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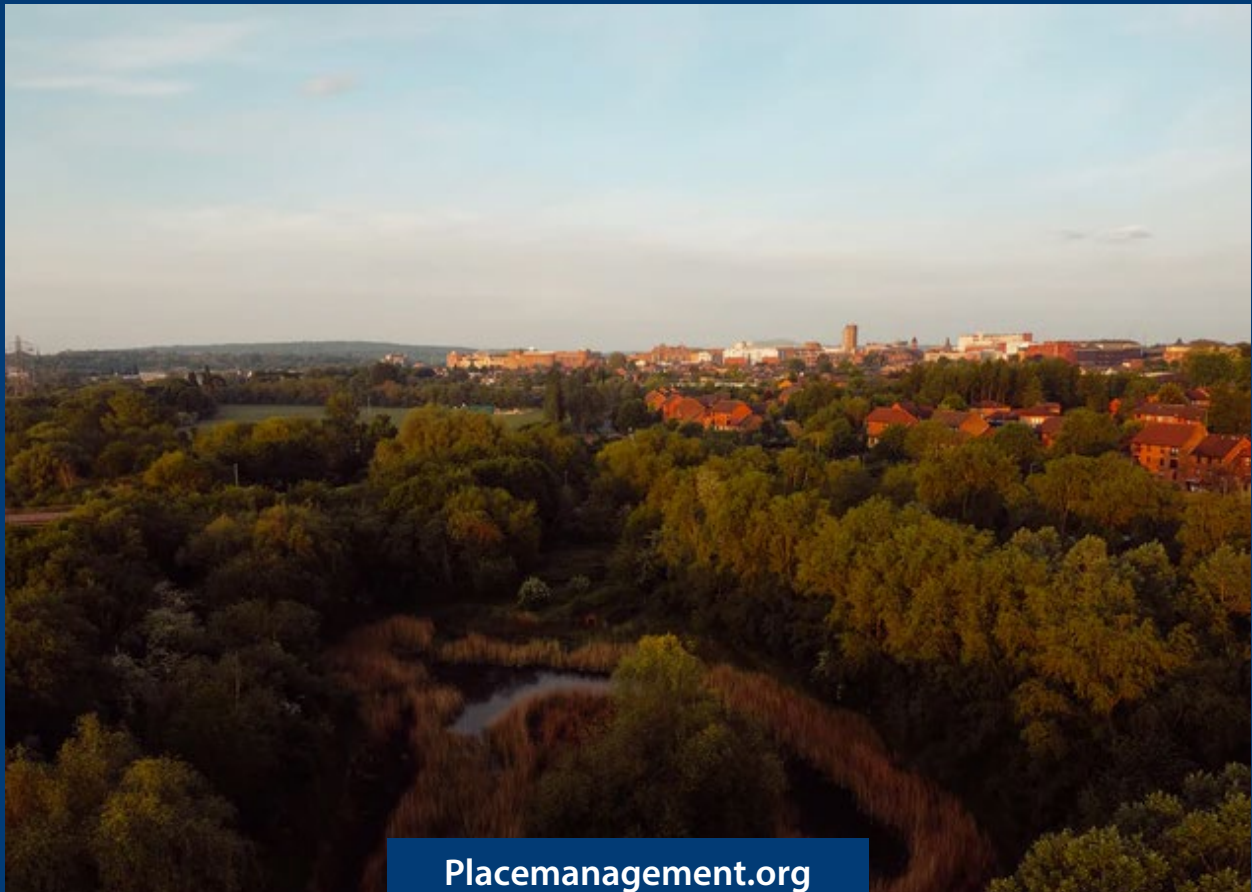
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Promoting the vitality and viability of Watford

Dr Steve Millington, Joe Barratt and Tom Hindmarch

May 2020



Placemanagement.org

About the Institute of Place Management

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

Authors

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Tom Hindmarch is the membership coordinator and events lead at the Institute of Place Management. Tom has been with the IPM team for nearly 4 years, helping manage and coordinate activity across key projects such as IPM's annual conference, the Vital and Viable programme and High Streets Task Force. In addition, Tom has recently completed an MSc in Place Management and Leadership, which a specific research focus on place management capacity and place-based strategies.

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Foreword

This report has been prepared following an online workshop for key local stakeholders in Watford on 16th April 2021. Facilitated by the Institute of Place Management at the invitation of Watford Borough Council, the event formed part of the journey Watford is undertaking to revitalise the town centre in terms of post-pandemic recovery and long-term viability.

Led Dr Steve Millington, a Director of the Institute and supported by Tom Hindmarch (Membership coordinator) and Joe Barratt (Junior Fellow), the workshop engaged 25 local stakeholders representing a variety of different bodies and interests in Watford in thinking about the future development of the town centre.

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Executive Summary

This report outlines the main findings from a workshop led by the Institute of Place Management, following an invitation from Watford Borough Council to engage with key local stakeholders and gather evidence regarding their collective view about challenges and opportunities for the town centre.

The first part of the report summarises some of the main structural challenges facing high streets and town/city centres. Many factors, which currently affect the vitality and viability of places, are the result of long-term processes, some stretching back decades. The pandemic, however, has brought new and additional challenges, but as we argue, also provides the spur for places to reimagine what they want from their centres, not only to manage recovery, but also prepare and adapt so they are more resilient going forward. In doing so, the report draws on the IPM's extensive research and engagement with places across the UK and beyond in relation to the vitality and ability of high streets and centres.

The report then explores the strengths, weaknesses and priorities for Watford town centre, presenting the outcomes of the workshop discussions and surveys undertaken with the stakeholders present, before outlining an adaptable framework based on the IPM's 4Rs – Restructuring, Rebranding, Repositioning and Reinventing, which includes suggestions for quick win's together with recommendations for longer term priorities. In summary these are:

Priority 1 – Restructuring

Quick wins

- Improve communication and co-ordination of key local stakeholders, and consider refreshing these networks to widen their diversity and add additional capacity to effect change
- Consider forming a strategic leadership group, but then delegate responsibilities to specific groups of stakeholders, for instance, the local authority to provide facilitation and co-ordination, the BID to focus on place activation and events, independent traders to take responsibility for social media and place branding etc.

Longer term

- Repurposing of retail space to add additional functionality
- Address concerns about traffic congestion
- Improve liveability and walkability within the town centre, and strengthen synergies with other anchors e.g. railway station, football stadium, Cassiobury Park, through creative place-making interventions, signage etc.
- Soften the impact of the ring road to improve connectivity between the town centre and residential neighbourhoods within walking distance

Priority 2 – Rebranding

Quick wins

- Low cost co-ordinated social media to communicate the centre offer and activity to increase visibility to existing catchment and users, and to nudge perceptions of Watford to a more positive position.

Longer term

- A clear shared vision, which is communicated in collaboration with users and stakeholders.

Priority 3 – Reinventing

Quick wins

- Small scale, low cost and basic improvements to appearance, planters, signage, shop front improvements, murals, artwork, lighting, pocket parks
- Creative pop-ups and events to activate the centre
- Review and evaluate the promotion and performance of the existing market.

Longer term

- Increasing the prominence of the leisure and cultural offer, independents and non-retail offer
- Potential to extend dwell time using footfall data to track interventions

Priority 4 – Repositioning

Quick wins

- Share the footfall data with a wide range of local stakeholders

Longer term

- Track effectiveness of interventions in the town centre through monitoring and interpreting footfall data (volume and pattern of activity)
- Improve co-ordination of key local stakeholders
- Reposition Watford as a diverse multifunctional and liveable employment, residential and cultural centre.

Background and context

The global pandemic is provoking intense debate about the decline, or even death, of the high street. With a keen eye for attention grabbing headlines, the national media is only too willing to write about the demise of national multiple retailers, declining footfall, increasing retail vacancy, and how online retailing continues to eat away at in-store spending. Less reported perhaps, is how retail change connects to long-term processes stretching back decades, and despite proclamations about the end of the high street, many centres across the country are actually performing well, and some thriving. What is clear is how the pandemic is accelerating the uptake of online shopping, changing consumer priorities, impacting on travel and holiday plans, and may transform how and where we work, all of which will have implications profoundly affecting high streets and town centres.

Although attention is currently on post-pandemic recovery, it is important places also recognise and understand the dynamic long-term processes that render high streets and towns in constant state of flux, and enact plans that address both their immediate recovery and long-term transformation.

Before the pandemic, support for town centres and high streets was high on the UK government's agenda with the announcement in 2019 of the Towns Fund, including the Future High Streets Fund, with £3.6 billion ring-fenced to support for towns in England. However, in light of the pandemic it became clear additional immediate support was needed to ensure the survival of towns and high street businesses. In response, the government provided a multi-billion-pound package of support through rates relief, grants and the furlough scheme. More recently, the government launched a £56 million Welcome Back Fund to support the safe reopening of high streets, with Watford Borough Council allocated £85,636. The government's response illustrates the severity of the challenge facing town and city centres. We are encouraged that Watford Borough Council recognises the need to act quickly and have enlisted the support of IPM to build consensus amongst stakeholders in the region.

Watford is a large town located within the county of Hertfordshire and is less than a 30-minute journey by train into London. Its location and transport links make it a popular and viable commuter town for professionals working in central London, with over nine million people passing through Watford Junction on an annual basis. In addition, Watford has a strong retail offer, with one of largest covered shopping centres in the UK located in the centre. This provides 1.4million sq. ft of space accommodating over 150 units for retail, leisure and hospitality businesses, making Watford a key regional shopping hub. Although the shopping centre was expanded in 2019, there are now are concerns about its management and ownership following the collapse of INTU, compounded by the loss of major department stores and familiar brands. Watford, however, is also a strong employment centre, home to several corporate headquarters and international employers. Like many towns in the UK, the pandemic has presented a number of challenges, with people's travel restricted and businesses forced to cease trading for a prolonged period. The pandemic, however, has produced some unexpected outcomes, with many people using their nearest local centre more often, there is an opportunity perhaps, for towns like Watford to reconnect with residents. This report will explore those challenges and opportunities in more depth suggesting a range of proactive steps Watford can take in the short, medium, and long term as well as highlighting various resources the centre can utilise to aid recovery and transform.

As we look to the future, it is essential centres of all scale adapt to this rapidly changing environment. As a result, local place management and leadership are more important than ever before. In addition to combatting the pandemic's short-term impact, all stakeholders need to consider the longer-term future of their locality, identifying and driving forward change as the 'new normal' begins to take shape.

The IPM is uniquely placed to support Watford on the road to recovery, due to extensive informed research on town centre change and more recently on recovery from the pandemic. Funding and additional support for town centres was strongly advocated in a report from the Expert Panel established by the then Minister for the High Street, Jake Berry, and led by Sir John Timpson. During 2018, the Institute of Place Management supported the Panel, by holding workshops in six locations across the country to hear first-hand the opinions, challenges and aspirations that town and city centre users of all kinds felt. Alongside The High Street Report from the Panel, the government also published a report from the Institute on *High Street 2030: Achieving Change*¹. Both reports were published in December 2018.

Subsequently in 2019, following a successful bid, the IPM was appointed to lead the government's High Streets Task Force (HSTF), alongside a consortium of partners. The HSTF was set up to provide providing expertise, knowledge, training and support to those involved in helping to regenerate town and city centres across England.

Since 2020, the IPM, through the work with the HSTF, has been at the forefront of research on town centre recovery and transformation, firstly producing the 'COVID-19 recovery framework' (see Figure 1 below), and the 'Routemap to Transformation'². Both frameworks have been widely adopted and adapted by places throughout the UK and Europe, including major cities like Liverpool and Newcastle and multiple locations across Greater London.

¹ <https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=f8f07583-af7b-4b91-a3d1-3c9b3aa905ba>

² <https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/transformation-routemap-webinars/create-a-transformation-routemap-for-your-town/>

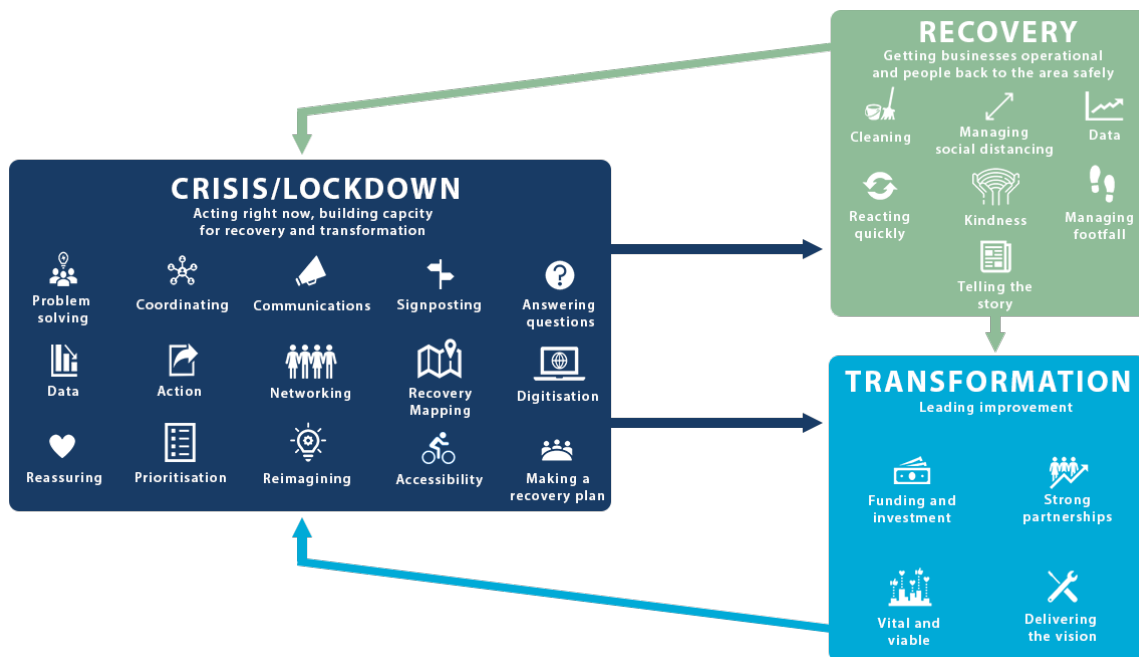


Figure 1: IPM’s COVID-19 recovery framework

This report also draws on IPM research and frameworks such as ‘the 25 factors for vitality and viability’³ and the ‘4Rs framework’⁴, which were developed in consultation with key national stakeholders, policy professionals, practitioners, and importantly in partnership with places themselves.

³ <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/frameworks/25-vital-and-viable-priorities/>

⁴ <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=b38091e3-488b-4e4a-a24a-bd5bd37534d6>

The changing high street

Footfall

The long-term picture for high streets is worrying. For the decade before the pandemic hit footfall was decreasing year-on-year, falling by almost 20%, but the impact of coronavirus on high streets has been profound. Within a week of the announcement of lockdown measures across the UK in March 2020, figures from the data and intelligence provider Springboard showed that footfall was down 81.4% compared to the same period in 2019. Across the whole of 2020, footfall was down 28.3% compared to the previous year. However, this was the national average. Footfall fluctuated across the UK, with some places subject to additional lockdown restrictions. In addition, whereas footfall dropped the most in larger comparison centres, Springboard data shows smaller towns fared relatively well. From March 1st to June 30th, 2020, footfall in smaller centres fell by 34.5%, compared to a drop of 75.9% in larger cities over the same period.

Likely explanations for this disparity in footfall suggest people no longer commuting to larger centres were compelled to use their nearest local centre during lockdown, and began to rediscover local assets and amenities, visiting local parks using local businesses. This impact is particularly marked in 'multi-functional' centres, which provide a wide range of services to their communities. Footfall also varied across other types of centre, with some holiday towns actually out-performing 2019 figures during particular weeks during the summer of 2020. It is important then that places analyse what is happening locally, as their experience may not necessarily reflect that of the 'average' town.

Working from home

Another consequence of the coronavirus pandemic has been a rise in working from home. ONS research suggests the number of people who did some work at home in 2020 increased by 9.4% compared to 2019, 35.9% of the workforce, which is more than 11 million employees. With large employers such as JP Morgan, HSBC and KPMG announcing plans to permanently allow workers to operate from their homes and suggestions more jobs are being advertised as working from 'anywhere', thousands of staff may never return permanently to the office, with flexible working becoming more normalised.

Although it is too early to evidence the impact of changing working conditions, there are predictions companies might begin to review the commercial space requirements and the need to maintain costly office space in centralised locations. With potentially fewer office workers, there is likely to be a significant impact on the local economy, in terms of demand for professional support services, building maintenance (cleaning, security, and maintenance), transport infrastructure and providers (including deliveries and logistics), hotels, and food/drink. Office workers, for example, often drive the morning, lunch-time and early-evening economies. Clearly, larger central city business districts will be most affected by these changes, demonstrated by the fact that, despite experiencing a visitor surge post-lockdown, footfall figures for central London are still nearly two-thirds down on 2019. However, these changes, if made permanent, may lead to the rise of "secondary cities" – smaller towns and rural areas who stand to benefit from the pursuit of workers to achieve a better quality of life in a greener environment. To capitalise on this development, however, may require these locations to adapt, with calls for more commercial and flexible working space on high streets, together with more diverse retail and hospitality sector.

Store Closures

According to the Centre for Retail Research, the high street lost 5,214 stores in 2020, the highest figure on record since 2009, affecting an estimated 109,407 employees, also the highest amount on record by some distance. Big name casualties included Debenhams, the oldest retail chain in the UK, which went into liquidation in December 2020, with plans to close 97 stores. Others included Arcadia, the parent company of big-name brands such as Topshop, Dorothy Perkins, Burtons and Miss Selfridge, and a range of others also closed including Poundstretcher, Go Outdoors, Monsoon, Oasis, Warehouse and Laura Ashley. Notably, some of these brands will live on, but only online.

Whilst the economic effects of the pandemic played its part in some of these closures, there are other factors to consider, including new competition, lack of investment, high property costs, and over-expansion. In the last decade, multiple retailers going into administration or announcing store closures have seen over 26,000 units close (CRR 2019), suggesting that this is not the consequence of the coronavirus alone. Furthermore, with the continuing rise of online shopping, retailers no longer need an extensive network of branches to achieve national coverage. The likely scenario for many places are that national multiples are unlikely to return to their centres in any great numbers, and towns can no longer rely on bricks and mortar shops to drive footfall and commercial investment.

Whereas much media commentary focuses on retail, the contraction of other services traditionally found in town and city centres is perhaps over-looked. The shift to greater online service provision and need to cut costs has seen more than 4,000 bank and building society branches close across the UK over the past six years. This disruption also threatens over 7,500 estate agents. The problems facing high street travel agencies, who were challenged by online competition, have been compounded by enforced travel bans, with 88% potentially facing closure. According to a survey by *Which? Magazine*, cash machines are also disappearing, with a reduction of 9,500 between 2018-19. This will most likely accelerate further due to the adoption of cashless payment systems that most businesses have shifted to during the pandemic.

Online shopping

In 2019, the UK led the world in online shopping, which accounted for 19.2% of all retail sales. Pre-pandemic, predictions suggested this would rise to 30% by 2030, but with the forced closure of bricks and mortar shops during lockdown, online sales grew rapidly, peaking at 36.4% in January 2021 the highest annual growth seen since 2007.

According to KPMG, high streets could lose between 20-40% of their retail offering as a result of the growth of online retailing. Basingstoke, Bracknell and Guildford appear to be the worst affected, with up to 39% of retail jobs made vulnerable by the shift to online sales. Across all the towns and cities covered by KPMG's analysis, there could be nearly 400,000 job losses on the high street, affecting between 1-5% of the labour force.

With ASOS, the online fashion retailer, acquiring the brands of Topshop, Topman and Miss Selfridge for the value of their digital brand presence, and with competitor BooHoo, purchasing the Burton brands, Dorothy Perkins, and Wallis, along with the Debenhams brand and website, it underlines the extent to which our high street experience is going online.

Places, however, should be cautious in responding to claims retail will disappear. Even with 30% of retail sales online, 70% remains in-store. Retail expenditure, in general, is expected to grow as the population size of the UK increases. In short, town centres may have a smaller slice of retail spend going forward, but the cake will be bigger. Furthermore, places might take note of Amazon's plans to open 3000 convenience stores worldwide, and the company's experiments in clicks 'n' mortar, suggesting there are limits to online growth, and a future for in-store shopping.

Out-of-town Shopping

Over the last 40 years, the UK has experienced a growth and spread of out-of-town shopping. In 1994, just 14% of retail development was happening in town centres, leading to tighter planning policies requiring a 'town centres first' approach and the introduction of the sequential test, designed to funnel new retail development into centres. Although this guidance limited the development of new mega-malls, in general it did not prevent retail expansion out-of-town, through retail parks and supermarkets, with over 4 million sq.m of new retail space constructed from 2001-11. Town centres within 10 miles major out-of-town retail development saw footfall deflections, on average, by 30%. Consequently, and notably before the advent of online shopping began, town centres continued to see their share of retail expenditure decline to just under 50% by 2000, falling from 75% in the 1970s. In 2018, the Centre for Retail Research estimated the town centre share had declined to 36.6%, with a projection it would decline further to 34% by 2022.

The competition to town centres from out-of-town retail once seemed an insurmountable challenge, but the restructuring of the retail sector has created particular problems for malls and shopping centres, especially those dependent on large department store anchors and national multiple retailers. One of the UK's largest operators, Intu Properties, with a portfolio including some of the largest UK retail malls such as Manchester's Trafford Centre, Nottingham's Victoria Centre and Norwich's Chapelfield, fell into administration in June 2020 with total debts of £4.5bn. The shopping centre giant Hammerson also posted a £1.7bn loss in March — the largest in its history — after the COVID-19 pandemic wiped £2bn off the value of its property portfolio. Covered shopping centres are experiencing declining investment, the highest fall in footfall, and largest increases in vacancy rates, with long-standing tenants disappearing, and those remaining perhaps unwilling to honour existing rental costs.

As can be imagined, the scale of change taking place is beginning to have an impact on retail property values. Recent advice from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors suggests we can no longer rely on past valuations. With the sale of shopping centres significantly below previous values (some to local authorities), and some property owners taking bold steps to mark down, new opportunities are arising to rethink the function of town and city centres. It may be the case that more towns might need to follow the lead of Stockton, where the local authority took control of a shopping centre and revealed plans to demolish it, and instead replace it with a hub for public services and new public park.

Ageing Towns

As town and city centres change, they also have to respect wider changes in society. Overall, the UK population is growing, but it is also ageing. Over the past two decades, the average age of a UK resident has risen by two years, to 40. Within 30 years, it is anticipated that one in four people will

be aged 65 and over, and the number of people aged over 85 will have doubled. Yet this ageing process is not happening uniformly across the UK.

Overall, towns are getting older whilst cities are getting younger. Since 1981, Britain's towns have lost more than a million people aged under 25, while gaining more than two million over-65s. In contrast, the UK's main cities have seen more than 300,000 under-25s arrive and 200,000 over-65s leave. This problem is perhaps most keenly felt in coastal towns such as Blackpool and Scarborough, which could see a 7% fall in the number of people under 30 living in the area by 2039. In contrast, coastal authorities in the south, such as Bristol, Southampton, and Canterbury, could see substantial rises in the number of children and young people.

Town and city centres can play a vital role in providing for the needs of an ageing society, not just through residential provision, but also through providing activities, health and educational facilities and opportunities. This is becoming increasingly important for smaller towns, which will more than likely see their labour markets become less dynamic and suffer from further strain on health and social care. Attempts to bridge the gap between the young and old should be welcomed across all communities, and there is nowhere better to centre that activity than around the high street to foster inter-generational contact and exchange. An important consideration, however, is the nature of ageing is also changing. Older generations are likely to be fitter, more active and likely to be working to a later age compared to previous ones.

Experiential economy

With customers now able to buy almost anything they desire from the comfort of their own home, more retailers are having to provide a reason for people to travel to their stores. The rise of experiential retail has occurred as a result, offering consumers a combination of entertainment and retail to deliver a personalised experiences. An example of this includes House of Vans, which provides an open-to-all, free to use indoor skate bowl for visitors to its store in central London.

Another development, termed retail+, refers to a growing number of stores, where customers might do courses: learn how to bake, to sew, to knit, to mix cocktails and even drive a sports car by using virtual reality. We are also seeing demand for variety, delivered through pop-ups, encompassing everything from market stalls, to events space used for entertainment, health, education and other community-focused activities. The high street, therefore, is becoming a place to 'do', as well as 'buy'. With more flexible and short-term leases, pop-up and meanwhile uses, seasonal offers, and events, the future high street may well offer a new experience each time you visit.

Technological Changes

By 2030, it is anticipated that our retail experience will be very different. Retailers will know far more about us through accessing our data, enabling greater personalisation. Currently people make about two thirds of their online purchases on a mobile device, but, with the rise of the Internet of Things and AI, an increasing proportion of the goods we order will become subject to automatic payment and delivery. Retailers such as Schuh and Asos have already seen mobile spending quadruple in just six years, totaling close to 80% share of online purchases.

In the last year, we have seen the rollout of the first Amazon Go store in the country, opening in Ealing, West London. The stores allow customers to shop and leave without queuing, with purchases

tracked by in-store cameras and sensors before charging customers using the Amazon app. The move towards hyper-convenience may be a paradigm shift in the way that consumers view convenience, with no long queues or self-service checkouts slowing the shopping experience down.

Technology is also allowing new transport options in cities. Apps such as *Whim* offer seamless travel by a range of modes within urban areas and they will become more commonplace as many cities ban or restrict cars in their centres. With data from the Universities of Oxford and Bristol finding that there has been a 40% decline in 18-24 year old car drivers now compared to the 1990s, it suggests we are entering a world with declining demand for private vehicle ownership, with implications for the level of road transport infrastructure and parking requirements in town centres.

For those trips that still use the car, the growth in electric vehicles will do much to improve air quality in town and city centres, with forecasts that 30 million will be on the road by 2030. Renault Nissan will launch 10 different electric cars this year and claims 84% of buses will be electric by 2030. We are also seeing the development of autonomous vehicles, with expectations that 50% of vehicles will be highly autonomous by 2030. Research by the University of Toronto suggests this will increase car-parking capacity in urban areas by 62%. These developments, however, do not necessarily address the continuing problems of congestion within centres. The pandemic, for example, brought to attention to paucity of public realm within many centres, in terms of both quality and quantity, drawing attention to the domination of road infrastructure in centres. This created a particular challenge for many places in relation to street-trading and the safe reopening of hospitality. To create safer, more liveable, and walkable places, and centres which are perhaps more resilient to the impact of a global pandemic, cities across the world are beginning to rebalance the amount of space given over to vehicles, to pedestrians and cyclists, creating car-free zones and streets that can be dynamically rebalanced according to need. The IPM often encounters local concerns about levels of parking and road access to centres, but there is little evidence to suggest restrictions will impact on trade. In certain cases, it is often the reverse, with increased visitor numbers and dwell-time.

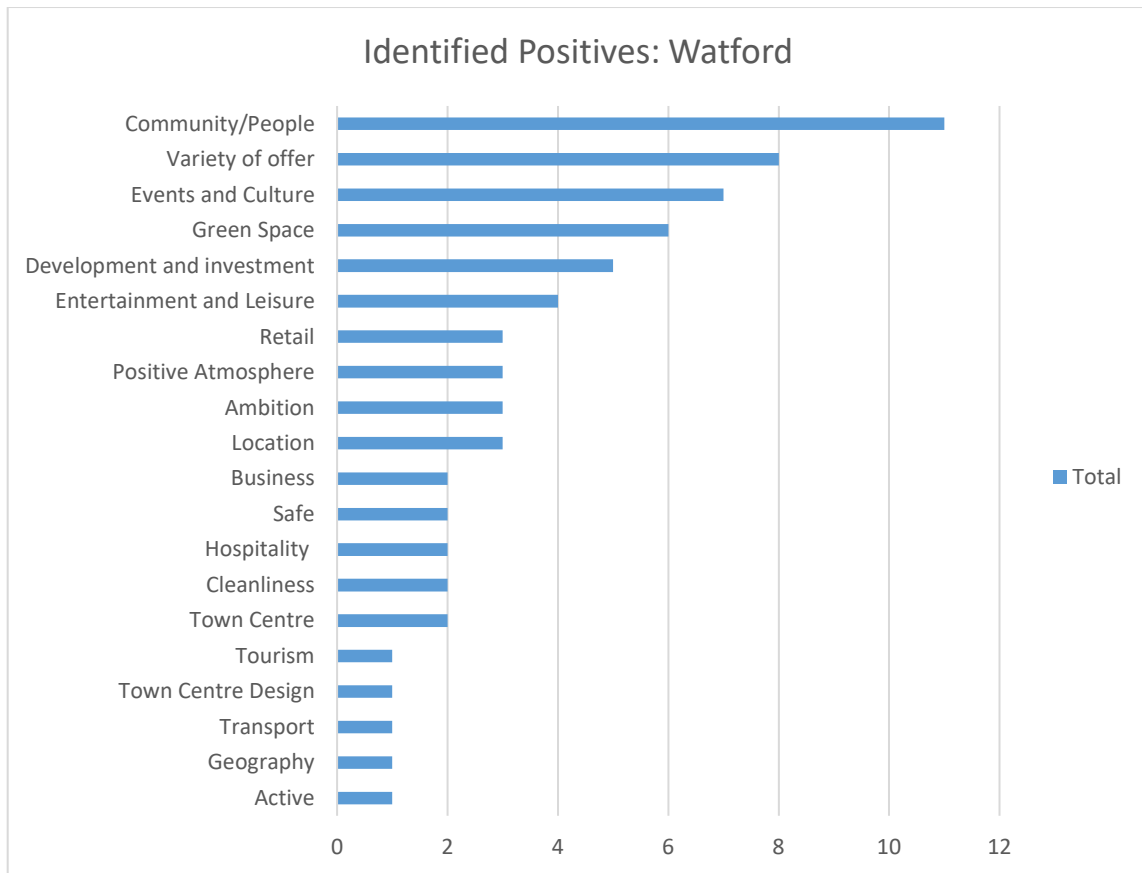


Figure 2: Word cloud themes (positives)

In total 20 different positive themes were identified. The most frequently mentioned was community/people, and the diversity Watford possesses. It was suggested it is the people who contributed to a general positive atmosphere in the town centre. In addition, stakeholders drew attention to the variety of the offer in town centre, with many mentioning the range and diversity of stores in the centre as a positive. In relation to the offer, retail, hospitality, the town centre and entertainment and leisure were all mentioned specifically on more than one occasion and were assigned a separate theme. Events and culture was also cited as a key positive, with a number of attendees mentioning the cultural offer and successful events before the pandemic.

The range of positives identified suggests there is strong retail focussed offer and a range of different activities taking place in Watford. It is also clear the community and people of Watford are central to the success and development of Watford.

Identified weaknesses for Watford



Image 2: Word cloud of identified negatives/weaknesses

Similar to the first interactive question, participants mentioned numerous elements that hold the centre of Watford back. Figure 3 below shows further analysis of the data from image 2.

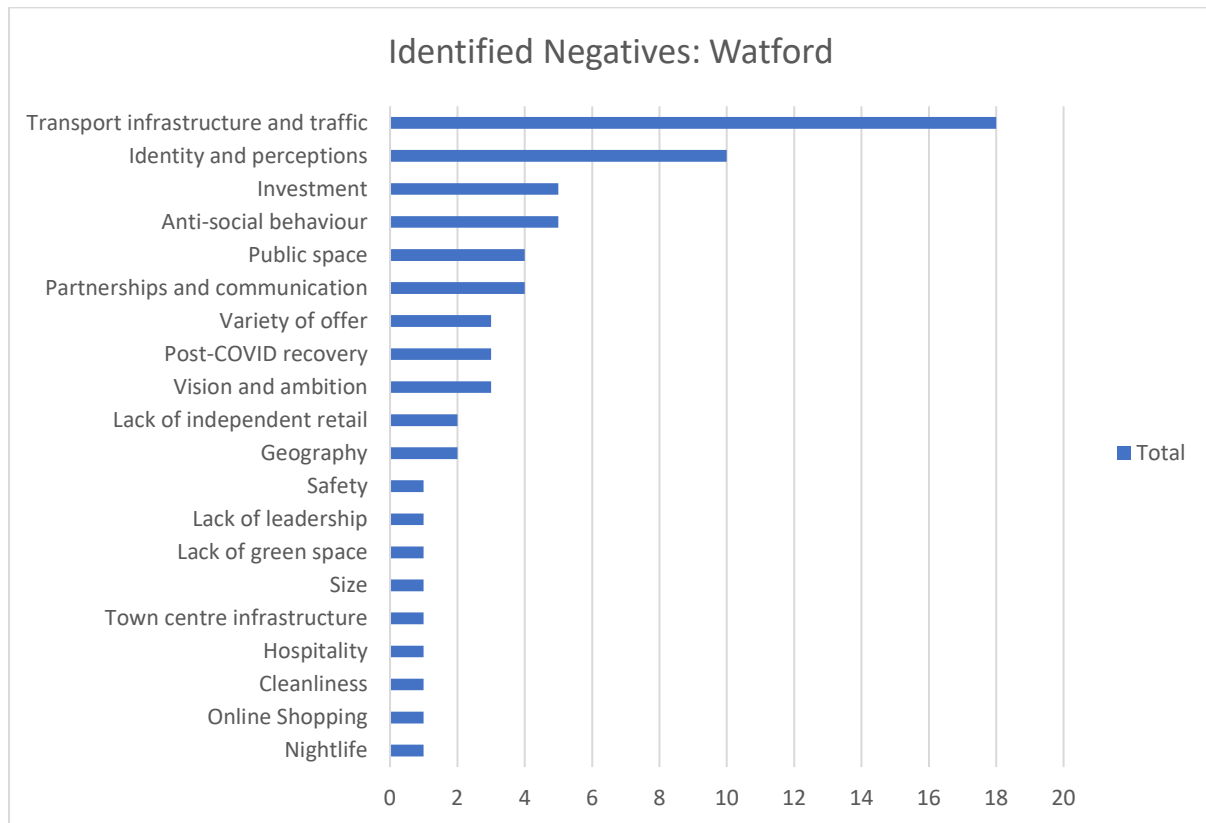


Figure 3: Word cloud themes (negatives)

From the analysis, it is clear transport infrastructure and traffic is a concern for stakeholders with 18 out of 25 noting traffic, congestion, or transport infrastructure such as the ring road, as aspects that hold Watford back. Additionally, elements related to identity and perceptions were mentioned by nearly half the workshop participants, with attendees specifically noting the perception of Watford is considered poor and that it lacks 'unique selling point (USP)'. Linking to this concern about the town's identity, participants referred to a lack of independent retailers, which might add both distinction and extend diversity within centres. Anti-social behaviour was also highlighted on several occasions, with one participant highlighting drug use as a specific problem.

There were a couple of elements which appeared as both a positive and as an aspect that holds Watford back, most notably investment and ambition split the opinion of the workshop participants.

Identified priorities for Watford

In the latter part of the workshop, participants were split into 5 groups of 4 to 5 individuals to discuss what they thought should be the priorities for Watford in the short and medium term based on their opinions and the learning from the workshop. The priorities are summarised below:

Group 1	
1.	Clearer Routemap/ an agreed partnership for the longer term
2.	A better understanding of footfall numbers and data sharing
3.	Transport: Watford needs better connectivity
Group 2	
1.	Define Watford's USP
2.	A platform to highlight what is happening in the city centre
3.	Lower the barrier to entry, create a functional market on the high street
Group 3	
1.	Support the creation of an Independent market/make pop-up space available through meanwhile use
2.	Data sharing
3.	Improvements to accessibility
Group 4	
1.	Perceptions vs reality
2.	Clarity on short term goals
3.	Creation of a longer-term plan
Group 5	
1.	Linking up businesses and 20-minute town
2.	Create more live/work spaces to take the focus away from retail
3.	A dedicated market space, make the start-up costs manageable

Figure 3: outcomes of group activity

Many of the priorities identified related to the first activity around strengths and weaknesses. A key aspect, highlighted by a number of the groups, included better data sharing and better understanding/creation of a plan for the town centre as centres transition out of the pandemic. The creation of a market for more independent also proved a popular choice of discussion with three out of the five groups stating it as a top priority for Watford. Several participants referred to markets

they had visited in nearby places, and spoke of their desire to see a similar offer in Watford. Interestingly, there was no mention of Watford's existing market. Although Watford does have a market, it would appear a number of residents have not visited it/and or do not consider it very good.

Many of these aspects discussed during the group activity are picked up later in this report when the '4Rs' framework is applied.

Lessons from wider experience

In 2014, as part of the ESRC-supported HSUK2020 project, the IPM undertook a comprehensive literature review to identify factors contributing to centre vitality and viability (see Parker et al., 2017). This produced some 160 factors, which formed a point of discussion with multiple stakeholders in the ten UK town centres who were partners in the project. This process identified additional factors, which we could link to published academic research, but it also revealed new factors, yet to be studied by academics. In total, the study identified 201 factors that affect town centre vitality and viability. The systematic review was replicated in 2020 for the High Streets Task Force, which took into account recent evidence and research, which subsequently extended the number of factors to 237. However, as they stand, the factors have no sense of priority or importance. Therefore, 22 leading town centre experts drawn from practitioners and researchers were asked to rank them using two scales: how much a factor impacted on town centre vitality and viability, and how much local control could be exercised over a factor. This then led to the ‘Top 25 Factors’ impacting vitality and viability, detailed in Appendix 1 below. Our recommendation is these can initially be used as an audit tool to assess how Watford is performing, and then as a means to determine a strategy.

Specific factors affecting the vitality and viability of Watford

A survey completed by 23 stakeholders from Watford on 16th April, asked participants to consider how much local effort there is to support each factor, and then asked how important they thought each factor was to Watford. In terms of resourcing, Figure 4 below shows how the group ranked each factor according to their perception of how well each factor is resourced in Watford.

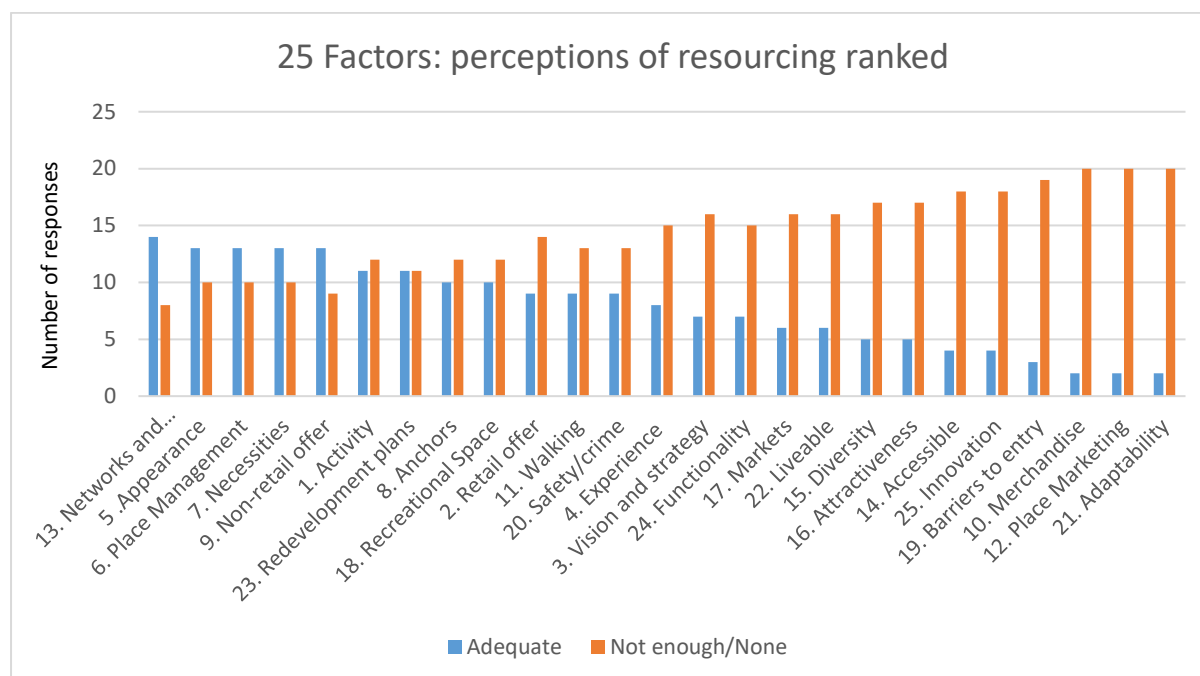


Figure 4: 25 factors: perceptions of resourcing ranking

A majority of the group perceives Networks and Partnerships with the Council, Appearance, Place Management, and Non-retail Offer, are sufficiently resourced, whereas all the remaining factors are

seen to be under-resourced, notably Merchandise, Place Marketing and Adaptability. Another consideration is the IPM Ranking (on the x-axis). For instance, a clear majority of respondents perceive Adaptability is inadequately resourced, but this is ranked as the 21st most important priority by the IPM. There is a similar consensus regarding Place Marketing, which the IPM's ranks 12th in terms of its impact on the vitality and viability of high streets and centres. All places have limited resource and need to prioritise spending. In the example discussed here, there is a logic in focusing on supporting interventions, which are likely to have most impact. In Watford's case then, there is an argument for prioritising Place Marketing over Adaptability. However, it is important to remember, these are perceptions of resourcing amongst a wide group of local stakeholders. It may be the case certain factors are genuinely under-resourced, although the reality may be different, suggesting perhaps more work needs to be done locally to communicate the level of effort supporting each factor more clearly and widely across the town.

The other consideration though is to what extent, say Place Marketing, is important to Watford. Figure 5 below, therefore, shows how the group ranked each factor according to their perception of how important the factor was to Watford:

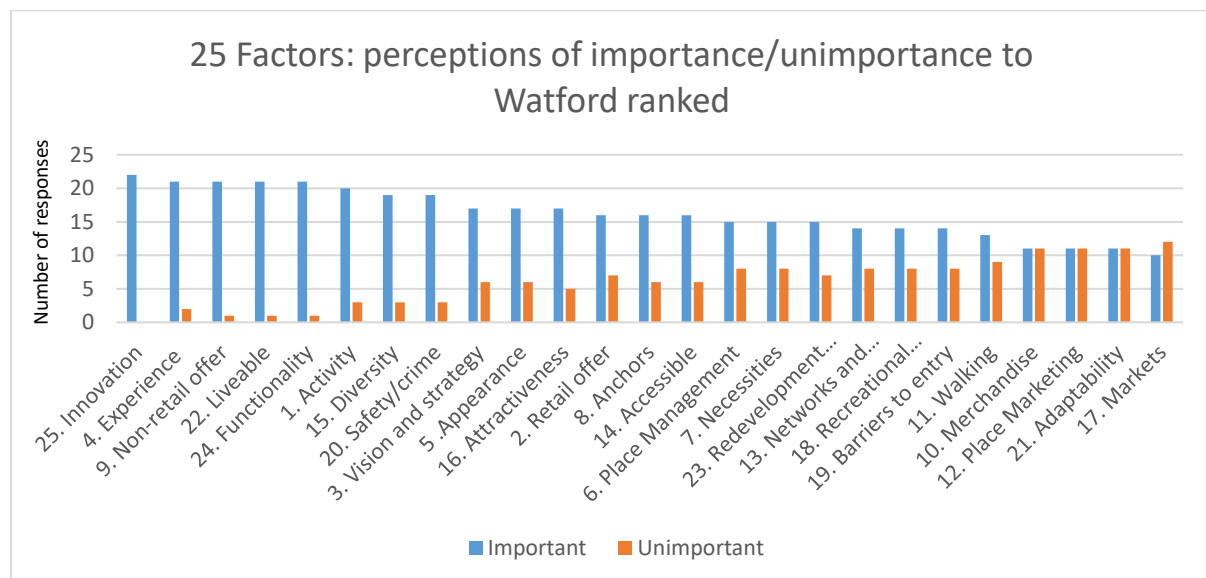


Figure 5: 25 factors: perceptions of importance to Watford ranking

According to this data, Place Marketing may well be seen as under-resourced, but the group thinks other factors are more important to Watford. For instance, the group was unanimous in identifying Innovation as the most important factor for Watford. In addition, there is a clear majority suggesting Experience, Non-retail Office, Liveability and Functionality, are also important to the town centre. Interestingly, although Markets featured in many of the discussions during the workshop, collectively the group ranked this factor quite low in terms of the importance to Watford. This is not to say Markets, and potential Market development is unimportant, rather the group ranked other factors more highly. That said, given the market appears to have been subject to relocation and substantial investment, the lack of reference to it during the workshop raises a concern about the profile and awareness of Watford's existing market amongst stakeholder groups.

In interpreting this data, it is also important to note the ranking of each factor (see appendix for full description) by the IPM according to potential impact on vitality and viability, and levels of local control:

1. Activity	14. Accessible
2. Retail offer	15. Diversity
3. Vision and strategy	16. Attractiveness
4. Experience	17. Markets
5. Appearance	18. Recreational Space
6. Place Management	19. Barriers to entry
7. Necessities	20. Safety/crime
8. Anchors	21. Adaptability
9. Non-retail offer	22. Liveable
10. Merchandise	23. Redevelopment plans
11. Walking	24. Functionality
12. Place Marketing	25. Innovation
13. Networks and partnerships with council	

Figure 6: 25 factors in rank order

For example, Innovation is seen as most important to Watford, but in terms of local control and impact, it is the 25th ranked factor by the IPM. The second most important factor in Watford is Experience, which according to research collated by the IPM is an area of intervention that is more viable and potentially impactful. The number one factor is Activity, which according to the stakeholder group is also important to Watford, but the perception is that it requires more resourcing.

To help get a sense of where priorities lie in Watford, therefore, the matrix below plots both perceptions of resourcing and importance against each other:

25 Factors: Adequately Resourced v Importance to Watford

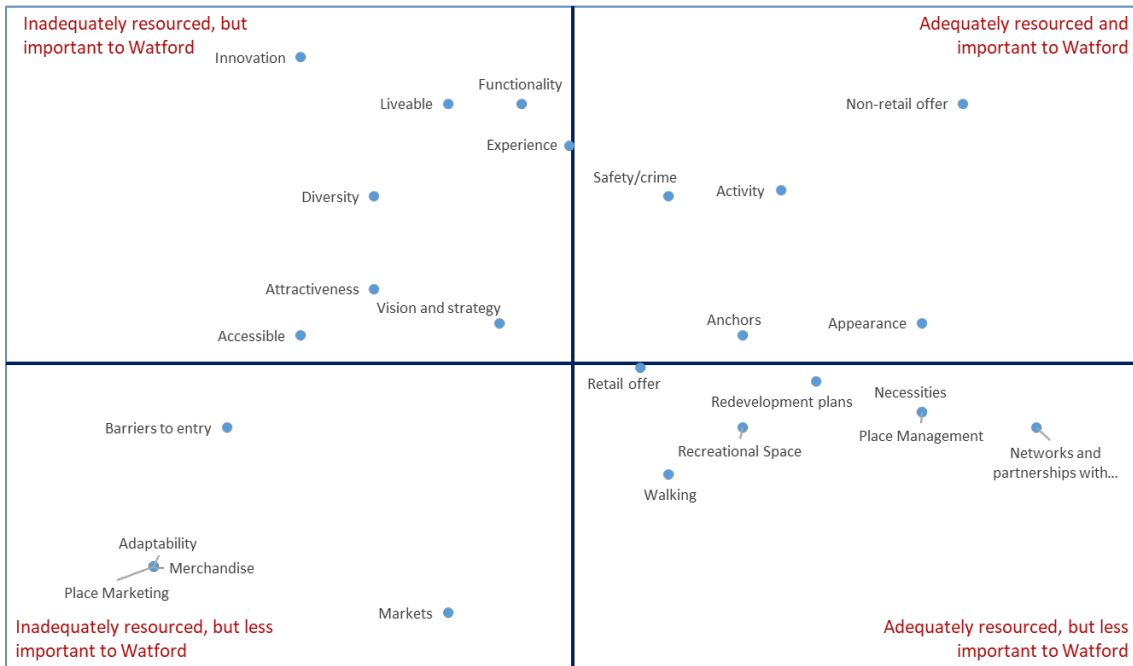


Figure 7: Survey matrix

The matrix may help in deciding priorities. The factors clustered in the right-hand boxes are perceived to be adequately resourced, whereas those in the top half are seen as more important to Watford. The matrix draws attention to the cluster of factors located in the top-left, factors which are perceived as important, but inadequately resourced. These factors resonate with the discussion in the workshop, such as what might attract people to Watford and concerns about accessibility. In deciding what to focus on, however, it should be noted factors such as Vision and Strategy and Experience, are ranked by the IPM within the top five priority interventions, whereas Functionally and Innovation, although important, are ranked less highly. The table below, therefore, ranks each factor according to the IPM’s priorities, with notes attached summarising discussions that took place during the workshop:

List of Factors considered important, but inadequately resourced – ranked according to IPM priorities

FACTORS	NOTES from breakout room discussions
1. Vision and Strategy (3)	<p>The strength of feeling within the group discussions relates to the development of clear and compelling long-term vision for Watford town centre, which can engage wider stakeholders and a more diverse range of voices from the community, and use existing community capacity more effectively.</p> <p>Stakeholders expressed concern about the need for more information and data sharing, the need for closer cooperation and coordination between stakeholders, networks and partnerships (although the group identified place management as adequately resourced and not so important to Watford).</p>
2. Experience (4)	<p>The prominent issue arising from the discussion with stakeholders relates to poor place image and reputation, as opposed to fundamental physical problems in the town centre.</p>
3. Accessible (14)	<p>Whereas Watford’s location in terms of access to London and national transport infrastructure is considered good, participants highlighted concern about traffic congestion. In addition, participants mentioned the need for greater synergy between the town centre and main railway station, which is a strong footfall anchor</p>
4. Diversity (15)	<p>Participants were concerned about barriers to entry for independents, which might contribute to diversifying the retail offer in the centre.</p>
5. Attractiveness (16)	<p>With major retailers and employers, Watford possesses strong anchors. However, the recent loss of major retail brands, together with together with strong competition from other towns and Out-of-Town shopping locations, there is concern about the continuing power of the retail offer to attract people to the centre. Furthermore, there was a feeling Watford’s leisure and cultural offer is perhaps undersold, together with Watford’s potential to grow as an employment centre.</p>
6. Liveable (22)	<p>Liveability refers to the potential of the town centre to be a place where people live, not just work or shop. Enhancing this will require a diversification of services and retail, which would better serve a residential population, together with enhanced non-retail offer, which might encompass health, leisure and culture, together with strengthening quality of public realm, and access to open and green space.</p>

7. Functionality (24)	Functionality refers to the degree to which a centre fulfils a role – e.g. service centre, employment centre, residential centre, tourist centre As discussed previously, Watford is currently seen as a predominantly retail and employment centre, but lacks attributes and services, which might strengthen its appeal to visitors and a potential residential population. Repositioning Watford to enhance its appeal to a wider range of users, might simply involve communicating its existing non-retail offer within the town’s catchment. Long-term transformation, however, would depend on strengthening a number of attributes, beyond diversity of services, to include liveability, access to open space etc.
8. Innovation (25)	Innovation refers to transformation that is not just dependent on traditional investment and development, but includes place leaders and partnerships being creative and experimenting in their approaches to town centre development. With the loss of major retailers and potential voids in the town centre, stakeholders identified innovation as perhaps the important to focus on – in terms of activating vacant and under-used space

The IPM’s 25 Factors, however, are not a prescription for change, and neither is it the case all places have to prioritise all 25. The town centre of Watford, for instance, may well be facing challenges, but remains a strong centre, with many strengths and positive attributes. We suggest they are used to inform local discussions about what next for Watford town centre, in a process whereby the town’s stakeholders agree a shared vision and priorities for Watford. The responses highlight factors that cross all four of the identified aspects that town and city centres need to address:

- **Attractions** are the reasons people come to a centre, and it is clear those attending the workshop felt improvements in the strength and diversity of offer are needed, or need better communicating.
- **Accessibility** is getting into, out of and around the centre, servicing and providing for people with various needs. There appears a high level of concern about this from the responses, specifically in relation to traffic congestion.
- **Amenity** is the quality of experience within the centre and there are references to appearance in discussions during the workshops, however, it was felt that Watford has a lot to offer, but suffers from a poor image.
- **Action** is about making things happen and it is clear that the respondents identified issues about leadership and engagement and about the need to change perceptions of the town centre. This is where innovation might play a vital role in shifting the appeal of Watford to a wider range of uses and changing their opinions of the centre.

Going forward

The workshop identified a number of shared concerns and issues about the future of Watford's town centre. The findings from the stakeholder workshop presented in this report draws attention to what these changes might be, and what action local stakeholders might take. The report provides only a snapshot from the workshop findings. Our recommendation is that Watford should review in more detail the 25 factors and see how the town is performing in respect of each. The IPM could support this review by conducting a Place Quality Audit; however, this would require a site visit and further desk-based research. Under current restrictions resulting from the pandemic, this might prove difficult, although local stakeholders could do the review themselves.

In communicating a potential strategy to take Watford town centre forward, it is important to acknowledge there a potential quick wins (such as place activation), whereas other interventions are only achievable in the long term. Addressing traffic congestion for instance, may require significant capital investment in transport infrastructure and planning. That said, Watford appears to have a number of strong attributes, and it may be the case that many existing interventions and activity simply need to be more effectively communicated across a wider range of stakeholders in the town centre. It also clear, given the workshop attendance and levels of engagement, there is potentially a strong network of stakeholders who are willing and invested in the town's future.

The Institute has developed a four-element framework for regeneration that enables full attention to be given to areas of need. The four areas where a difference can be made are repositioning, reinventing, rebranding and restructuring.

Priority 1 – Restructuring

We would classify the top three factors identified in the workshop as being primarily concerned with restructuring. Accessibility problems mentioned by participants are about physical restructuring whilst the issues around networks and partnerships and vision and leadership are concerned with governance and management structures. Both of these require restructuring strategies (Peel and Parker 2017). The workshop suggests that these areas need to be the focus for real change to happen. The first requires a thorough analysis of the problems and potential solutions and the best use of current infrastructure. Too often, however, places embark on major planning and physical regeneration projects, without sufficient resource dedicated to place management and maintenance in the long term. The second change, therefore, calls for greater cooperation of all place stakeholders and creation of strategic networks and public-private relationships that will nurture conditions for the sustainable development of a place, rather than taking top-down approaches. What was quite telling from the workshop was how stakeholders highlighted "community" as a key strength, but much less clear is how Watford's communities are involved in decision-making and shaping the future of the centre.

Quick wins

- Improve communication and co-ordination of key local stakeholders, and consider refreshing these networks to widen their diversity and add additional capacity to effect change
- Consider forming a strategic leadership group, but then delegate responsibilities to specific groups of stakeholders, for instance, the local authority to provide facilitation and co-ordination,

the BID to focus on place activation and events, independent traders to take responsibility for social media and place branding etc.

Longer term

- Repurposing of retail space to add additional functionality
- Address concerns about traffic congestion
- Improve liveability and walkability within the town centre, and strengthen synergies with other anchors e.g. railway station, football stadium, Cassiobury Park, through creative place-making interventions, signage etc.
- Soften the impact of the ring road to improve connectivity between the town centre and residential neighbourhoods within walking distance

Priority 2 – Rebranding

The second most significant barrier appears to concern about place reputation, image, perception and communication, which we group under Place Marketing. To address this issue, we would advise rebranding.

Strategies of rebranding focus upon the application of branding, marketing communications, and public relations techniques in order to deliver a consistent place identity, which relates to the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions in the minds of potential consumers of a place (Ntounis, and Kavaratzis, 2017). Successful place brand management can lead to positive word-of-mouth, and assist in the transformation of previously negative, or just as problematic, non-existent images. We would suggest more research is undertaken to analyse and understand how Watford is perceived more generally, e.g. through social media sentiment analysis, as sometimes concerns expressed by stakeholders about place reputation are not necessarily reflected in how wider consumers or residents talk about a place.

Going forward, Watford stakeholders should come together to co-create a positive and consistent place brand. Indeed, participatory place branding processes can flourish when place stakeholders are engaged in the right context and are encouraged to work together collaboratively. This does not necessarily require professional branding assistance, and neither does the target audience need to be an external one. Rather, low-level and low-cost social media communication across multiple platforms designed to engage and inform existing users of the town-centre, stakeholders and residents, about existing activities and the wider offer in the centre might prove just as effective.

Quick wins

- Low cost co-ordinated social media to communicate the centre offer and activity to increase visibility to existing catchment and users, and to nudge perceptions of Watford to a more positive position.

Longer term

- A clear shared vision, which is communicated in collaboration with users and stakeholders.

Priority 3 – Reinventing

The workshop findings suggest Watford possesses strong retail and employment anchors and serves a diverse population and catchment. The town is well-located in terms of national transport infrastructure and possesses a rich cultural, sporting and leisure offer. However, there are concerns about how widely the town centre's existing strengths are more widely appreciated. Participants also drew attention to how Watford might become a more significant employment centre and a place to live, especially given the predicted changes to mobility and working patterns that appear to be emerging post-pandemic. There are perhaps opportunities, therefore, to reinvent Watford as an attractive and liveable place for employees and residents. It was felt, however, the town centre current lacks a sufficient range of diverse retailers, non-retail offer and leisure/cultural attributes, which might appeal to potential users of the centre and encourage them to dwell/linger for longer. Added to this, was a concern about how sufficiently the centre currently serves the diverse population of the wider town.

Reinventing strategies relate to the activities undertaken to revitalise a place's identity and offer (Theodoridis, Ntounis, and Pal, 2017). Any place, however, should understand and seek to meet the needs of its catchment and the visitors it may attract, and be sensitive to these insights when making any changes within a centre. We would encourage stakeholders in the area to make use of the footfall data being recorded to track progress of any interventions and to monitor change using other data. There is support available through the High Streets Task Force, for instance, to help places collect and analyse this data, including extended data dashboards for towns' with Springboard counter. This data can be an invaluable resource, particularly for local businesses when considering aspects such as opening hours, which can be important for centres looking at extending dwell time of visitors.

Quick wins

- Small scale, low cost and basic improvements to appearance, planters, signage, shop front improvements, murals, artwork, lighting, pocket parks
- Creative pop-ups and events to activate the centre
- Review and evaluate the promotion and performance of the existing market.

Longer term

- Increasing the prominence of the leisure and cultural offer, independents and non-retail offer
- Potential to extend dwell time using footfall data to track interventions

Priority 4 – Repositioning

Repositioning is a strategy that relates to clearly identifying and communicating a place's market position (Millington and Ntounis, 2017). It can be used to counteract decline, and enables centres to identify potential competitive advantages. The start point involves understanding forces of change, and the value of unique responses that reposition centres. Such responses should build on a place's distinct capabilities, whilst also accommodating future trends in order for a centre to be resilient. Knowledge exchange between stakeholders is also crucial in such strategies to generate a shared understanding of a centre's identity and function.

Our general impression is pre-pandemic, Watford town centre was serving its catchment well, and it was functioning as strong retail and employment centre. However, there were concerns expressed by stakeholders about the town's retail offer, which has clearly been affected by recent closures of major department stores, and uncertainty about the future management of the shopping centre. Whereas Watford had become a strong retail destination, the town does face strong competition from other retail locations within the region, and with the wider restructuring of the retail sector, especially the shrinkage of national multiple retailers, it is timely to define more clearly the town's position. As highlighted in this report, Watford's role as a centre for entertainment, leisure and culture is perhaps under-appreciated and not widely communicated. Another consideration is that the town centre's annual footfall signature pre-COVID, suggests Watford is already performing, like many centres do, as a multi-functional centre, adds credence to discussions in the workshop about Watford role as a non-retail destination. Future strategy development, therefore, perhaps need to consider how to strengthen Watford as an employment, and potentially residential centre. However, it is important Watford use evidence and data to understand wider social and economic change to provide an enhanced offer to current and potential users of the town.

Quick wins

- Share the footfall data with a wide range of local stakeholders

Longer term

- Track effectiveness of interventions in the town centre through monitoring and interpreting footfall data (volume and pattern of activity)
- Improve co-ordination of key local stakeholders
- Reposition Watford as a diverse multifunctional and liveable employment, residential and cultural centre.

Conclusion

Watford is a town with many underlying strengths and positive attributes. The workshop participants shared a common passion for Watford and are invested in its future. Although local stakeholders are aware and able to talk about these strengths, it appears the qualities of Watford's town centre are perhaps not widely known or appreciated by wider audiences. Addressing place reputation is clearly important, however, many places quickly resort to rebranding strategies, when there might be other priorities that need addressing first. For example, the group recognised how the world is changing in relation to retail, employment and mobility, together with wider structural challenges, which will require change in Watford. Adapting the town centre for the future, however, will require a clear and shared vision, effective place leadership and appropriate networks and partnerships to deliver activity and investment. Once established, this group should take ownership of rebranding Watford.

The work undertaken by the IPM only provides a snapshot, but has begun to identify factors that might contribute to the vitality and viability of Watford town centre. We have also shared the four elements of the regeneration process. We hope that the workshop was just another step in developing a future for Watford as a town serving both its communities as the world changes.

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Appendix 1: The IPM 25 priorities for vitality and viability

1 Activity

Description: Activity (or town centre activity) is understood as patterns and levels of everyday usage. It refers to a high street or town centre being open for people for a variety of uses (retail, leisure, social exchange, entertainment, work, etc).

Activity includes: Opening hours; footfall; shopping hours; evening economy.

2 Retail offer

Description: Retail offer is the overall range of retailers and services available on the High Street including the availability and variety of products and services (comparison/convenience, luxury, discount), retail channels (store-based, online only, click and collect) and retail formats (from small independent shops to shopping centres) that are aimed at satisfying the needs of consumers.

Retail offer includes: Retailer offer; retailer representation

3 Vision and strategy

Description: The continuing economic, social and other challenges that shape the High Street necessitate the development of a clear, shared and compelling vision that sets out long-term aspirations, aims and goals. Effectively, a vision lays down the blueprint for future strategic development and regeneration of a place, which is then adopted by the wider community.

Vision and strategy include: Leadership; collaboration; area development strategies.

4 Experience

Description: Experience refers to a person's perception and sense of a place, and can comprise physical, cognitive and emotional attributes. Experience of a place can be related to a number of factors such as whether it feels welcoming, if it is a good place to spend time, overall customer service experience of retail premises, transport and public space, and environmental factors such as air quality, noise levels and lighting.

Experience includes: Centre image; service quality; visitor satisfaction; familiarity; atmosphere.

5 Appearance

Description: Appearance refers to the quality of the public realm and aesthetics of a place. It involves cleanliness, but also other aspects that can translate into positive (or negative) experiences such as lighting, green elements (e.g. trees or flower baskets or beds), congruent landscape (in harmony with the vision and identity of the town), and management of unused spaces.

Appearance includes: Visual appearance; cleanliness; ground floor frontages

6 Place management

Description: The Institute of Place Management (IPM) defines place management as "a coordinated, area-based, multi-stakeholder approach to improve locations, harnessing the skills, experiences and resources of those in the private, public and voluntary sectors".

Place management includes: Centre management; Shopping Centre Management; Town Centre Management (TCM); Place Management; Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

7 Necessities

Description: Necessities refers to basic amenities and facilities such as car and bicycle parking, benches and other street furniture, rain and shade structures, streetlights, public toilets, pavements, etc.

Necessities include: Car-parking; amenities; general facilities.

8 Anchors

Description: A high street anchor can be described as any type of attraction or infrastructure that significantly increases the presence of people (footfall) in the high street and the surrounding areas. Anchors can be retail, employment, public transport hubs, greenspace, heritage or culture etc.

9 Non-retail offer

Description: Non-retail offer refers to the opportunities in a centre beyond retail. It includes bars and restaurants; leisure, entertainment, arts, and culture; business and employment; education; health services; and housing.

Non-retail offer includes: Attractions; entertainment; non-retail offer; leisure offer.

10 Merchandise

Description: Merchandise refers to the range, assortment, and quality of goods in a centre. It also refers to whether a centre meets the needs of the catchment through the merchandise it offers. Merchandise is not only about availability, but also about pricing, discounts, samples, etc. that customers benefit from.

Merchandise includes: Range/quality of goods; assortments; merchandising.

11 Walking

Description: Walking refers to how walking-friendly an area is, the quality of walking conditions, including safety, comfort, and convenience. It also includes other aspects that can improve the walking experience: car free zones, appropriate lighting, signing, etc.

Walking includes: Walkability; pedestrianisation/flow; cross-shopping; linked trips; connectivity.

12 Place marketing

Description: Place marketing is traditionally concerned with the development and subsequent promotion of a place product, as well as the construction of a sellable place image that can highlight local difference and enhance a place's competitive position.

Place marketing includes: Centre marketing; marketing; orientation/flow.

13 Networks & partnerships with council

Description: Networks & partnerships with council refers to the presence of strong networks and effective formal or informal partnerships with council, business and the community. It includes any collaborations that can positively influence the high street.

Networks & partnerships with council include: Networking; partnerships; community leadership; retail/tenant trust; tenant/manager relations; strategic alliances; centre empowerment; stakeholder power; engagement.

14 Accessible

Description: Accessibility of a town centre or high street refers to its ease of reach, and to how convenient it is to access it, by a variety of different modes of transport. It also includes how well the centre is connected digitally.

Accessible includes: Convenience; accessibility; connected (including digital).

15 Diversity

Description: Diversity is about facilitating a variety of offers that makes a place attractive to live and work in and refers to the importance of making sure places are vibrant and viable at different times of the day, week and year, attracting different markets for a range of activities.

Diversity includes: Range/quality of shops; tenant mix; tenant variety; availability of alternative formats; store characteristics; comparison/convenience; chain vs independent; supermarket impact; retail diversity; retail choice.

16 Attractiveness

Description: Attractiveness is an economic term and refers to the 'pulling power' of a centre and relates to KPIs that measure its performance, over time.

Attractiveness includes: Sales/turnover; place attractiveness; vacancy rates; attractiveness; retail spend; customer/catchment views; Construction of OOT centre.

17 Markets

Description: Markets add to the pleasure of the customer experience and for markets that sell locally produced goods they act as signifiers for local identity, providing colour and character and focusing on regional wares and specialities.

Markets include: Traditional markets; street trading.

18 Recreational space

Description: Recreational space refers to the amount and quality of recreational areas and public space/open space and places that are uncommodified where people can enjoy spending time without spending money.

Recreational space includes: Recreational areas; public space; open space.

19 Barriers to entry

Description: Barriers to entry refers to hindrances that are associated with the profile and characteristics of the location (land prices, rents, vacancy rates, whether there is ground for development, absence/presence of competitors, land uses, commercial lease agreements) that stop new entrepreneurs trading in the centre.

Barriers to entry includes: Barriers to entry; landlords.

20 Safety/Crime

Description: Safety/crime is a centre KPI measuring perceptions of safety and crime and actual recorded crime including shoplifting.

21 Adaptability

Description: Adaptability refers to the flexibility of the space, property and operators in a centre. It is about the flexibility of the planning system and how units can be re-let or re-purposed. It also involves how adaptable retailers are to change their type or style of retail activities in relation to potential shifting consumer behaviour and catchment needs.

Adaptability includes: Retail flexibility; retail fragmentation; flexibility; store/centre design; retail unit size; store development; rents turnover; store/centre design.

22 Liveable

Description: Liveable refers to the resident population or potential for residence in the centre. Having town centre residents supports many businesses, particularly food shops, cafes, restaurants; that is, retail and non-retail offer that can improve the vitality and viability of a centre. A liveable place is concerned with quality of life and community wellbeing.

Liveable includes: Multi/mono-functional; liveability; personal services; mixed use.

23 Redevelopment plans

Description: Planning for redevelopment is a complex process involving developers, planners, landowners, investors, community groups, and businesses. Redevelopment plans can often exclude and silence the relevant and most vulnerable stakeholder groups (e.g. small businesses, consumers, residents) in favour of 'high-returning' redevelopment projects that are influenced by corporate capital and desensitise people from their place. Town centre regeneration, where misguided can stall plans and leading to situations that have a negative impact on town centres and high streets.

Redevelopment plans include: Planning blight; regeneration.

24 Functionality

Description: Functionality refers to the degree to which a centre fulfils a role – e.g. service centre, employment centre, residential centre, tourist centre.

25 Innovation

Description: Innovation refers to transformation that is not just dependent on traditional investment and development but includes place leaders and partnerships being creative and experimenting in their approaches to town centre development. This approach could include encouraging pop-up shops, festivals, events, and community use of redundant retail space.

Innovation includes: Opportunities to experiment; retail innovation.