Alsop Williams Architects drew on the palette of vernacular materials and applied these imaginatively without recourse to imitation. A local housing association, Dane Housing, took on the management of the new homes created as part of the scheme.

Developer CTP

Architects FaulknerBrowns

Local authority Ellesmere Port and Neston (now Cheshire West and Chester)

The project was not without controversy. Neston residents were divided on the need for a supermarket and there was a vociferous campaign of opposition. The Council remained steadfast, however, and planning permission was granted in 2007. Now that the store is open it is trading well, the market is flourishing and the decline of the High Street appears to have been stemmed.

Opposite – clockwise from bottom left:

1. Detailed design

2&3. The supermarket scheme creates new routes through the site

all images courtesy FaulknerBrowns

LESSONS LEARNT

- Planning policy underpinned by sound understanding of the retail market.
- Thorough assessment of suitable sites and their capacity.
- Restriction of the store to food sales only through S106 Agreement.
- A commitment to high quality design and the use of an independent architectural consultant.
- Integration of the open market and direct pedestrian link to the High Street.
- Residential development to add out of hours vitality.

THEME 3

Entrepreneurial involvement and partnerships

The final theme focuses explicitly on the role of partnerships and entrepreneurs in driving the regeneration of historic cores. As noted in the overview, the 2005 Retail Development in Historic Areas report did not consider town centre management and other forms of partnership working, but clearly this type of intervention can play a crucial role in reinforcing the vitality and viability of town centres.

Four case studies have been identified – the first of which, Holt, demonstrates the role that entrepreneurial spirit can have in maintaining competitive advantage and responding to the qualities of place that define a setting for the historic core.

Hitchin and Horsham provide examples of more structured initiatives and interventions. Horsham illustrates the role that public-private partnerships can have alongside a carefully coordinated town centre management initiative. Hitchin takes this one step further, in the evolution of the town centre management scheme to a fully fledged Business Improvement District (BID).

Darwen provides an example of a heritage-led regeneration project that has been successfully integrated with a wider town centre management strategy to bring environmental, social and economic benefits.



3A. Regeneration led by Entrepreneurs

HOLT, NORFOLK

Rejuvenation of the retail and visitor economy in a small, historic market town led by entrepreneurial investment

Holt is a small market town (population 3,600) in North Norfolk, close to the coast and a 25-minute drive from Norwich. Holt is in the Glaven Valley Conservation Area and the North Norfolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Holt was largely developed in the Georgian era, following a fire in 1708, and is characterised by a tight-knit network of lokes and alleyways. Much of Holt is covered by a conservation area. There are a variety of unusual and specialist independent shops in the town centre. The Market Place is the focus for the town, and the network of streets fan out from this central space.

Holt is a key local employment centre in the rural area, providing retail, light industrial, education and service jobs. Gresham School, established in 1555, is a major employer and continues to play a key role in Holt's identity.

In recent years many high streets and town centres in the UK have been tending to look the same, as rental prices have increased and independent businesses have been pushed outwards.

Holt, in contrast, has an unusually diverse independent retail offer which has developed partly from Gresham's presence in the town and partly as a result of innovative entrepreneurial activity that has seen local businesses grow regional reputations and spread their activities.

The cross-fertilisation of businesses and cultural activities has played a key role in creating a distinctive and innovative offer which "punches above its weight" in the retail hierarchy.

The growth and enhancement of Holt is being driven by the Holt Vision Board, a group comprising the Town Council, Holt Area Partnership, the Chamber of Trade, Holt Youth Project, Holt Society, Gresham's School, North Norfolk Community Partnership, North Norfolk District Council, and Norfolk County Council. The Board has produced a new vision for Holt and has attracted funding to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. Byfords is an example of the entrepreneurial spirit

Local authority North Norfolk District Council

which has led to Holt's success. The Byfords building is one of the oldest in Holt, with a cellar possibly dating back to the 15th century. The premises traded as a hardware store/ironmonger's for over 100 years under the family ownership until the late 1980s. Following a seven-year restoration project, the building was purchased by entrepreneurs Iain and Clair Wilson who have established a series of businesses including a cafe, a new store and very high quality "boutique"-style bed and breakfast accommodation.

Byfords, a popular cafe, restaurant, shop and self-styled "posh B&B"



LESSONS LEARNT

- Regeneration led by entrepreneurs.
- Positive view of historic assets and character.
- Allowing changes of use to encourage entrepreneurial activity.



Retailing in Holt





English Festival, 2nd weekend of May each year image courtesy Horsham District Council/Beth Cox Photography

3B. Town Centre Management and Business Improvement Districts

HORSHAM UNLIMITED, WEST SUSSEX

Wide-ranging programme of events and initiatives led by business partnership and town centre manager

Horsham is a successful and popular location which continues to perform well as a vibrant town centre. Largely Victorian in appearance, it is overlain on medieval and Georgian roots and Horsham's appeal continues to draw on its rich and distinctive historic environment.

Horsham District Council has identified economic development and town centre management as a key pillar in their place-making strategy and recognises that Horsham's historic assets provide a unique selling point for the long-term attractiveness and prosperity of the town centre.

A town centre manager (TCM) post was created in 2005. The TCM has been instrumental in establishing a wide range of initiatives and events to promote Horsham and reinforce the area's competitive advantage. The overall aim is to create a positive experience for visitors, stimulating repeat visits.

In addition to a tactical role, the TCM post also entails a strategic function, with a stake in planning and development initiatives. The TCM works closely with the planning and estates teams in the Council to ensure that the Council adopts a balanced view of conservation objectives and wider town centre dynamics. For example, the Council has adopted a strategy of actively protecting and reinforcing the historic pattern of narrow frontages and smaller floor areas as this provides ideal conditions for independent retailers. In tandem, the Council has identified a need for larger retail units and is considering options for the redevelopment of modern units which do not contribute to the character of the town centre.

In 2010, the Council helped to establish Horsham Unlimited, a business partnership which has recently been incorporated as a Community Interest Company. Three directors from the private sector have overall responsibility supported by a partner board, made up of retailers, other commercial bodies, the Neighbourhood Council, the TCM and Council members.

Local authority Horsham District Council

Although Horsham Unlimited does not generate revenue in its own right, it plays a key role in steering investment by the Council and attracting sponsorship and other contributions to town centre events and initiatives.

Horsham Unlimited has overseen a wide range of initiatives including promotional strategies, events and training initiatives.

Horsham continues to demonstrate considerable resilience to wider economic pressures. Although the town centre's historic environment and a relatively wealthy catchment have played a part in this, there is no doubt that the initiatives of Horsham Unlimited and the District Council have contributed to the area's lasting prosperity.

Recently completed public realm enhancements in East Street, part of a coordinated strategy image courtesy Horsham District Council



LESSONS LEARNT

- A wide-ranging approach to place-management, putting town centre management at the heart of planning.
- Innovative use of events to encourage people to visit the town centre and enjoy a pleasant shopping and leisure experience in a historic environment.
- Good example of effective partnership working in the absence of a formal revenue-generating mechanism.

3B. Town Centre Management and Business Improvement Districts

HEART OF HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE

Business Improvement District (BID)

Hitchin is a historic market town which developed as a staging post on the Great North Road. The BID work has been complemented by a comprehensive conservation area character statement (July 2011). The town centre enjoys an attractive historic setting focused on the cluster of shopping streets that lead to Market Place adjacent to St Mary's Church. Despite its appeal, however, there had been considerable leakage of trade, with half of the town's non-food expenditure disappearing to Stevenage, Luton or further afield.

The Business Improvement District (BID) was a natural progression from the Town Centre Management organisation, which was created in the mid-1990s. Known as Hitchin Initiative, it implemented a number of town centre projects that improved the environment and raised its profile. These initiatives were funded through membership fees, sponsorship and fundraising events.

The activities of the Hitchin Initiative reached a plateau when the sums generated voluntarily were insufficient to deliver all of the proposed activities of the partnership. Following a comprehensive survey of the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders, it was concluded that attaining BID status would be the ideal, sustainable model through which to deliver the growing aspirations for the town centre.

The Heart of Hitchin BID was established in 2009 and is in its final year of the initial five-year term as a private, not for profit organisation, independent of the local authority. The BID Company applies a small, mandatory levy (based on current Rateable Value) to each business in the town which is pooled with additional funds from other sources. More than 600 businesses are now members of the BID and several of these undertake an active role in the delivery of additional services.

Local authority North Hertfordshire District Council

The BID has formed a separate management company to run the market. This has resulted in an increase in the number of stallholders and growing footfall. The BID has ambitions to further enhance the market area, which include the redevelopment of the Churchgate shopping centre.

The primary objective of the BID is to increase the profitability of supporting businesses. In this context, a number of activities have been introduced during the operation of the BID:

- Appointment of Town Centre Rangers to patrol the BID area to share information and police antisocial behaviour and other issues. They are also responsible for collecting and recycling business cardboard, plastic and glass.
- Safety improvements including extended CCTV and environmental enhancements to access routes.
- An Independents' Day is a regular feature where peripheral local shop owners are encouraged to operate a market stall to promote awareness of their goods and services.
- A local "app" and loyalty scheme is being set up to encourage repeat customer visits.
- A consortium of BID members is also seeking to take ownership of the Town Hall building for leisure use.
- The BID operates a regular "counter skills" training course, an annual food festival and a fashion show.
- The Hitchin Festival is held during the summer months and comprises a wide range of cultural events and activities.

LESSONS LEARNT

- The BID is a sustainable financial model yielding a significant budget for town centre enhancements.
- Focus on improving the town centre experience with the single objective of enhancing business profitability, a factor that is appealing to business members.



Clockwise from top to bottom left:
 1. Market Square, Hitchin in Hertfordshire image courtesy Cherry Lincoln
 2. An independent eating place image courtesy Chris Hollins



“ Two-thirds of businesses sampled have seen their turnover remain at last year’s level or are showing improved performance, with profitability largely in line with increased takings.

95% of the sample feel that business performance in the coming year will remain constant or will grow modestly.

Reported crime has declined markedly in the previous year, largely thanks to the presence of the BID-based Ranger team”.

Business and User Survey, 2012
 New Horizon Limited/PFBB



Deli Carlo

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ITALIANA

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OPENING
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WEDNESDAY
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3C. Town Centre Management and Townscape Heritage Initiatives

DARWEN

Townscape Heritage Initiative

Local authority Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Darwen is a Lancastrian market town with a population of approximately 30,000. Situated within the picturesque West Pennine Moors, it is the second largest town in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

The Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is a partnership-led scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The scheme helps to enable the refurbishment of buildings and spaces in conservation areas and aims to attract new investment into town centres.

The THI scheme was formally launched in 2006 as part of the Darwen Town Centre Strategy (2004–2010) with the Heritage Lottery Fund committing £1 million and the Council matching this through external funding. Through analysis completed during the Darwen conservation area appraisal, specific buildings were targeted in view of their condition, occupancy and historical significance. Three areas were also identified for public realm improvement works.

The initiative is now complete and key buildings and spaces in the town have received much needed investment. The Council has undertaken an economic evaluation of the initiative. This identifies a wide range of positive economic, environmental and social benefits, which have been delivered through the investment attracted by the initiative. The evaluation makes it clear that for sustainable economic impacts to take place, both social and environmental changes need to occur.

Environmental improvements have been achieved successfully, with investments and repairs to prominent buildings in the centre contributing positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

There has also been a significant social impact in the town as a result of the THI. The changes in Darwen's pride and image have contributed hugely to a more positive attitude towards Darwen town centre. The Darwen Partnership Board is intending to prepare written guidance to help protect and enhance the

character of the conservation area. This will help to further encourage local people to take an active interest in the future of Darwen and help raise awareness of the importance of protecting and enhancing the character of the conservation area.

The Council's evaluation also identified a series of key economic indicators that have generally suggested that the THI has had a positive effect on Darwen town centre. Most significantly there has been a hugely positive effect for Darwen in terms of ongoing investment in the town centre. It is clear that there is ongoing commercial interest in the town from external investors.

“Darwen people are proud people, maybe they weren't proud of their town centre before – but they are now.” Adam Hulme, Bridgewater Pub Manager



LESSONS LEARNT

- Integration of conservation projects into broader town centre management strategies.
- Role of heritage-led regeneration in delivering economic benefits and attracting new investment to town centres.
- Wider community benefits of investing in historic environments and thus engendering a greater sense of civic pride.

lessons learnt and recommendations

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353

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WELLS ROAD
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A busy shopping day in historic St Albans



Darwen Town Hall, with new shop units at street level

conclusions

Shifts in the economic climate, retail trends and national policy through the NPPF are particularly relevant to the ongoing health and success of historic town centres, streets and spaces.

This report contributes to the growing body of good practice relating to the improvement and reinvention of our town centres and high streets as sustainable locations for shopping, leisure and business.

It is important that local authorities recognise that many high streets, and town and city centres will have to adjust to current trends and manage the reduction in the number of retail units, in conjunction with the identification of other uses to retain footfall and vitality.

National and international economic pressures, compounded by changing tastes and preferences, have had a profound effect on the traditional town centre, leading to a huge swell of vacancies and voids.

Although recent years have seen an advent of more innovative approaches to major town centre masterplanning and retail development, economic circumstances and trends have also seen an increasing emphasis on smaller-scale interventions, where strategic positioning, creative initiatives and collaborative partnerships have proven just as effective as large-scale investments and physical development projects.

There are now many examples where town centre management initiatives, Business Improvement Districts, creative management strategies, or entrepreneurial groups and individuals have played a critical role in helping town centres “turn the corner”, reverse trends or create the conditions for sustainable investment.

Many of the projects in this publication have demonstrated the role that meanwhile uses, pop-up shops, window display initiatives, and rent-free periods

can have in stimulating energy, enterprise and a sense of enthusiasm and revival, reinforcing the spirit and character of historic locations. Although these trends and strategies are increasingly cited within the overall field of retail, town centre, planning and economic policy and practice, they also have relevance to the historic environment. The shift towards a smaller scale of project also signifies an increasing sense of community ownership and awareness of local distinctiveness. This has naturally coincided with a greater appreciation of the role that the historic environment and heritage assets play in defining the character and individuality of town and city centres, which are critical factors in determining the quality of experience and competitiveness of many retail and leisure destinations.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is an increasing expectation that major retail development proposals will define a sensitive and appropriate response to the context of the historic environment. By placing an emphasis on contributing to the quality of the city, establishing continuity with the past, and focusing on spaces as well as buildings, contemporary schemes are realising a more subtle and successful integration with existing historic cores.

Although it is inappropriate for this report to engage in a debate about the creeping sameness of many town centres, or the spread of chain stores through large-scale redevelopment, it is important to consider these issues from a heritage perspective. The report has demonstrated that it is often possible for towns to absorb large retail schemes without eroding the integrity or setting of historic assets. Research has demonstrated that the creation of new or re-invigorated retail destinations can displace shopping patterns and prosperity. However, in some cases, the addition of a new prime retail destination, such as Liverpool One, can create the conditions for the resurgence of independent operators in secondary locations nearby (for example Bold Street).

lessons learnt

Our review of planning policy, retail trends and the case studies has illustrated a number of key messages about the experience of historic centres. These present clear messages and examples of best practice for those that are responsible for managing similar centres in other locations.

A commitment to town planning and architectural excellence: A common thread running through many of the case studies is a commitment to architectural excellence (Bolton, Bury St Edmunds, Liverpool One) and the need to create distinctive, memorable places which are sensitive to historic character.

Adaptability of places: Schemes such as Rotherham and Exeter are likely to be able to adapt, if and when circumstances change.

Collaborative design and briefing: Schemes such as Liverpool One and Exeter illustrate the importance of establishing an effective process of collaborative design, with a mix of architects working to an agreed masterplan.

Local market research and knowing your customers: Knowledge of local market conditions has been a key factor in ensuring that interventions are relevant and appealing to the existing and future customer base (Rotherham).

Analysis of wider economic conditions and needs: In addition to a thorough understanding of local demand, there is also a need to respond positively to wider economic conditions, requirements and changes. Both Neston and Bolton provide successful examples of schemes based on clear market intelligence. The need to understand the economy will undoubtedly continue and those involved in town centre management must stay abreast of trends. For example, a recent trend has emerged indicating that a high proportion of occupied shop units, especially in centres outside of London and the south-east, are only on short-term lets. This presents those managing town centres with

the challenge of ensuring that units do not remain unoccupied in the face of high turnover and churn.

Complementary role of niche and mainstream shopping: Paignton and Bold Street have demonstrated that town centres have a varied and dynamic pattern of activities and functions. Secondary locations often provide an ideal setting for a vibrant cultural, evening economy and an independent retail offer which appeals to the local catchment and the visitor economy. In this way, smaller centres can create a niche and act to complement, rather than compete against, their larger neighbours. Analysis of retail trends has shown that there is an increasing polarisation in the presence of certain multiple retailers to regionally strategic locations only, meaning that smaller centres are seeing fewer chains located on their streets. This, alongside the general poor financial “health” of some multiples, heightens the importance of centres in secondary locations establishing a niche for themselves.

Town centre image making, catalyst development and events: The creation of a vibe and reputation, either organic or planned, can play a key role in the creation of a sustainable town centre economy (Whitstable, Holt, Brixton). The experience of the Portas Pilots will be important in shaping future initiatives. Formal and informal partnership arrangements and town centre management initiatives, including Business Improvement Districts, have been instrumental in achieving quick-wins in relation to branding and place-making.

Transport and servicing: A joined-up approach to transport and servicing strategy can underpin a welcoming and attractive arrival experience for visitors (Rotherham).

Property investment and willingness to tackle underlying problems: There is a strategic need to embrace endemic issues and structural challenges. Examples such as Rotherham, Paignton and Whitstable

have illustrated the impact that a comprehensive and carefully targeted package of interventions can have.

A proactive approach to development management and policymaking: A proactive response to identified retail needs should be embedded in the plan-making process. The allocation of appropriate sites is an important step, but the identification of key parameters (for example, relating to accessibility, scale, massing and materials) through the preparation of design guidance and identification of historic character and sensitivity, either within the local plan or as a supplementary planning document, development brief or endorsed masterplan, can play a key role in sowing the seeds of a successful scheme. Developers and local planning authorities have increasingly embraced street-based retail schemes which respond to existing historic grain, routes and permeability.

Managed approach to review of retail frontages: Research suggests that some retail cores could shrink, leading to greater pressure for units on secondary streets to change from retail activity to other uses. It is recommended that these changes are planned for, and managed proactively.

Adapting existing fabric: Future opportunities for the creation of additional floorspace in most town centres may be limited in the short term, due to economic factors. This will mean that town centre growth might be partly dependent on the successful adaptation of existing buildings and spaces. Brixton and Bolton both demonstrate how this can be successfully achieved. Also, as the presence of traditional high street uses, such as bank branches and post offices, continues to decline, it will become increasingly important that new, vibrant uses are found for any vacated accommodation. These types of uses are often housed in buildings with heritage value and it will be essential that they are adapted and reused to prevent the decay of historic fabric.

Building a strong leisure offer: Emerging market trends are showing that visitors to town centres are increasingly seeking an “experience”, as well as the opportunity to shop. As such, footfall is drawn by eating and drinking establishments and leisure opportunities, and town centres must seek to establish a competitive offer. Historic centres will often have the benefit of an attractive environment and tourist attractions, alongside any potential for commercial leisure. This could give them a strong competitive advantage.

Encouraging residential uses: Complementary uses play an important role in supporting the vitality of town centres. In particular, the presence of residential units alongside other uses such as retail and leisure can play an important role in increasing the number of people in the town centre, especially outside of normal trading hours. New homes can be built as part of redevelopment schemes or make use of empty or underused upper-floors.



St Albans – the city’s rich heritage and town centre retail offer are complementary

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