Vital and Viable Atherstone

Dr Steve Millington, Joe Barratt, and Tom Hindmarch

March 2022

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

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

Dr Steve Millington

Steve Millington is a Reader in Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University. His academic career spans over 20 years, he is currently a Director of the Institute of Place Management, where he leads on several projects including the IPM's Vital and Viable programme, the Interreg ABCE Cities project, and coordinating research for the High Streets Task Force for England.

Joe Barratt

Joe Barratt is a Junior Fellow of the Institute of Place Management and a board member of the government's High Streets Task Force. Having co-founded The Teenage Market, which gives young people a free platform to showcase their creative talents at market events across the UK, he is now responsible for championing the role of young people in place making and place decision making, helping to inspire council leaders and other place management organisations (such as BIDs) to work with young people and include them in governance structures.

Tom Hindmarch

Tom Hindmarch was the membership coordinator and events lead at the Institute of Place Management. Tom was 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. He is now Stakeholder Engagement Manager for the iNetwork.

Foreword

This report has been prepared following an online workshop held in December 2021, attended by 12 key local stakeholders from Atherstone, including representatives from the local and county councils. Facilitated by the Institute of Place Management at the invitation of Warwickshire County Council, the event formed part of the journey Atherstone is undertaking to revitalise the town centre in terms of post-pandemic recovery and long-term viability. This report builds, therefore, on findings collated by the High Streets Task Force for England, and a wider piece of work being undertaken by the IPM to inform country policy response to the challenge's affecting Warwickshire's town centres and high streets.

Table of Contents

Summary

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 global 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 to also help places prepare and adapt so they are more resilient in the future. In doing so, the report draws on the IPM's extensive research and engagement with places across the UK and beyond in relation the vitality and ability of high streets and centres. The second part of the report presents the workshop findings from Atherstone, 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.

Priority 1: Restructuring

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Improve communication between and co-coordination of key local stakeholders e.g., ensure the updating of signage is communicated to local stakeholders.	Establish what short term, actionable objectives can be achieved over the next year, and establish sub-groups to tackle specific initiatives.
Evaluate extent local stakeholders and community share and support the vision.	Revisit and refresh the existing vision for Atherstone and consider whether a new collaborative vision is required.
Re-map stakeholders across the town and circulate findings.	Consider refreshing local networks to widen their diversity and add additional capacity to effect change through engagement with local traders, younger people, event organisers outside the town.
Review how the Atherstone Partnership is resourced and establish a business case for increased funding to support activity. Is there scope to rethink how the partnership is supported by local and county government?	Construct a system for supporting and managing local volunteers – and make a succession management plan for the town centre partnership and volunteer network, to enable their continuity.

Priority 2: Rebranding

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Co-ordinate local social media channels, to improve both consistency and targeting of messages about the town centre, its retail and non-retail offer, and the range of events taking place both in the town, and in nearby places.	Ideally local traders, including market traders, would take responsibility for social media in relation to the town centre.
Establish what retails channels are present in the town e.g., how many retailers/market traders are store-based only compared to traders with an online presence, those offering click and collect services, home-delivery etc.	Encourage independent traders to create active social media accounts and provide training to improve their digital footprint.
Conduct analysis of social media to understand better how people perceive the reputation of Atherstone, visitors experience and review of service quality e.g., collate and analyse TripAdvisor reviews for local businesses and attractions.	Coordinate social media with surrounding events and tourist destinations to encourage visitors to make linked trips to the town centre and develop closer alignment with county wider visitor and tourism strategy.
Assess how welcoming the town is in terms of legibility and atmosphere at different times of the year / compare night and daytime / market days to non-market days / festival and events to non-event days.	Identify small funding pots for small / tactical place-making projects e.g., improvement of shop front, murals, pocket parks, parklets. Trial and experiment to build evidence base for more permanent/large scale intervention.
Collate a list of any obvious eyesores which detract from visitor experience / quality of gateways, signage, street furniture, planting and planters, unkempt verges/micro-plots, lighting, commercial waste, general litter and so on.	Establish feasibility for small-scale place-making interventions to improve legibility and wayfaring Work with other stakeholders to improve appearance e.g., of car parks, transit stops, properties – assets outside the control of local government. Update and improve signage across the town centre.

Priority 3: Repositioning

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Ensure footfall data is widely available and can be accessed by local traders, event organisers and other place-based stakeholders to demonstrate success of delivery.	Continue to track effectiveness of interventions in the town centre through monitoring and interpreting footfall data (volume and pattern of activity), providing impact assessment of events etc.
Conduct a use class survey and analysis to establish: • The mix of retail, leisure, social, entertainment, commercial activity • Any imbalance or underrepresented services or activities, • The overall range of retailers and services, to establish mix of comparison, convenience, luxury, discounters, • The range of retail formats, e.g., balance of national chains compared to independents, shopping centres etc • Establish modal opening and closing towns of town centre businesses.	Establish where there are any key retailers or other services currently absent in the town centre, which might see Atherstone as a viable investment option. Engage local property owners and provide them with insights to inform reuse of vacant units.
Conduct footfall analysis to establish: • Impact of market days on footfall, • Impact of events/festivals on footfall, • The extent business opening times of align with activity patterns, • Regular / routine patterns of activity around major place-based anchors e.g., employment, transit hubs etc.	Establish an action plan to amplify synergies between different place-based anchors and local traders e.g., re-trialling changed opening times, co-ordinated marketing of events, engagement with local employment anchors.
Review existing plans and vision and benchmark against the IPM's 25 Priorities.	Based on this analysis, review existing plans or visions for the town and update them to reflect continuing long term structural trends and challenges to the high street Ensure alignment between Local Plan and the intelligence gathered.

Priority 4: Reinventing

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Review range of place-based anchors (retail, employment, transport, green space, heritage, culture), everyday activity that significantly attracts footfall.	Ensure key place-based attractors are embedded in local plans and visions for the town centre and include in wider messaging. Conduct feasibility study into adding skills/education functionality to the high street e.g., co-working space, hospitality training, support for independent traders.
Review how Atherstone is promoted within the wider North Warwickshire tourism.	Work with local DMO to ensure a clear, consistent messaging is used to promote Atherstone and nearby tourist attractions, festivals, and events.
Evaluate potential to extend dwell time using footfall data to track interventions e.g., through trials of extended opening hours, early evening events, pop-ups.	Identify opportunities to experiment and deliver new innovative place-making interventions e.g., new retail formats, extended market offer, pop-ups, reuse of vacant units.
Review and evaluate impact of new market activity e.g., monthly Farmer's Market, market stalls in the evening e.g., by footfall activity.	Ensure market offer drives footfall and aligns with catchment needs.

Structural challenges facing the high street

The challenge

The collapse of well-known retail brands, declining footfall, high vacancies, and the rise of internet shopping all present major challenges to the vitality and viability of town centres and high streets. Clearly the pandemic had a major impact, but what is becoming evident is not all places were affected in the same way. Many high streets are recovering, and several towns have already returned to, and several have significantly surpassed their pre-pandemic levels of footfall[1]. Despite proclamations about the end of the high street, many centres across the country are performing well, and some thriving. Although attention is currently on post-pandemic recovery, it is important places also recognise the dynamic long-term processes that render high streets and towns in constant state of flux and enact plans to not only address their immediate recovery, but also accommodate room for adaption to address long-term transformation. What is also clear is how the pandemic accelerated the uptake of online shopping, changing consumer priorities, by impacting on spending and holiday plans, and continues to impact on where people work and choose to visit. Although difficult to predict how long such developments will last, certainly the pandemic will continue to have profound implications for high streets in the short to medium term. But there are other developments which will certainly shape the future. There will be a growing and ageing population, for instance, mobile commerce and big data analytics will continue grow, and places will have to confront the challenge of climate change.

Before the pandemic, support for town centres and high streets was high on the UK government's agenda with the establishment of the Towns Fund in 2019, including the Future High Streets Fund, with £3.6 billion ring-fenced to support for towns in England. However, considering 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 and Reopening High Streets Safely to support the safe reopening of high streets. The government's response illustrates the severity of the challenge facing town and city centres. We are encouraged that Warwickshire County Council recognises the need to act quickly and has enlisted the support of IPM to build consensus amongst stakeholders in the region.

The IPM and planning for the future

As we look to the future, it is essential centres of all scale adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Local place management and leadership was more important than ever as places combat the pandemic's short-term impact. However, it is important for the future of Atherstone local stakeholders also consider the long-term future of their town, identifying and driving forward change as the 'new normal' begins to take shape.

The IPM is uniquely placed to support Atherstone on the road to recovery, having conducted extensive research on town centre change and more recently on recovery from the pandemic. The Expert Panel established by the former Minister for the High Street, Jake Berry, and led by Sir John Timpson, strongly advocated for additional funding and support for town centres. The

---

[1] High Street Task Force Annual Review of Footfall 2020-2021

recommendations in Sir John's *High Street Report* draw on evidence collated by the IPM. The IPM visited six towns in England listening to the first-hand opinions, concerns, and aspirations of local stakeholder groups, much like the group in Atherstone. The findings are summarised in the report *High Street 2030: Achieving Change*[2], published in December 2018.

In 2019, following a successful bid, the IPM was appointed by the UK government to lead a consortium of partners who comprise the High Streets Task Force (HSTF). The HSTF provides expertise, knowledge, training, and support to local stakeholders involved in regenerating their local centres and high streets across the whole of 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'[3]. 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.
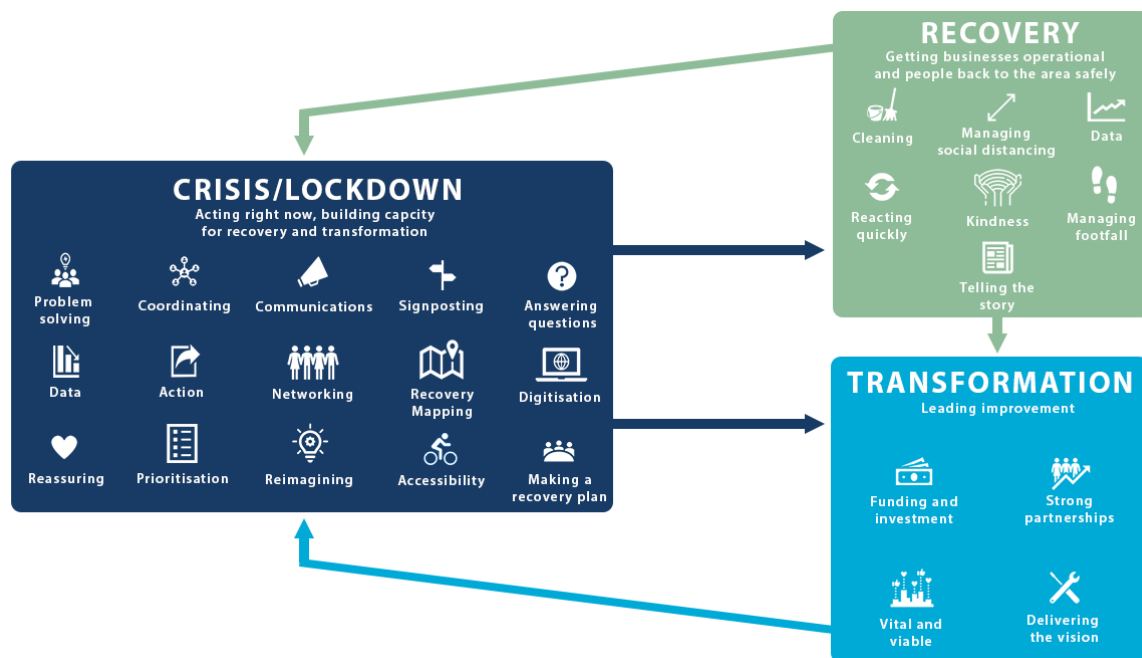
Figure 1: IPM's COVID-19 recovery framework

This frameworks draw underpinning research conducted by the IPM, such as 'the 25 factors for vitality and viability'[4] and the '4Rs framework'[5]. These were developed through academic investigation in consultation with key national stakeholders, policy professionals, practitioners, and importantly through partnership working with several places across the UK.

---

[2] High Street 2030: Achieving Change
[3] Routemap to Transformation
[4] IPM 25 Priorities for Vitality and Viability
[5] IPM 4Rs Framework

The changing high street

Footfall

In the decade prior to the pandemic, high street footfall was decreasing year-on-year, with a cumulative fall of over 20% between 2010-19. Pandemic lockdown measures which began in March 2020, led to a sharp decline in the numbers visiting high street, with footfall down by 81.4% in March 2020 compared to March 2019. Comparing the whole of 2020 to the previous year, retail intelligence experts Springboard reported a 28.3% decline in footfall across all high streets.

However, the national average hides significant differences in the relative performance of different types of towns. The HSTF *Annual Review of Footfall*[6], published in 2022, reveals how comparison centres, typically large city centres, not only experienced the greatest drop in footfall, but are also recovering more slowly than other types of centre. Towns and district centres, for instance, not only experienced much lower declines in footfall, but also recovered more quickly. By the end of 2021, 100% of district centres, typically local high streets, and 70% of towns for example, had recovered their pre-pandemic levels. With more people working at home or flexibly, rather than commuting into the bigger cities, local high streets and smaller towns received a boost. We conclude that recovery appears to be linked to the size of towns.

From this analysis, we can also conclude that centres dependent on retailing to attract visitors were most vulnerable and recovered more slowly compared to places which offer a broader range of attractions. For example, towns investing in culture and heritage led regeneration recovered a little more quickly, and 'multi-functional' centres, centres which provide a wide range of services to their local communities, proved to be the most resilient during the pandemic. Finally, with many people unable to holiday abroad, footfall levels during the summer of 2021, meant that the best performing high streets in the UK were holiday towns, where several reported a better performance than in 2019. People are primarily drawn to these places for reasons other than shopping, but nevertheless high streets in resort towns received a boost as visitor numbers soared. Ultimately, we can conclude that national averages only provide insight into the general picture, and they hide significant geographical differences. Consequently, we would strongly recommend local stakeholders analyze what is happening locally, as the local experience may not necessarily reflect that of the 'average' town.

---

[6] HSTF Annual Review of Footfall 2020-21

Working from home

Another consequence of the 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 and online working becoming more normalised.

It remains to be seen whether these changes will have long term consequences. There are predictions companies might begin to review their commercial space requirements and reconsider the need to maintain costly office space in central locations. With potentially fewer office workers, there is likely to be a significant impact on the local economies 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, lunchtime, and early-evening economies. Clearly, larger central city business districts will be most affected by this change should it happen. In central London for example, despite experiencing a visitor surge post-lockdown, footfall is still nearly two-thirds down compared to 2019. The most likely explanation between the relative performance of larger and smaller centres relates to the drop in commuting. With many working at home, the suggestions are that many people started using their nearest local centre more often during lockdown, discovering local assets, including retail, services, and attributes such as green and open space.

The early signs are that changing patterns of work have clearly provided opportunities for smaller towns, but the extent working at home will become a permanent aspect of everyday life remains open to question, with calls already for workers to return to the office. These changes, if they become 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, will require many locations to adapt, with calls for more commercial and flexible working space on high streets, together with more diverse retail and hospitality sector, and potentially residential uses.

Store Closures

According to the Centre for Retail Research, over 16,000 store units were closed across the UK in 2020, and a further 11,000 in 2021, affecting around 200,000 retail jobs. Big name casualties included Debenhams, the oldest retail chain in the UK, which went into liquidation in December 2020, with the loss of 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, it must be noted 30,000 units were closed across 2018-2019, a continuation of a long-term pattern which

accelerated after the 2008 financial crash. There are multiple factors driving store closures, including:

- The high costs of running retail outlets, including rents, business rates and labour costs,

- Low profitability caused by high costs, slow growth in sales, squeezed profit margins and heavy price competition,

- The rapid growth of online competition such that by 2018 online sales accounted for around 18.4% of total retail merchandise sales, mainly at the expense of bricks-and-mortar retailers,

- Lack of investment in stores and weak forward planning to meet the challenges of the new retailing.

Although many independent traders face similar challenges, the biggest impact has been on national multiple retailers, those companies operating a large network of stores across the UK. 34,000 stores closed between 2008-2020 as a direct consequence of well-known chains going into administration, rationalizing their property portfolio, or using CVAs to renegotiate their rental terms. The additional pressures on bricks n mortar shopping arising from the pandemic lockdowns perhaps should not be seen as the root cause of this decline. Instead, the pandemic accelerated the demise of already struggling retailers. Many simply failed to adapt to new market conditions and long terms trends in consumer behaviour. This is clear with the case of online shopping, which had been rising steadily year-on-year since the turn of the century. Its growth was entirely predictable. Retailers with strong online sales simply do not need to operate an extensive network of branches to achieve national coverage, with new major clothing retailers, such as BooHoo, not requiring any stores at all. Again, the pandemic is not the cause. Rather it has accelerated the country's transition to a nation of online shoppers. It is unlikely, such national multiples will return to most centres in any great number, and towns can no longer rely on bricks and mortar shops to drive footfall and commercial investment.

Whereas media commentary might focus on the plight of retail, the contraction of other traditional high street businesses services receives much less attention, but nevertheless has contributed further to a decline in the attractiveness of high streets. The shift to online service provision and the need to cut property costs underpin the closure of more than 4,700 bank and building society branches across the UK since 2015. In addition, according to *Which? Magazine*, 9,500 cash machines were removed between 2018-19. This will most likely accelerate further the adoption of cashless payment systems that most businesses have shifted to during the pandemic, with implications for traders and communities reliant on cash transactions. Almost 1000 travel agencies have closed since 2016, and the Association of British Travel Agencies is forecasting the physical industry is under dire threat with potentially 750 further closures as major tour operators are unlikely to return to normal trading conditions in the foreseeable future. This has already led to notable casualties with the collapse of Thomas Cook in 2019, and STA travel in 2020, affecting over 650 high street branches. Swinton Insurance once operated a network of 220 branches, but only 40 remain, as their main business goes online. A similar picture is emerging in the retail property sector, with around 1200 estate agents closing since have gone since 2018. High property costs and the shift to online, therefore, is disrupting many business models, not just retail. It must be added though that not all these closed are all vacant. In some cases, independent shops have begun to take the place of national chains, and many others have been converted into non-retail use. According to the Local Data Company, during the first half of 2021, UK gained a net increase of over 800 small stores.

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. 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. According to KPMG, high streets could lose between 20-40% of their retail offering because of the growth of online retailing. 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. Consequently, we might conclude towns dependent on retail to attract footfall are most at risk

Places, however, should be cautious in responding to claims physical retail will disappear entirely. 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 market volume will become larger. 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 there is a future for in-store shopping. Notably, Primark, one the most successful retailers of recent times, does not have an online store offering home delivery, citing the high costs of establishing a cost-effective logistics operation to support an online business. Their online presence, however, deliberately drives customers pick up items instore, where there hope customers will purchase additional items at the same time. However, the qualities of retail experience may need to change in alignment with consumer preferences, explored in the next section.

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 experience. 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 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. In this context, independent traders are well positioned to offer more flexible, tailored, and experiential offer compared to their larger competitors.

Out-of-town Shopping

Over the last 40 years, and despite robust planning guidance to prevent it, the UK experienced rapid growth of out-of-town (OOT) shopping. In 1994, just 14% of retail development was happening in town centres. With concern huge shopping mall developments were harming nearby town and city centres, tighter planning policies requiring a 'town centres first 'approach were introduced, with local authority planning departments asked to apply the "sequential test", which was designed to funnel new retail planning development into traditional centres. Unfortunately, this did not prevent retail expansion, with over 4 million sq.m of new space constructed between 2001-11 through OOT retail parks and supermarkets, whereas town centre floorspace began to decline. Research suggests that when a new major out-of-town retail development is constructed within 10 miles of an existing town centre, it will deflect on average 30% of footfall to the OOT location. Consequently, and long before online shopping began to dent retail spend in town centres, between 1970-2000 high streets lost around 25% of spend to OOT shopping. When combined with online competition, it is not surprising to learn that by 2018 the share of retail spend on high streets had declined further to around 37%, with the Centre for Retail Research estimating it could fall to 34% by 2022.

Competition OOT shopping once seemed an insurmountable challenge, but the restructuring of the retail sector has also created problems for malls and shopping centres, especially those dependent on large department store anchors and national multiple retailers to act as tenants. With many brands closing, or companies seeking lower cost leases, including several who during lockdown even refusing to pay any rent at all, it is also not surprising to see one of the UK's largest shopping centre operators, Intu Properties, with a portfolio including Manchester's Trafford Centre, Nottingham's Victoria Centre, and Norwich's Chapelfield, fall into administration in June 2020 with total debts of £4.5bn. The shopping centre giant Hammerson posted a £1.7bn loss in March 2021— the largest in its history — after the COVID-19 pandemic wiped £2bn off the value of its property portfolio. Although the pandemic has been particularly damaging, with suggestions people preferring to avoid enclosed spaces when the shops were open, we should not less this divert attention from the fact investment in covered shopping centres was already declining to a 25-year low.

Losing more footfall than high streets, increasing vacancy rates as long-standing tenants fell into bankruptcy, and with remaining traders unwilling to honour existing rental costs, poor trading conditions preceded the pandemic, and the scale of change taking place is beginning to have a wider 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[7], 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.

---

[7] Arch Daily

Ageing Towns

As town and city centres change, they also must 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. It is vital then, that local partnerships and networks responsible for high street change, begin to listen to the voices of both the younger and older generations, and ideally involve their representatives in decision-making.

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 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 livable, and walkable places, and centres which are perhaps more resilient to the impact of a global pandemic, town and city centres 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. Plans high street, therefore, again need to acknowledge these wider trends, and create room for adaption and change as new technology emerges.

How should centres respond?

In the face of these challenges, what should be done? How can centres become more sustainable, a place people want to be, and where business can thrive? In 1994, the government commissioned the publication of *Vital and Viable Town Centres: Meeting the Challenge* (HMSO, 1994). This led to changes in national planning policy, which introduced the 'town centres first' concept. The report defined vitality and viability in respect of town centres. They are both concerned with life: the first (vitality) being about whether a centre feels lively and the second (viability) whether a centre has the capacity to attract the investment needed, not only to maintain the fabric of the place, but also to allow for adaptation to changing circumstances.

The complex problem of high street change is compounded by a lack of guidance for local stakeholders to enact viable and effective programmes of intervention. Building analysis of 1000s of academic studies, a national footfall data set, and importantly drawing on insights from towns themselves, the IPM has developed frameworks design to help places make the right decisions. These are not planning documents, nor are they prescriptive programmes for change. Instead, the frameworks allow for local stakeholders to build their own customised programme of support for their high streets.

The first framework is based on the IPM's 25 factors of Vitality and Viability. The tool identifies potential areas of intervention which should have the most impact on making centres attractive, or resilient. Importantly, these interventions should all fall within the control or responsibility of local stakeholders. It is not the case that all places have to act on all 25 factors. Rather, the 25 factors framework is designed to provoke local discussions about what the priorities for that place but framed within a set of both meaningful and practical solutions. The second, the 4Rs Regeneration Framework provides a routemap for place transformation. Through this tool, places can begin to identify short-term quick wins, as well as long-term objectives. Importantly, this framework encourages places to think about delivery of plans and proposals.

To reiterate, these frameworks have not come about by accident, but are based on years of applied research undertaken by the IPM in partnership with local places across the UK. The frameworks were applied and developed first in Manchester, through a programme of work analysing hourly footfall patterns in 10 district centres across the city, supported by more in-depth studies of 5 centres. The resultant Vital and Viable programme has been delivered for both large and small centres, from major city centres to small rural market towns. The workshop has been delivered to North American Business Improvement District managers, and place-based stakeholders from small towns and suburban centres located across Victoria State (Australia). In 2021 alone the IPM supported the counties of Derbyshire, Hertfordshire as well as Warwickshire, in addition to completing work with Watford, Salisbury and Sleaford. In 2022, we are undertaking projects in Salford and Stockport, which will encompass a further 13 district centres. Each of these programmes utilise the frameworks to provide unique place-based recommendations.

25 Priorities for Vitality and Viability

In 2014, research by the IPM identified 201 factors that influence the vitality and viability of the high street and town/city centres. This work was updated in 2020, through research for the High Streets

Task Force, which identified 36 new factors said to impact on the performance of high streets/ centres, reflecting new developments from *crowd funding* to *hipster stores*. With 237 factors to consider, place leaders and local partnerships face a bewildering array of potential interventions. Through working with a panel of experts, and importantly local town teams across the UK, the IPM began to distil this complexity into more meaningful guidance. This involved organising the evidence in terms of:

1. How much *influence* each factor has on the vitality and viability of town centres/high streets? In other words, **what matters?**

2. How much local *control* there is over each factor? In other words, **what can you do about it?**

By calculating a score for each factor, based on both *influence* and *control* this enabled us to identify the Top 25 Priorities that local place leaders and place leaders should focus on, to support the vitality and viability of their high streets and centres. As part of our method, we have grouped the top-rated factors into 25 priorities, presented in detail in Appendix 1.

4Rs of Regeneration framework

The '4Rs' framework is a strategic tool developed to support place leaders to navigate their town and city centres and high streets onto a path of positive change. The 4Rs have been used by many centres to identify higher-level strategic priorities for a given location. The framework underpins the High Streets Task Force's 'Routemap from Recovery to Transformation' a tool endorsed by the UK government designed to help centres navigate the challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Previous research and projects from IPM such as High Street 2020 project has demonstrated how the 4Rs framework provides a structure to the incredibly complex process of place transformation. It distinguishes between the processes of analysis and decision making (repositioning), effecting change (reinventing), communication (rebranding) and governance/spatial planning (restructuring).

Repositioning

In some locations, there is a poor understanding of the catchment, the challenges and trends impacting on the place as well as a lack of data on which to base decisions. In these instances, a strategy of repositioning is sensible. This entails taking time to collect and analyse data and information, as well as develop appropriate visions and strategies that can get widespread buy-in.

Reinventing

Other places have the data they need and sensible plans for how the town or city needs to change to better serve its catchment communities, but nothing is happening there. A process of reinvention is needed. Transformation needs to start! This might be through temporary interventions, events, pop-ups, or experimental place-making.

Rebranding

Sometimes there are good plans, based on good evidence and these are being brought to life. The place is both repositioning and reinventing – but catchment perceptions have not changed. People are still negative about the town or city. In this case, rebranding may be needed. Rebranding

includes better stakeholder communications, not just marketing and PR activities. It also involves using communication to channels to listen to what people say about a place.

Restructuring

Finally, some places just seem to be stuck in a state of inertia around decision making or, when decisions are made and action taken, it doesn't have the impact that was expected. This can be tackled through a process of restructuring. Either the governance and management mechanisms in the place need changing or, large scale spatial planning is needed to address some structural problem – for example the town is too fragmented and needs to be restructured around a centre of gravity that is not the town's current designated core.

Vital and Viable Atherstone

Introduction

On the 9th December the IPM team consisting of Dr Steve Millington, Joe Barratt and Tom Hindmarch delivered a place-based workshop with key local stakeholders from Atherstone. This section of the report summarises the outcomes of the Vital and Viable workshop. The workshop was based on the Vital and Viable programme, a service which the IPM provides for people who are concerned about their local high street, town, or city centre. The full version of the programme would normally involve the installation of automated footfall counters, place quality audits conducted independently by the IPM, a walking tour of the town led by local stakeholders, an in-situ workshop, and final report. In Atherstone's case, the town has an existing footfall counter, and due to concerns about social distancing, the workshop was adapted to be online only. To make up for the other elements, the IPM team instead undertook detailed desk-based research, using a technique developed for the High Streets Task Force, called Transforming Your High Street (TYHS). The outcomes of this work were presented to participants during the workshop. The mix of stakeholders from Atherstone was encouraging, provoking a wide-ranging discussion, with well-informed and passionate people providing important local insights and experience. In addition, we utilised several online survey tools to summarise local opinions. Participants were asked to complete an independent survey ranking the 25 factors. Later, the group was split into three subgroups and discussed priorities using the 4Rs. This was the same exercise completed during the county wide workshop. First, the report outlines the local context, before summarising the Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities identified by the participants. Using the IPM's 25 Priorities for Vitality and Viability, the report identifies priority areas of intervention for the town. Finally, the report outlines potential quick-wins and long-term ambitions with the findings organised using the IPM's 4Rs Framework.

Locating Atherstone

Alongside Coleshill and Polesworth, Atherstone is one of North Warwickshire's key market towns. It has a population of c.8000 and acts as the administrative centre for a wider district of c.60,000. Atherstone is within reach of three major cities, Birmingham, Coventry, and Leicester, and is well connected, with an hourly direct train service to London. Situated on the A5, the town is well positioned in relation to the national motorway network, with access to the M42, M40, M1, M6, and M69.

Atherstone possesses a diverse range of independent traders, from quirky shops and cafes ideal for leisurely browsing, to more everyday services, including a baker and butcher, shops which have disappeared from many other high streets. Long Street is the focus for shopping, although the library and a leisure complex (comprising a gym, swimming pool and fitness classes) are also on high street. Notably, social media impressions draw attention to the number of bridal shops in the town. The town has a historic centre based around St. Mary's Church and the Market Square, which hosts markets on Tuesdays and Fridays, and is used for many of Atherstone's community events. Tourism is an increasing feature, with Atherstone a popular stopping point on the Coventry Canal, which runs through the town. Atherstone can draw on a rich history dating back to Roman times, it is alleged

Queen Boadicea (Boudica) met her fate outside the fort in the Anker Valley. Atherstone can also boast about connections to Henry Tudor, acting as an importance location during the English. Dating back to the 12th century, the Atherstone Ball Game remains an important date in the town's calendar, normally taking place on Shrove Tuesday, when hundreds of people gather to play this unique version of 'the beautiful game.' Atherstone became well known for its hatting factories with the last one, Wilson and Stafford's, closing as recently as 1999. With the decline of the mining industry, Atherstone falls within the Coalfield Regeneration schemes. Atherstone has also recently reinvented itself as a book town, with several bookshops selling new and second-hand stock. Furthermore, Atherstone and North Warwickshire are becoming cycling hotspots, hosting regular international events. Ultimately, Atherstone today might be considered a highly liveable place, an attractive historic market town and visitor destination, providing a range of amenities for both residents and tourists.

Atherstone's *Transforming Your High Street* Report prepared by the High Streets Task Force, reveals the town possesses many strengths, including a range of active community groups and events and festivals. The town centre partnership perhaps remains embryonic, but potentially provides a mechanism through which to build on local strengths and co-ordinate local activity and deliver the vision and plans for Atherstone. The workshop, however, identified several shared concerns and issues about the future of Atherstone'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 Atherstone should review in more detail the 25 factors and see how the town is performing in respect of each.

In communicating a potential strategy to take Atherstone town centre forward, it is important to acknowledge there a potential quick wins, whereas other interventions are only achievable in the long term. Atherstone has several 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.

Understanding Atherstone

As an introductory exercise we asked participants to undertake a short exercise on Mentimeter, an interactive word cloud tool. The exercise presented participants with two simple questions.

- What are your three favorite things about Atherstone?
- What are three main things that hold Atherstone back?

The results from the exercise can be seen in Figures 2 and 3 below:

Figure 1: Favourite things about Atherstone

As can be seen from the figure above 24 different words and phrases were used to describe positive aspects of Atherstone. Clearly standing out are themes related friendliness, people and community, history and heritage, and small independent traders. The main positive here is there appears to be a clear shared understanding of the town's image and identity.

Figure 2: Things holding Atherstone back

25 different words and phrases were used to describe different elements holding Atherstone back. The list here is more diverse, there appears to be less consensus or shared understanding of the challenges facing Atherstone. This is where the Vital and Viable workshop can really help, in terms of helping local stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the problems, together with priorities for intervention.

Specific factors affecting the vitality and viability of Atherstone

Participants were asked to independently fill out our 25 Priorities survey, which requires each respondent to rank each factor in relation to two questions:

1. How much effort/resource is dedicated to the priority in Atherstone?

2. How important do you think the priority is to the vitality and viability of your town?

In total 12 participants within the workshop completed the survey. Figure 4 below summarises how the group ranked each factor according to their perception of how well each factor is resourced in within centres in Atherstone.

Figure 3: 25 Priorities: perceptions of resourcing
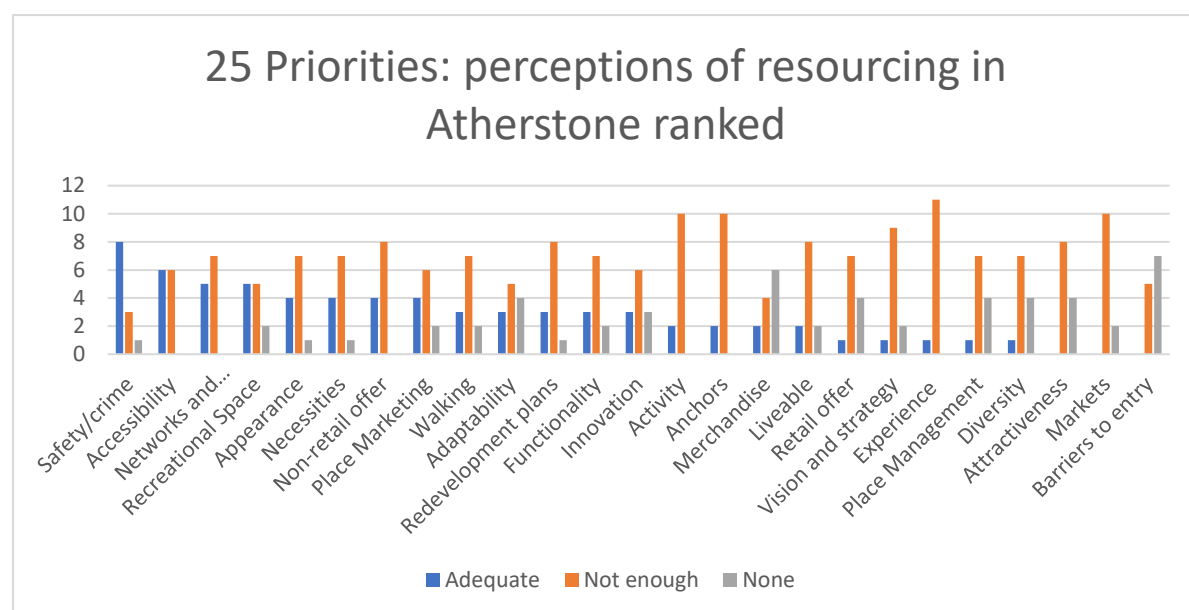
Perhaps somewhat unusually, most of the group perceives Safety/Crime as sufficiently resourced, followed by Accessibility. All the remaining factors, however, are perceived to be under-resourced, notably Attractiveness, Markets, and Barriers to Entry. Before drawing any firm conclusion, it must be emphasized this is a small sample group, and it records perceptions, not actual resourcing. The challenge maybe that Markets, for instance, is something that is well resourced (there must be more than zero resource), but for some reason this is not communicated well or widely appreciated in the town. More transparency and the sharing of data and information amongst key stakeholder groups maybe the quick fix in terms of addressing what on the outset appears to be quite a negative picture of the town.
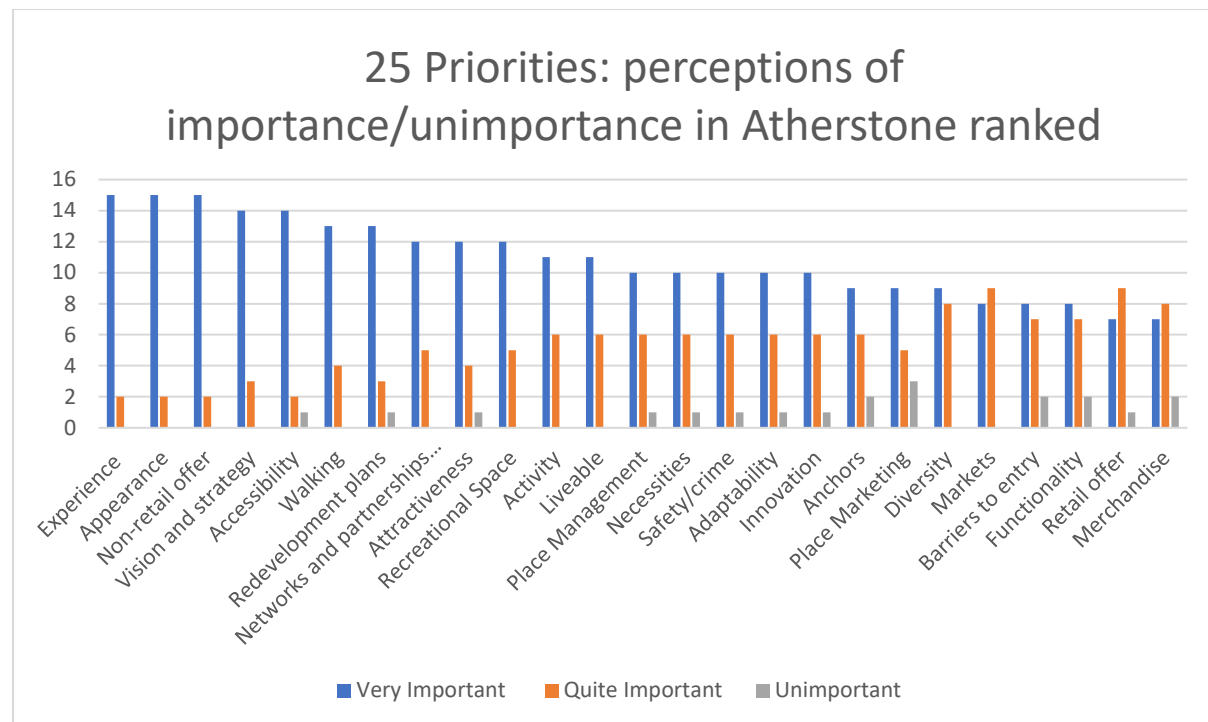
Figure 5 reveals some interesting challenges. For example, when asked what you favourite things are about Atherstone, the small independent traders stood out, but the survey suggests the retail offer, and merchandise are not so important. Instead, here the survey reveals of wide range of important priorities, but amongst the top priorities are Experience, Appearance, Non-Retail Offer, Vision and Strategy, and Accessibility.

The next consideration, however, relates to how underpinning research behind the IPM 25 Priorities ranks the importance of each factor (see Table 2 below), according to the potential impact on vitality and viability, and the levels of local control.

Table 1: List of the IPM 25 Priorities

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	

Taking this list into consideration reveals some challenges, for example, whereas the participants ranked Retail Offer low in Figure 5, the IPM's research ranks this more highly. This is not to suggest Atherstone should necessarily attach higher priority to Retail Offer, rather the IPM listing might help local stakeholders to refine the priorities they have identified. To assist with this process, Figure 7 below, maps the ranking of importance against perceptions of resourcing. Priorities located in the top two quadrants are identified by participants as adequately resourced in Atherstone. Priorities located on the right-hand side quadrants are seen as more important to Atherstone, compared to those on the left. Our attention, therefore, is drawn to the bottom right-hand quadrant, which locates issues participants believed to be important to Atherstone, but inadequately resourced.

Figure 5 perceptions of resourcing plotted against perceptions of importance.

25 Priorities in Atherstone: Importance v Resourcing
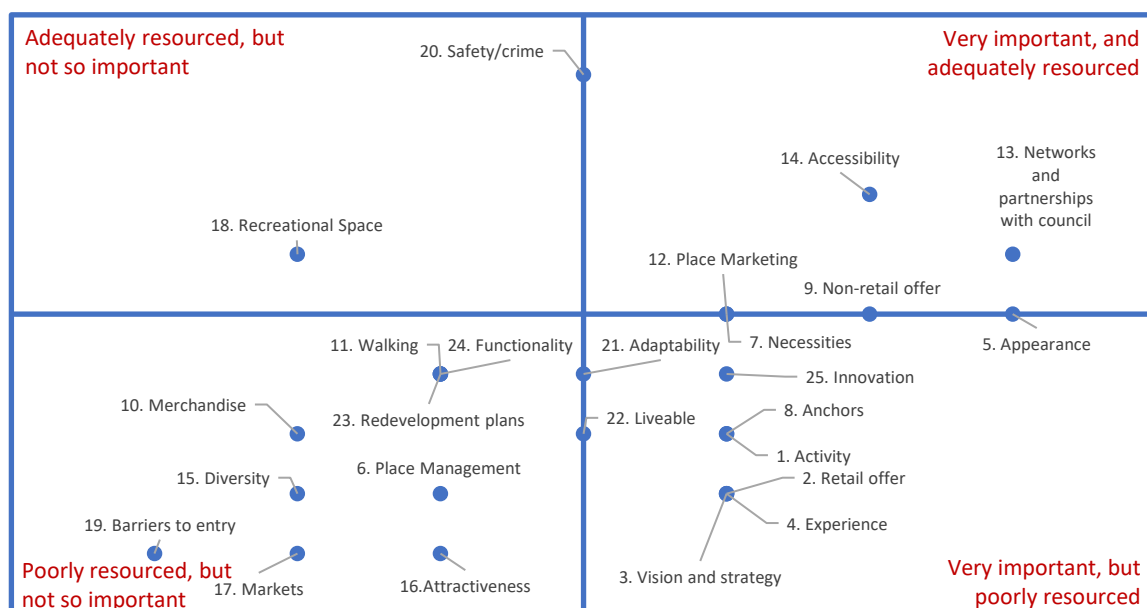
Overall, is it a concern that only 4 factors were seen to be well resourced. For the sake of clarity, if we rule out all the factors located on the x-axis (Adaptability and Liveable, Place Marketing, Necessities, Non-retail Offer, and Appearance), this leaves a group of priorities firmly located in the Very Important to Atherstone, but poorly resourced quadrant. To help order these, the labels positioned in the matrix also include the IPM ranking. Activity, Retail Offer, and Vision and Strategy are the top 3 most important Priorities according to the IPM analysis. Taking this into account, Table 3 below ranks each Priority according to its importance in the IPM ranking. The table also includes indicative activities or interventions to address each priority.

Table 2: Priorities for Atherstone?

Priority	Indicative activities, which might require additional resource
Activity	• Analysis of hourly footfall data – to ascertain the balance between day and evening economies • Review opening times of local business – do they align with activity patterns and if what can local traders do to change this? • Analysis of use classes in town centre (to ascertain mix of retail, leisure, social, entertainment, commercial activity etc), and identify imbalances/underrepresented services • Analysis of the impact of market days and other events/festivals on footfall – what can be done to amplify synergies with local traders?
Retail Offer	• Review of overall range of retailers and services, to establish mix of comparison, convenience, luxury, discounters. • Establish what retails channels are present in the town e.g., how many retailers are store-based only v traders with an online presence, click and collect services. • Review retail formats, e.g., balance of national chains compared to independents, shopping centres etc • Are there any key retailers or retail services currently absent in the town centre?
Vision and Strategy	• Review existing plans or visions for the town and update them to reflect continuing long term structural trends and challenges to the high street? • To what extent do local stakeholders and the community share and support the vision? • Is there a need to develop a new vision, or refresh the existing one?
Experience	• Review centre image and reputation e.g., through survey of local business, residents and visitors, online sentiment analysis, media representation etc. • Review service quality and visitor satisfaction e.g., analyse TripAdvisor reviews • Does the town appear welcoming, is it legible, what kind of atmosphere exists in the town on different days e.g., how market days compare with non-market days, what differences are between day and night-time experiences?
Anchors	• Review the range of place-based anchors in the town (retail, employment, transport hubs, green space, heritage, culture), basically any activity that significantly attracts footfall into the town. • How strong are the synergies between nearby anchors and the town centre? E.g., do employees regularly come into the town? • What scope is there to quickly improve links between town and nearby anchors e.g., signage, route-making etc?
Innovation	• What opportunities are there to experiment e.g., innovative place-making interventions, to introduce new retail formats or offer in the town centre? • What can be done to encourage pop-ups, festivals, events, e.g., through the re-use of vacant shops, or under-utilised public space? • What potential is there to extend the market, or introduce an extended market offer e.g., focused on street-food, crafts etc,

It may well be the case the data and information to tackle these priorities already exists, but the necessary analysis or insights have not been shared widely with local stakeholders. Furthermore, it may also be the case, for example, innovation is already happening, but this activity is perhaps not well co-ordinated or communicated.

An important message is that addressing these priorities might not necessarily require major investment or significant capital funding, but instead might be tackled by improved working practices to better coordinate and communicate what is happening locally. However, you may find your review of these priorities reveals need for a more strategic reappraisal of future development plans. For example, improving synergies between the town centre and nearby footfall anchors, might only require better signage, clearer waymarking, and some promotion e.g., to make employees aware of the local retail offer and direct them to it. Alternatively, it might require more substantive interventions to remove physical blockages and to improve walkability into the town centre from surrounding neighbourhoods.

Ultimately, the recommendations above are based on a single workshop, with small, although important group of participants. We would suggest our recommendations here are taken back to this group for review and comment, or they could form the basis of future discussions in a process whereby local stakeholders in Atherstone refine their vision for the town and agree shared priorities.

The 4Rs Framework in Atherstone

Following the completion of the survey, the IPM team facilitated a more in-depth discussion focussing on the 4Rs framework. Please refer to the Figure 6 below to see the visual representation of the exercise, where participants were asked to identify and justify which off the scenarios best described the situation in Atherstone. The group was split into two breakout rooms, and the outcomes of these discussions are organised within the IPM's 4Rs Framework. In short, participants were asked to identify which of the following scenarios best match the situation in town. From these local insights we still feel Repositioning should be a top priority and Rebranding the lowest, but we would then propose Restructuring takes precedence over Reinvention. is second, rather

Figure 6: 4Rs Framework Workshop Exercise

The initial outcomes of this exercise were fed back to a group of local stakeholders on the 17th of February 2022, including representatives from local government, elected members, Civic Society, local traders, Federation for Small Businesses, which led to further refinement of the priorities based on feedback received in this session. For example, the group thought improving communication and co-ordination should be considered a quick win, as opposed to a longer-term priority.

Recommendations: the main priorities

The IPM's view is that Atherstone needs to revisit its partnership arrangements first, to address the challenge of communication across the town, and to consider how new capacity might be added to existing structures and provide new impetus. The first task should be to revisit existing visions and plans and consider whether these too new a refresh considering the pandemic and its impact on wider society. Consequently, we see **Restructuring** as the top priority. Given that the town already possess several strong attributes, has events, festivals, and markets, together with a strong independent retail offer, we see **Rebranding** as the second priority. Resolving local communication issues, for example, through a single co-ordinated online social media communication channel, will help Atherstone reconnect with its existing catchment by clearly communicating what is happening in the town and advertising its retail offer. Once the town has reactivated its existing offer it will then be timely to review how well the existing offer meets the needs of the local catchment and to think about new opportunities and markets. Consequently, we see **Repositioning** as the next stage of Atherstone's development, to consider what could be done in the short-term to help the town prepare for future adaption. Finally, we have **Reinventing** as the fourth priority, as a strategy for activating the town through new interventions which help the town to reposition itself.

Priority 1 – Restructuring

In some cases, local action is constrained by structural barriers, which require large scale spatial planning interventions to resolve. In the short-term, this does not necessarily appear to be the case in Atherstone. Possibly, long-term planning solutions might focus on the synergies between the town centre and the railway station, or the major employment hubs on the edge of Atherstone.

Another consideration, drawing from the IPM's wider research experience, should Atherstone pursue major regeneration projects in the future, their impact and legacy will be amplified if there are effective networks and partnerships already in place. So, our focus here in relation to restructuring is on the local partnership working and governance arrangements.

With representatives from Warwickshire County Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Atherstone Partnership, Federation of Small Businesses, local traders, Civic Society, and St Mary's Church, a range of people could speak for the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is clear there are a numerous active groups in the town, but concern was raised about momentum, but the pandemic stalled activity and collaborative working. There is a need to reenergise existing networks and partnerships, establish events and simply the get the momentum going again.

The main challenge or barrier holding Atherstone back, and something which was mentioned repeatedly throughout the workshop by numerous participants, was the lack of coordination. There was some frustration expressed concerning why "everyone is fighting against each other". One participant referred to the Welcome Back funding and reflected on how difficult that has been due to everyone wanting their own say on how that money is spent. As another remarked, working with stakeholders in Atherstone, compared to other Warwickshire towns, was like "herding cats".

To illustrate the point about coordination, the Charity Christmas Tractor Rally, which despite being a great spectacle, there is a feeling there might be stronger synergies with the town centre. It was also revealed the Atherstone Heritage Centre had previously worked with Mancetter and there was a need to refresh this collaboration.

"We have been trying for years to tie in Atherstone, Mancetter, Battle of Bosworth, canals etc as contributors to Atherstone heritage and attraction. We are seeing some progress, but more effort and support needs to be coordinated in this" (Workshop Participant).

Furthermore, there was reference to a Destination Management Plan produced by the County Council, but questions were raised about what happened to this. Despite some history to wider working, participants can see value in bringing event organisers located outside Atherstone into local networks and partnerships, including the county council.

Several participants also referred to a disconnect between local businesses and other events, resulting in local traders failing to take advantage of increased footfall. Despite attempts to improve digital skills and presence, and trailing different opening days, there remains a concern about engaging local traders, where participants believed the relationship between this group and local government needs improvement. One suggestion was to run a programme of networking events with local business to identify their needs and challenges, but as one participant opined "people have long memories" and complained about interventions in the past which have not worked out, to suggest future engagement with traders would be challenge.

In Atherstone there is an active group of local volunteers firmly committed to making the town a better place. However, the pandemic perhaps has stalled local networks and partnerships, and certainly workshop participants were concerned about the reliance on a small group of volunteers to take things forward. As we have seen elsewhere this can create challenges in the long term, with individuals becoming burnt-out and withdrawing from volunteer networks, and without a succession management plan in place, the volunteer network eventually dwindles as people over time naturally move on and draw back from activities, and there is no clear idea about who will take their place. Questions were asked about whether the local authority might take on a role in providing support for volunteers, but public resource for this appears limited. There is perhaps an opportunity to refresh membership by reaching out to and including new residents or including more younger people. It appears the Atherstone Partnership has been working on by bringing together a 'Youth Partnership' as a sub-group, together with work with local schools, but this currently seems to be less of a priority. Although mapping exercises may have been done previously, given the pandemic and new arrivals in the own, it maybe apposite to review local community capacity, to determine whether new individuals and groups might be added to existing partnership arrangement.

Sometimes places just seem to be stuck in a state of inertia around decision making or, when decisions are made and action taken, it does not have the impact that was expected. This can be tackled through a process of restructuring. Strengthening existing synergies perhaps involves more than simply improving communications between local stakeholders, and instead calls for more greater collaboration and coordination of local stakeholders. This may involve a refreshing of existing networks. Sometimes wider town partnerships meet too often or are simply too large to be effective. It might prove useful, therefore, consider delegating specific tasks to sub-groups, which meet more often, who report back to a smaller executive group. It is not for the IPM, however, to determine how this operates, the various partnerships and stakeholders involved in Atherstone, including local government, need to work out what works best. Consequently, there are not many easy wins here, but hopefully the Vital and Viable workshop provided a springboard to address this issues in proactive way.

Priority 1: Restructuring

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Improve communication between and co-coordination of key local stakeholders e.g., ensure the updating of signage is communicated to local stakeholders.	Establish what short term, actionable objectives can be achieved over the next year, and establish sub-groups to tackle specific initiatives.
Evaluate extent local stakeholders and community share and support the vision.	Revisit and refresh the existing vision for Atherstone and consider whether a new collaborative vision is required.
Re-map stakeholders across the town and circulate findings.	Consider refreshing local networks to widen their diversity and add additional capacity to effect change through engagement with local traders, younger people, event organisers outside the town.
Review how the Atherstone Partnership is resourced and establish a business case for increased funding to support activity. Is there scope to rethink how the partnership is supported by local and county government?	Construct a system for supporting and managing local volunteers – and make a succession management plan for the town centre partnership and volunteer network, to enable their continuity.

Priority 2 – Rebranding

Strategies of rebranding focus upon the application of branding, marketing communications, and public relations techniques 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. In this respect, the overall reputation of Atherstone is a largely positive, and its position in relation to nearby tourist destinations enables the town to benefit from visitor markets, although more might be done to exploit this advantage.

Sometimes there are good plans, based on good evidence and these are being brought to life. The place is both repositioning and reinventing – but catchment perceptions have not changed. People are still negative about the town or city. In this case, rebranding may be needed. This might be case for Atherstone town centre, where the offer and attributes of the centre might be more clearly communicated to the existing local catchment. By this we mean both residents and others who regularly visit the town centre, including who work in Atherstone, but may live elsewhere. We would suggest more research is undertaken to analyse and understand how Atherstone is perceived, 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. It also involves using communication to channels to listen to what people say about a place.

Rebranding includes stakeholder communications, not just marketing and PR activities. An illustration of this issue relates to events taking place in or near Atherstone, such as cycling or the tractor run, participants reported concern about the reach and effectiveness of the communications promoting these events. However, the challenge is not necessarily related to a lack of communication, as there appears to be numerous active social media channels. Rather the issues appear to relate to the consistency of this messaging, which again points to the need for greater coordination of activity between local stakeholders. The same situation might apply to internal messaging, in relation the independent retail offer and the market.

Ultimately, a strong place brand should be positive and consistent, and the product of local co-creation. It might be appropriate to establish a local subgroup to review and develop an appropriate a participatory place branding process, which engages a wide range of local stakeholders. We would emphasise, 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.

In terms of physical interventions, participants raised concern about tired and dated signage, which according to one participant "point to things that don't exist anymore". Clearly legibility and wayfaring are significant issues to address both in terms of accessibility and for visitors unfamiliar with the town, but as another participant pointed out work was being done to address this issues, further illustrating the priority should be focused on getting the different voices working together, to "bring all the disparate groups together". The updating of signage, however, not only needs to reflect existing assets and strengths in the town but needs to be consistent with the wider vision and identity of Atherstone in terms of style, design, colour and so on. Signage should contribute to place distinction, not distract from it.

Priority 2: Rebranding

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Co-ordinate local social media channels, to improve both consistency and targeting of messages about the town centre, its retail and non-retail offer, and the range of events taking place both in the town, and in nearby places.	Ideally local traders, including market traders, would take responsibility for social media in relation to the town centre.
Establish what retails channels are present in the town e.g., how many retailers/market traders are store-based only compared to traders with an online presence, those offering click and collect services, home-delivery etc.	Encourage independent traders to create active social media accounts and provide training to improve their digital footprint.
Conduct analysis of social media to understand better how people perceive the reputation of Atherstone, visitors experience and review of service quality e.g., collate and analyse TripAdvisor reviews for local businesses and attractions.	Coordinate social media with surrounding events and tourist destinations to encourage visitors to make linked trips to the town centre and develop closer alignment with county wider visitor and tourism strategy.
Assess how welcoming the town is in terms of legibility and atmosphere at different times of the year / compare night and daytime / market days to non-market days / festival and events to non-event days.	Identify small funding pots for small / tactical place-making projects e.g., improvement of shop front, murals, pocket parks, parklets. Trial and experiment to build evidence base for more permanent/large scale intervention.
Collate a list of any obvious eyesores which detract from visitor experience / quality of gateways, signage, street furniture, planting and planters, unkempt verges/micro-plots, lighting, commercial waste, general litter and so on.	Establish feasibility for small-scale place-making interventions to improve legibility and wayfaring Work with other stakeholders to improve appearance e.g., of car parks, transit stops, properties – assets outside the control of local government. Update and improve signage across the town centre.

Priority 3 – Repositioning

Repositioning is a strategy that relates to clearly identifying and communicating a place's market position (Millington and Ntounis, 2017). In some locations, there is a poor understanding of the catchment, the challenges and trends impacting on the place as well as a lack of data on which to base decisions. In these instances, a strategy of repositioning is sensible. This entails taking time to collect and analyse data and information, as well as develop appropriate visions and strategies that can get widespread buy-in.

Upon review, we feel Atherstone is performing well in this area. The town, for example, has footfall data collected from automated counters, and participants in the workshop expressed a willingness to share the data locally. However, it would also be useful for someone to take the lead on providing insights and analysis from this data. For instance, some participants expressed they did not fully understand who uses the town centre and what really attracts visitors to Atherstone. That said, workshop participants appear to have a good understanding of Atherstone as a multifunctional and liveable employment, residential and cultural centre. Participants could recognise the town's attributes and appear to share a strong sense of place identity. Nevertheless, continued knowledge exchange between stakeholders is also crucial in repositioning strategies, to maintain a shared understanding of a centre's identity and function.

Repositioning can also be used to counteract decline and enable a centre to identify potential competitive advantages. Currently, Atherstone is performing relatively well, and the long-term picture appears healthy. But, repositioning also involves understanding forces of change, and the value of unique responses that reposition centres. High streets are extremely dynamic places, and they change to reflect both short- and long-term change in consumer behaviour. Inevitably the offer will need to change and adapt to future local needs. One participant did express they were unclear about how future trends are going to affect the high street, and that understanding this was vitally important. Responding to change, however, involves a careful balance between building on a place's existing and distinct capabilities, whilst also accommodating new activities to ensure centre remains resilient. Going forward, Atherstone will need to ensure processes are in place to continually review and respond to data and trends.

Priority 3: Repositioning

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Ensure footfall data is widely available and can be accessed by local traders, event organisers and other place-based stakeholders to demonstrate success of delivery.	Continue to track effectiveness of interventions in the town centre through monitoring and interpreting footfall data (volume and pattern of activity), providing impact assessment of events etc.
Conduct a use class survey and analysis to establish: • The mix of retail, leisure, social, entertainment, commercial activity • Any imbalance or underrepresented services or activities, • The overall range of retailers and services, to establish mix of comparison, convenience, luxury, discounters, • The range of retail formats, e.g., balance of national chains compared to independents, shopping centres etc • Establish modal opening and closing towns of town centre businesses.	Establish where there are any key retailers or other services currently absent in the town centre, which might see Atherstone as a viable investment option. Engage local property owners and provide them with insights to inform reuse of vacant units.
Conduct footfall analysis to establish: • Impact of market days on footfall, • Impact of events/festivals on footfall, • The extent business opening times of align with activity patterns, • Regular / routine patterns of activity around major place-based anchors e.g., employment, transit hubs etc.	Establish an action plan to amplify synergies between different place-based anchors and local traders e.g., re-trialling changed opening times, co-ordinated marketing of events, engagement with local employment anchors.
Review existing plans and vision and benchmark against the IPM's 25 Priorities.	Based on this analysis, review existing plans or visions for the town and update them to reflect continuing long term structural trends and challenges to the high street Ensure alignment between Local Plan and the intelligence gathered.

Priority 4 – Reinventing

Reinventing strategies relate to the activities undertaken to revitalise a place's identity and offer (Theodoridis, Ntounis, and Pal, 2017. Any place 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. Sometimes places have the data they need and sensible plans for how the town or city needs to change to better serve its catchment communities, but nothing is happening there. A process of reinvention is needed. Transformation needs to start, and this might be through temporary interventions, events, pop-ups, or experimental place-making.

The general picture for Atherstone, is that the town is in a good position, is performing relatively well, and is seen as an attractive location. The town has a range of place-based anchors, which attract people into Atherstone, although more needs to be done to generate synergies with the town centre. For example, before the pandemic the over 171,000 passengers used the local railway station. Aldi's head-office employs over 1,400 people. The town and surrounding areas boast numerous attractions and visitor destinations. To echo the views of local stakeholders, more could be done to capitalise on existing assets either in the town or located nearby.

As identified above, it perhaps not necessary for the town to completely reinvent itself as something new. The town possesses a unique set of strong attributes from which to build on. Rather efforts should be made to protect the existing offer, but at same steps need to be taken to ensure future resilience. It is important this is led by evidence and data, which reflects what is happening locally. An interesting example here relates to point raised about the changing nature of the local catchment, with reference to the "Education, Skills & Training" domain of the IMD 2019, compounded, according to participants, by cuts to adult education in the town. There is a suggestion, therefore, that the high street might provide a space and opportunities for skills and education development. This perhaps needs further research and development but may provide a channel through which to rethink the vision for the town centre to diversify beyond retail and add additional functionality.

Broadly the workshop participants expressed a drive and passion to effect change, but there remains concern that the town's unique attributes had not been fully exploited, and there seems to be a lack of clarity in terms of what to do next and move from a position of talking about plans for change, to delivering that change through practical interventions. However, the IPM view is that there are many events and festivals taking place in the town already, there is a market, and there is a small but passionate group of volunteers willing to take things forward. The issues to address, therefore, relate more to restructuring and rebranding. From the workshop, however, we feel the main issues relate to maintaining and sustaining existing qualities, with scope to enhance existing synergies. We would suggest, therefore,

Priority 4: Reinventing

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Review range of place-based anchors (retail, employment, transport, green space, heritage, culture), everyday activity that significantly attracts footfall.	Ensure key place-based attractors are embedded in local plans and visions for the town centre and include in wider messaging. Conduct feasibility study into adding skills/education functionality to the high street e.g., co-working space, hospitality training, support for independent traders.
Review how Atherstone is promoted within the wider North Warwickshire tourism.	Work with local DMO to ensure a clear, consistent messaging is used to promote Atherstone and nearby tourist attractions, festivals, and events.
Evaluate potential to extend dwell time using footfall data to track interventions e.g., through trials of extended opening hours, early evening events, pop-ups.	Identify opportunities to experiment and deliver new innovative place-making interventions e.g., new retail formats, extended market offer, pop-ups, reuse of vacant units.
Review and evaluate impact of new market activity e.g., monthly Farmer's Market, market stalls in the evening e.g., by footfall activity.	Ensure market offer drives footfall and aligns with catchment needs.

Bibliography

Millington, S, Ntounis, N, Parker, C, and Quin, S. 2015. *Multifunctional Centres: A Sustainable Role for Town and City Centres*. Institute of Place Management. Manchester.

Millington, S, Ntounis, N. 2017. Repositioning the high street: evidence and reflection from the UK. *Journal of Place Management and Development*. 10(4): 364-379.

Millington S, Ntounis N, Parker C, Quin S, Roberts G, Steadman C 2018. *High Street 2030: Achieving Change*. Institute of Place Management, Manchester

Ntounis, N, and Kavaratzis, M. 2017. Re-branding the High Street: the place branding process and reflections from three UK towns. *Journal of Place Management and Development*. 10(4): 392-403.

Parliament, 2019. *High streets and town centres in 2030*. House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Westminster available at https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1010/1010.pdf.

Parker, C, Ntounis, N, Millington, S, Quin, S, and Castillo-Villar, F. 2017. Improving the vitality and viability of the UK High Street by 2020: Identifying priorities and a framework for action. *Journal of Place Management and Development*. 10(4): 310-348.

Peel, D and Parker, C. 2017. Planning and governance issues in the restructuring of the high Street. *Journal of Place Management and Development*. 10(4): 404-418.

Theodoridis, C, Ntounis, N, and Pal, J. 2017. How to reinvent the High Street: evidence from the HS2020. *Journal of Place Management and Development*. 10(4): 380-391.

Timpson, J. et al. 2018. *The High Street Report*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766844/The_High_Street_Report.pdf

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 several 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.