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Place Making Programme – Final Report and Action Plan





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Foreword

Gateshead and the High Streets Task Force (HSTF) began working together following an expert visit in July 2021. Based on discussions with the Council, the subsequent *Unlocking Your Place Potential Report* outlines how the Task Force can provide further support for Gateshead. It was agreed there is a sensible vision to regenerate Gateshead, but it was recognised this may take several years to achieve. The pressing challenge is the need to activate the town centre now. Consequently, the Taskforce recommended Gateshead begin a process of reinvention. This entails developing a programme of activities which will increase footfall and spend, through interventions to attract a wider range of residents or encourage existing other visitors to stay longer. This could include events, festivals, pop-up retail, reuse of vacant shops, and basic improvements to the appearance of the town centre. New activity might also trial new products or services which will diversify the local offer and begin to adapt the centre to meet the needs of future users.

To help places tackle reinvention, the Taskforce offers the Placemaking Workshop developed and delivered by the IPM, which is designed to bring together key stakeholders to identify the challenges and opportunities for their high street and to agree short term and long-term priorities which can be the focus of an action plan to ensure its future sustainability.

In Gateshead the workshop took place at the end of April 2022 and included representatives from the arts, education, transport and independent business as well as the police, shopping centre and resident representatives and the manager of university student accommodation. Council representatives from Community and Voluntary Sector Development, Major Projects and Communications were also present. The Task Force would like to thank all who attended the workshop for their active contributions and to thank Gateshead Council for organising the session.

This report summarises ideas provided by local stakeholders, but also reveals barriers they identified which they think currently stops activity from happening. Based on the workshop discussion and findings, the High Streets Task Force has developed a series of short and long-term recommendations to inform a strategy of reinvention for Gateshead.

The recommendations outlined in this report mark the end of the direct support offered through the High Streets Task Force, but online resources, training and support is available through the website¹.

Thank you for participating in the High Streets Task Force Programme. With your permission, the High Streets Task Force would like to check in with you after 12 months to evaluate how delivery of your transformation plan is progressing. Please indicate whether this is possible in your response to this report.

¹ https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/



About the High Streets Task Force and Report Authors

The High Streets Task Force

The High Streets Task Force is an alliance of placemaking experts working to redefine the high street. We provide guidance, tools, and skills to help communities, partnerships and local government transform their high streets. The programme, funded by HM Government will run in England until 2024.

The report authors

Dr 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.

Penny Bell has experience across both the private and public sectors. She has worked in a town centre management role for over 20 years, leading on nationally recognised initiatives and towns as well as for the destination marketing organisation, Marketing Manchester. She is a long-time member of the Institute of Place Management and one of the High Streets Task Force Experts supporting a range of towns and cities with their revitalisation plans.



The Need for Reinvention

High street revitalisation is complex and challenging. Although they face common challenges, places are unique and there are no easy prescriptive solutions for regenerating high streets and town centres. Whereas the Taskforce can provide expert guidance and frameworks to help, it is incumbent on local stakeholders to use their insights and capacity to create and deliver bespoke programmes of change to ensure their high street or town centre is both attractive and prepared for the future.

The *Unlocking Your Place Potential Report* (UYPP) written by Taskforce experts, draws on the IPM's 4 Rs Framework of Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding and Restructuring. Based on the results of a major research programme, the Framework is designed to help places make a town centre action plan. It is important to acknowledge the 4Rs are not mutually exclusive but are connected to one another; each is a potential start point on a journey to transformation; and different places will be at different stages on the journey.



Fig 1: 4 Rs Framework Outline Summary

Reinventing is recommended as a starting point on a place's transformation in a situation where there are clear and evidence-based plans for how the town needs to change to better serve its catchment communities, but where little is happening in the town to deliver the vision. Reinventing is prescribed when there is a lack of activity in a place, or there is too much reliance on the existing offer to drive footfall. It may be the case local people are having to travel elsewhere to access the products and services they need or want, rather than use their local centre. Although the focus is on developing a programme of short-term priorities, places also need to consider how they can introduce new activities which will begin to adapt the town centre to meet the needs of future users. It is important, therefore, that local stakeholders



share a common understanding of broader structural change affecting the high street. The Taskforce has summarised the main considerations in the High Street Change report which accompanies this one.

The Need for Reinvention in Gateshead: Experts Summary

The Taskforce's evaluation of Gateshead's plans for the town centre concluded there is a sensible and clear vision in place. This should deliver transformative change, but it may take several years to fully realise. Rather than revisit these plans, therefore, the Taskforce concluded Gateshead should focus on addressing the lack of activity in the town centre by developing a placemaking programme which delivers quick wins, but also diversifies the offer to appeal to a wider catchment area and demographic profile and to prime the centre for future adaption. Based on workshop discussions, the UYPP Report, and tour of the town centre, this section of report outlines in more detail the need for reinvention by illustrating several placemaking challenges, linking each challenge to the IPM's 25 Priority Interventions.

Challenge 1: activity, diversity, and markets

Recent investment has created a mixed-use development comprising a large convenience store, contemporary retail units, and student accommodation centred around Trinity Square. There is synergy between this and the transport interchange, providing Gateshead with a strong convenience/transport anchor. This should drive a consistent pattern of footfall throughout the year providing a basis on which to build. It is recognised much is done already to activate Trinity Square, but this space could showcase additional activities e.g. to serve the student population. As it stands, other than transport or convenience, the existing offer is unlikely to appeal to visitors to the nearby conference or arts centre, or other key potential user groups such as Council workers. With competition from both Newcastle city centre and the Metro Centre, many Gateshead residents within walking distance perhaps avoid the town centre for these other destinations too as there is little happening in the town centre to attract them there. Addressing these issues however might require responding first to a concern expressed during the workshop by several stakeholders who referred to their frustration with Gateshead Council in relation to supporting community ideas to activate the town centre and its environs. For example, there is a willingness from local traders to activate the area around the railway infrastructure. There also appears to be a long-standing issue in relation to the operation of markets in Gateshead, holding up the implementation of what otherwise could be a key placemaking tool. The challenge is to sustain existing levels of activity, whilst providing new events to encourage users to dwell for longer, and which also appeal to wider audiences.

Challenge 2: attractiveness and barriers to entry

Whilst Trinity Square and its immediate environs are relatively thriving, the rest of the town centre has low footfall and high vacancy. There are many empty shops and vacant buildings and underutilised spaces, with poor quality landscaping and pedestrian links, creating a negative experience and perception of the town. Existing users are unlikely to venture much further than the Trinity Square/Interchange axis. Whereas the large number of vacant shops might be of concern, this does present an opportunity to bring new activity into the town. Barriers to entry however need to be addressed to encourage the creative use of empty shops, e.g., through



short-term, flexible, and lower cost leases to promote pop-up or meanwhile uses, or basic improvements to facades and shutters. However, there needs to be constructive dialogue with private property owners to enable this. The challenge here is what could be done to activate and improve vacant shops and buildings in the town centre?

Challenge 3: appearance and walking, and anchors

There are numerous and extensive underutilised and unkempt spaces on the edge of the centre including key gateway sites. This includes spectacular heritage buildings which lie boarded up and dormant, under-used railway arches and surface car parks, blank or poorly rendered gable ends, and unkempt left over green spaces (verges, pavements). Major roads restrict pedestrian and cycle access into the centre from neighbouring areas where many of strong non-retail anchors are located, such as the new conference centre and educational campus, and Baltic Arts Centre. This not only restricts footfall from these anchors into the centre, but also reduces synergy with Newcastle City Centre. Another consideration is that the impact of long-term plans to encourage residential development adjacent to the centre will also be reduced unless greater attention is paid to improving walkability by mitigating the impact of the road system and raising the overall quality of key entry points. It is recognised there have been interventions to soften the impact of highways on the northern edges, but more could be done. It is noted Gateshead Council is a major landowner, a situation which should in principle make it easier to deliver site specific place making interventions to address these challenges. As the Pandemic revealed, regulatory barriers to closing roads and public squares to create more room for walking, cycling and street trading or use of creative lighting can be temporarily and quickly removed to encourage short term activation activities, or trials to establish the business case for permanent schemes. The challenge, therefore, is what could be done quickly to improve access into the town, and to activate or improve underused sites and buildings on the edge of the centre at key gateway sites to establish stronger connectivity between key anchor institutions and the town centre.

Challenge 4: place management, networks/partnerships

Whereas the challenges outlined above might be of concern, the abundance of space which could be repurposed, and which is also in Council control, offers great potential for reinventing Gateshead. Place activation, basic improvements to appearance and a simplified Council process to enable stakeholder projects to happen quickly should be key priorities in the short-term. However, Gateshead town centre does not have a Business Improvement District or town team/manager structures which might otherwise help to lead and coordinate a placemaking plan. It has been noted above that the Council needs to create a better working relationship with local stakeholders who are already willing to lead on place activation. Reaching out to the relevant representatives from the college, arts centre, and conference centre might also add additional capacity to a local partnership if they are willing to get involved. There is a specific need to rekindle the association of Gateshead with culture. This once was very strong following the opening of the Baltic but has since declined. Other than a window vinyl advertising the Baltic, there is a little evidence to suggest they are strongly invested in the town centre. Arts and culture more generally are invisible in the town. Encouraging collaborative working will help to overcome general apathy and negativity about a lack of involvement in Council regeneration plans. The challenge, therefore, is for Gateshead Council to facilitate the establishment of an effective local network to coordinate a place making action plan.



Recommendations

1. Sustain existing levels of activity and provide new events to encourage users to dwell for longer and appeal to wider audiences.

Quick Wins

Ensure existing programming of Trinity is maintained and supported, but also consider how this activity might extend to adjacent streets.

Trial events at different opening times e.g., evening events, different days of the week, seasonal programming, working with local traders to maximise trading opportunities.

Vary events and activities to attract families, employees, underserved communities, visitors to nearby anchors e.g., pop-up retail, extended food offer, entertainment e.g., temporary street markets/fairs that do not contravene Charter Market regulations.

Focus event on engaging younger people e.g., run a Teenage Market, or similar, to provide a show case for local creative talent and young entrepreneurs, and/or work with University of Northumbria to provide welcome events for new students in Trinity Square – and drive students to use local services e.g., voucher-schemes.

Trinity Square and the Metro Interchange could share footfall data more widely within local stakeholders to establish a baseline against which to measure impact, and to help with organisation and scheduling of activity.

The Council should review existing rules regarding regulation and licensing of markets, street trading, temporary road-closures, and outdoor performance to enable local stakeholders to activate under-utilised sites more easily both in and around the town centre

Longer term

Evaluate the potential of bigger events e.g., review GlastonBuryBury – a music festival in Bury town centre – involving 13 pubs and six temp outdoor performance venues. See: http://www.glaston-bury.com/

Link activation projects to other strategic policy goals for Gateshead e.g., to promote health and wellbeing, safety, business support, skills training/updating and student engagement outcomes.

Adjust placemaking programme to meet the needs of future users from nearby residential development.

Supporting resources

Case study: Non-retail offer: https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=91ee3eda-d1fc-4cf0-ae3a-26cdeeca8c5b

Festive Cheer: The local impact of Christmas markets

https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=74cace59-3795-4432-aa0f-d6cd454f416b



2. Activate and improve vacant shops and buildings in the town centre

Quick Wins

Create a property register to identify the owners of all shops and buildings.

Improve shop fronts through a shutter-art scheme and basic cleaning (removal of graffiti etc.) – utilising small grant schemes and existing powers to enforce improvement of private property.

In council owned land/property encourage meanwhile use and short-term flexible leases to lower barriers for new business formation particularly in relation creative enterprise.

Continue with developing links with community groups involved in creative production and performance.

Longer term

Work with landlords to create a viable plan to activate vacant shops through flexible, short-term lets, rentfree periods, reduced rents for start-ups etc.

Review the management of key architectural buildings such as the old town hall. This needs prioritising at a senior leadership level as the current plans do not seem realistic in terms of bringing these unique assets back into effective use. A review is needed in terms of the spending priorities perhaps.

Evaluate the potential to link local cultural groups with the Baltic to establish the town centre as a creative hub for production and performance.

Supporting resources

Utilising Vacant Retail, in consultation with landlords, strategic partners, businesses and the community https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/623715



3. Start basic improvements to physical appearance of the centre and key gateway sites, activate under-used sites, and improve connectivity with key anchors

Quick Wins

Undertake a comprehensive audit of poor-quality sites in Council ownership and develop a clear and viable programme of small-scale and iterative improvements – supported with micro-funding (crowd funding, local authority small grants, contributions from key stakeholders) to enable community groups to easily bid and take ownership of different projects.

Projects could include measures to improve specific building facades or gable ends, community planting, pocket parks, street art/murals, litter-picking, graffiti removal etc

Extend events programmes to encompass key gateway sites e.g., Railway Quarter and viaducts

Review good practice in relation to activating underused sites and buildings, notably former railway architecture and infrastructure e.g., examples in the workshop from Manchester included Grub, Hatch, and Freight Island – and high street improvement in Withington (Manchester).

Introduce basic signage and pathfinding e.g., use planters and basic creative installations to mark potential routes

Enact further measures where possible to soften the impact of road and improve crossing points e.g., temporary cycle lanes, widened pavements, temporary road or lane closures.

Longer term

The development of the Railway Quarter provides a strong opportunity to take advantage of synergies with central Newcastle and encourage more attractive pedestrian access across the river and into Gateshead via the high-level bridge and to attract new commercial development. Local stakeholders need to be supported to activate and improve underutilised public realm and the space near the railway arches with events and festivals.

Review of long-term regeneration plans should accommodate the demolition of certain buildings and substantive investment to improve public realm in and around the centre, more substantive road softening schemes and improved walking routes between anchors, removal of physical barriers and obstructions, opening railway viaducts, more permanent repurposing car-parks, creation of contiguous and green walking and cycling routes into the town centre.

Creating a strong heritage offer through architectural conservation, installation of signage or interpretation boards, walking tours, more ambitious mural schemes e.g., the New Brighton Street Art Project.

Supporting resources

25 priorities - Walkable: https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=9f26d5c3-dd79-441a-891e-6a1c37ab5d10

High Streets Task Force Case Study: Bigg Market - Giving an Historic Heart back to Newcastle: https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=02c83b43-5615-44e4-9f52-5a665890e047



4. Establish an effective local network to coordinate a place making action plan

Quick Wins

Create a Gateshead Town Ambassadors Group from the existing local stakeholder group present at the workshop, with the remit to:

- provide strategic leadership and co-ordinate events in the town centre
- communicate the centre offer, promote business offers and increase visibility to existing users
- improve communication between key local stakeholders
- delegate delivery of specific projects to specific organizations/individuals
- review and evaluate the effectiveness of placemaking interventions using footfall and other KPIs to measure impact
- generally, promote a positive image of the town centre

Create a town centre management role to liaise between local stakeholders and various council, services, and to facilitate local networks, broker new relationships, support local business, and the implementation of placemaking proposals.

Longer term

Extend the group to include private property owners and representatives from key anchor institutions including the conference and arts centres, college, and university to lead on the provision of activities in the town centre and to activate under-used and vacant shops e.g., showcasing student talent in empty units.

With plans to substantially increase the residential density around the town centre, the long-term vision for the town centre needs to be reviewed by stakeholders to consider how the future community will be better served by a new retail leisure/hospitality and growing cultural offer for Gateshead, together with other neighbourhood and community facilities.

Potentially formalise partnership working to sustain both the network and to grow capacity to take on more strategic projects. This may include establishing the feasibility of a Business Improvement District.

Supporting resources

Diagnostic: capacity and structures for managing change (IPM):

https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=ef1f3e38-3cd4-4241-82ac-9785e146b334

High Streets Taskforce Webinar: Reinventing – Making Vital and Viable Multifunctional Hubs: https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/transformation-routemap-webinars/reinventing-making-vitaland-viable-multifunctional-hubs-5-5/

High Streets Taskforce Online Learning: Understanding Futures Users of the High Street: https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/frameworks/understanding-future-users-of-the-high-street/

BID Feasibility

Case study: Strategic Management for sustainable high street recovery:

https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=304fe763-f947-4d00-a576-09cc6992b8db



Developing A Framework for Action

It is vital stakeholders have a well communicated plan that recognises the tasks which need to occur to manage recovery and longer-term transformation. This is effective place management and is what gets places from a collection of investments and actions onto a path of transformation. The 4 Rs Framework below distinguishes between the processes of analysis and decision making (repositioning), effecting change (reinventing), communication (rebranding) and governance/spatial planning and development (restructuring). The High Streets Task Force encourages town centres to use this framework in their recovery and long-term planning.

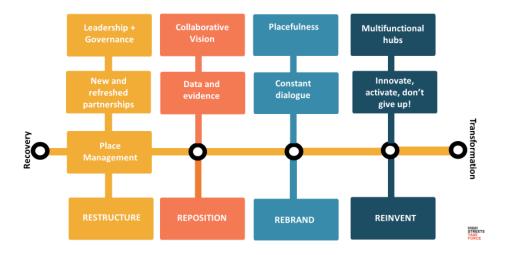


Fig 2: Transformation routemap

An editable version of the transformation routemap with instructions can be downloaded² to help you plan the Action Plan. Depending on where you start, this Route Map will take time to deliver but is a useful tool for planning both short and long-term priorities. Actions under each R may happen simultaneously, consecutively, or repeatedly.

If delivered correctly through effective leadership and collaboration with all key stakeholders, placemaking has the potential to improve the local economy, environment, and society, as well provide cultural benefits. The underlying aim of any placemaking intervention should be to create and promote places that are sustainable, attractive, sociable, accessible, active, secure, welcoming, healthy, and friendly. Temporary activation of underutilised or neglected sites can showcase these to potential investors. Reinventing, however, is just one element of the routemap. It is important, therefore, to work through the implications of the recommendations above in terms of the other Rs on the routemap.

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



Appendix 1: Workshop Findings

The future of Gateshead town centre: stakeholder perspective

In the first interactive session, workshop participants were asked to individually identify one broad change that should happen to attract people to the town centre and to ensure the centre's future sustainability. Each table was then asked to agree what the most important change should be. The Table below summarises the views of the stakeholders. Where appropriate these are aligned with several of the IPM's 25 Priority Interventions, with suggested indicative interventions to address each one. The views expressed obviously only represent those who attended but there was quite a diverse range of stakeholders with different perspectives on the town.

IPM Priority	Stakeholder comments	Indicative interventions
ACTIVITY	In general, more people using the centre More evening activity	Analyse modal opening and closing times to see if there is alignment with user activity patterns Experiment with new opening times if there is mismatch
EXPERIENCE	Attractive and 'safe' gateways to town centre (rail and pedestrian), Interchange is miserable	Basic improvements to appearance Pop-up activities to activate space
APPEARANCE	Image – run down looking areas Shop frontages	Basic improvements to the appearance Introduce a shop façade scheme
NON-RETAIL OFFER	Leisure and hospitality Cultural offer Community and family offer Needs to be less of a shopping centre Commercial employment	Pop-ups, markets, and festivals to provide temporary extensions to leisure, hospitality, and cultural offer Long term development plans to create a multifunctional community hub
WALKING	Create safe linkages across the town and make them more accessible Connectivity between the various areas/attractions with Gateshead and the wider area Disconnection – inner motorway (A167) Sage/ Arena/Baltic etc	Basic improvements to signage and wayfaring, including greenery Softening of road infrastructure to create better pedestrian and cycling environment Long term physical change to road layout to reduce impact of roadways



PLACE MARKETING	Media coverage/grants	Coordinated, low-cost social media
DIVERSITY	Activities/offer to attract younger people and students More leisure facilities Extended hospitality offer to include more eateries	Pop-ups, markets Work with landlords on tenant mix Long term development plans to include leisure facilities
ATTRACTIVENESS	No purpose to stay Empty shops	Measures to activate town by drawing in higher footfall and encourage longer dwell times Activation of vacant units
MARKETS	Need more events	Regular and rotating market offer
RECREATIONAL SPACE	Spaces to socialise	Basic improvements to public space Long terms plan to create civic square Measures to improve hospitality offer
SAFETY/CRIME	Antisocial behaviour exacerbated by lack of activities for children Homelessness Address perceptions of an unsafe environment (especially evenings/weekends) Demolish the eyesore old shops/derelict buildings which encourage anti-social behaviour	Events to focus on families Long term plans might accommodate youth facilities More visible street wardens/ambassadors Multi-sector partnership to tackle rough sleeping
REDEVELOPMENT PLANS	Homes around the centre Transport – road systems improvements, Roads! Road layout	Long term plans to encourage residential development and improve road layout

The exercise reveals how the views of local stakeholders align with the Taskforce recommendation that Gateshead pursues a strategy of reinvention. Reinventing involves activating and animating the town centre in the short term, but with the long-term goal to become more multifunctional by diversifying what is on offer.



Activating Gateshead town centre: a stakeholder perspective

The second workshop exercise asked participants to highlight what is currently being done well to activate the town centre, and what else could be organised quickly to extend this activation programme. The responses are summarised in the table below, with the priority ones in bold.

Activities Currently Done Well in Gateshead

Quayside regeneration/Sage & Baltic Centre visitors/events

- Trinity Square family events programme and pop-up events/markets
- Children's Garden
- Cinema/Gym
- Clean & tidy
- Understanding new ideas/projects
- Banks/building society presence
- **Buskers**
- Good transport links

Activities to Quickly Improve the Town Centre

- Empty shops make creative spaces/have music or pop-up mini concerts, offer cheap or rent-free periods to encourage 'quirky' and independent businesses/pop-up shops/breweries/restaurants, shop frontage vinyls
- Create a centralized Council point of contact/hub to ease barriers to organizing temporary activities/trade markets for underutilized spaces and offer a business friendly/supportive culture
- Creation of Ambassadors to talk up the town
- Maker Festivals/seasonal, family-friendly and pop-up night-time events, targeting different user groups
- Space for an outdoor auditorium
- Use STEM to create a drone race in town centre (police/NHS/RNCI)
- Green up/make Interchange lighter to address safety perceptions
- Promotional offers (e.g., car park fee back with instore spend, Baltic/Arena ticket vouchers for in town business offers, encourage students to use nonconvenience shops with offers)
- Play centre/Activity centre
- Outdoor cinema/theatre
- Tackle graffiti
- Pedestrianize Close/Hills Street
- Remove ASB by creating clean, safe spaces for young adults/children in town centre areas and encourage involvement in town centre restoration projects
- Free /improve parking
- Encourage community environmental/greening activities

Some of these ideas are more viable than others, but the recommendations try and reflect as many as possible. The key challenge going forward, however, is which organisations and individuals are going take responsibility for delivery.



Barriers to activation: a stakeholder perspective

For the final exercise workshop participants were asked to consider what barriers need to be removed to enable change to happen. Their views are summarised in the table below, grouped to align with the IPM 25 Priorities:

Main Barriers	Indicative interventions
Lack of place Management / networks and partnerships with council Red tape/barriers to organizing community activities/events	Establish town team and partnership Appoint a Town Centre Manager Review regulation of events/markets/pop-ups/street trading etc.
Poor council communication channels/no central point of contact to reduce processes time Lack of a business-friendly zone, e.g., an Enterprise Zone like Teesside, to encourage business confidence, communicate available business and investor support/grants etc.	G The state of the
Barriers to entry for new business Issues concerning the reactivation of empty shops and buildings	Create a landlords register and action plan to tackle vacant buildings/absent landlords Lower costs of start up and running a business
Unclear who owns what property lack of office space/workers, lack of investor interest in derelict/vacant buildings	Use markets to create a town centre presence for online businesses and start-ups
Walkability Physical barriers	Improve connectivity barriers between new/Quayside developments and the town centre Improve pedestrian/cycle access routes and underutilized spaces with temporary activation, road adjustments
Crime/Safety ASB issues and negative perceptions of safety	Establish a multisector partnership to tackle ASB Establish business crime prevention scheme Increase footfall in town centre to create nature surveillance Basic improvements to appearance



References/further reading

Underpinning research

25 Priority Interventions: e-learning https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/frameworks/25-vitaland-viable-priorities/

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