Vital and Viable Polesworth

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About the Institute of Place Management

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

The Institute has guided the Expert Panel established by the former Minister for the High Street, Jake Berry (MP), and led by Sir John Timpson, who advocated for additional funding and support for town centres in his *High Street Report.* His recommendations draws on evidence collated by the IPM from several towns in England, captured in the report *High Street 2030: Achieving Change*, published in December 2018. In 2019, 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 revitalising their local centres and high streets across the whole of England.

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Introduction

At the invitation of North Warwickshire Borough Council, we prepared this report following a workshop the IPM delivered in November 2023 for local stakeholders in Polesworth. It is worth noting this follows a wider programme of activity which has brought together agencies responsible for management, development, and marketing of towns across Warwickshire. This work aims to identify the key factors that will dictate the future of the county's towns and high streets and assess what stakeholders and partnerships need to focus on to survive and thrive over the next 15 years. Stakeholders from Warwickshire can access the materials from this project on The Warwickshire Future Places Routemap landing page, including the slide deck presented in Polesworth.

The guidance underpinning this project was developed through the IPM's academic research, consultation with key national stakeholders, policy professionals, practitioners, and importantly through partnership working with places across the UK. The IPM translated this body of knowledge into two frameworks, the 4Rs (Reposition, Reinvent, Rebrand, Restructure) and the 25 Priority Interventions, which are designed to help local communities, not only to understand the complex challenge of high street revitalisation, but also to help them devise their own responses specific to their location. Consequently, this report applies these frameworks to identify place specific recommendations, drawn from the views of a range of local stakeholders in Polesworth, overlayed with our professional and independent insights. In summary the main priorities are:

1. **Strengthen and widen partnership working and delivery capacity**
2. **Develop a collective ambition for Polesworth e.g. re-imagine the village as a multipurpose leisure and recreation destination**
3. **Prime the activation of green space to appeal to a wider range of users**
4. **Establish stronger and more effective communications for the village/town**

There is a strong group of willing people who are invested in Polesworth's future. To take the recommendations forward we would advise they utilise the HSTF website which hosts a compendium of free resources for people who want to improve their high streets, including online learning, policy guidance, case studies and hundreds of reports and documents covering all facets of high street change. In this report, therefore, we provide not only strategic recommendations and an action plan, but also signposting to useful starter resources for the people to consider in taking their next steps.

Professor Steve Millington, Director – Institute of Place Management

How should local stakeholders respond to the challenge?

The scale and complexity of changes on the high street can overwhelm local communities and lead to paralysis or in-action. It is important to get over this hurdle by breaking challenges down into discrete and viable tasks. To help, the IPM has considered what makes high streets sustainable, places where people want to be, and where business can thrive. In 1994, the UK 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 in terms of where new retail development is allowed to happen. Importantly the report defined vitality and viability. Vitality simply refers to how busy a high street is, at different times, and in different parts. Viability concerns whether a high street has the capacity to attract the investment needed, not only to maintain the everyday upkeep of the place, but also to allow for adaptation and change to meet the future needs. The IPM's view is vitality and viability remain important measures of high street progress, and we should still use these ideas to build feasible plans for local high streets today.

The challenge of where to start is compounded by a lack of guidance for local stakeholders. The IPM, therefore, undertook analysis of over 9000 academic studies about vitality and viability, which it then tested with experts and with local partnerships in towns across the UK. The outcomes are the 4Rs Framework and 25 Priorities, which combine both expert opinion, peer-reviewed academic research, and insights from local stakeholders, to establish a framework to help places make the right decisions. The 4Rs provide long-term strategic direction and start point, whereas the 25 Priorities encourages places to think about the delivery of plans and proposals. Neither should be treated as a prescriptive programme for change. There are no off-the-shelf solutions. Rather, our approach enables local stakeholders to build their own customised programme of support for their specific high street.

Where to start? 4Rs of Regeneration framework

This is a strategic tool to help place leaders navigate their town and city centres and high streets onto a path of positive change. The 4Rs have been used in many places to identify higher-level priorities for a given location, including 150 local authorities receiving support from the High Streets Task Force. The framework also underpins the HSTF'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 by the 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), communicating change (rebranding) and managing change (restructuring). In summary:

Repositioning	Reinventing
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.	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 placemaking.
Rebranding	**Restructuring**
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.	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 does not 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 large problems.

Table 1

These are not mutually exclusive categories, each are connected. However, the value is in understanding which situation best describes what is happening in your place, so you can decide where best to start. When we put all the evidence together, we have been able to identify strategic priorities and a starting point for Polesworth. We considered the following questions:
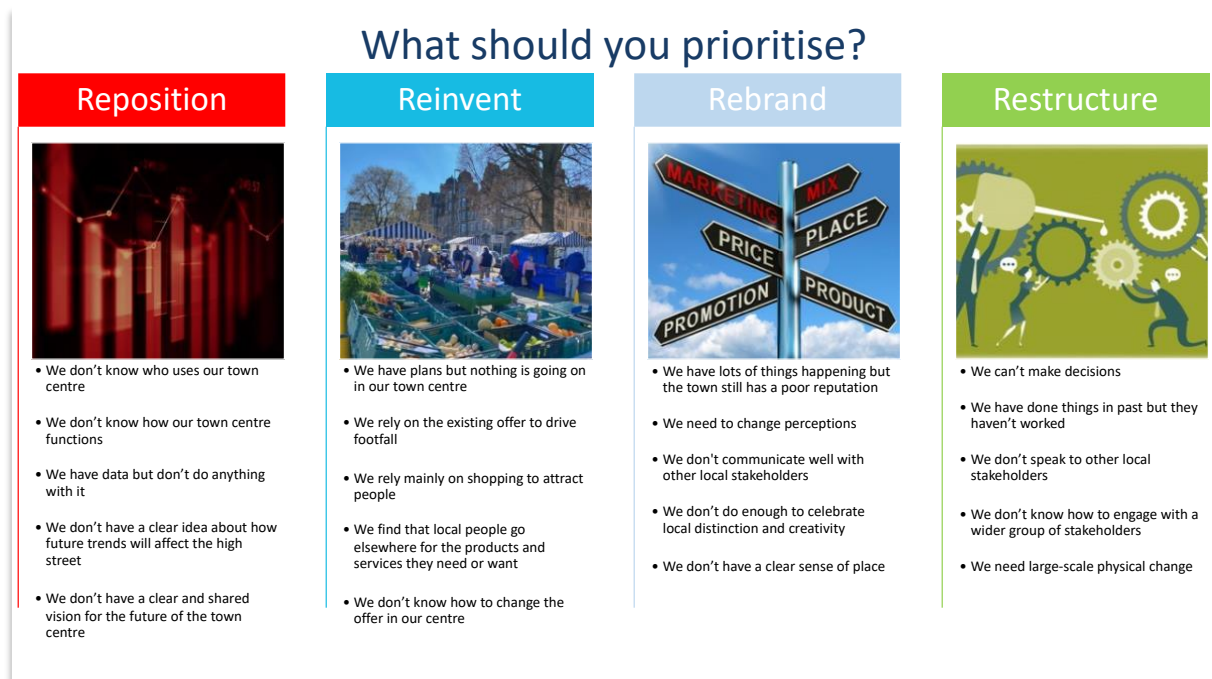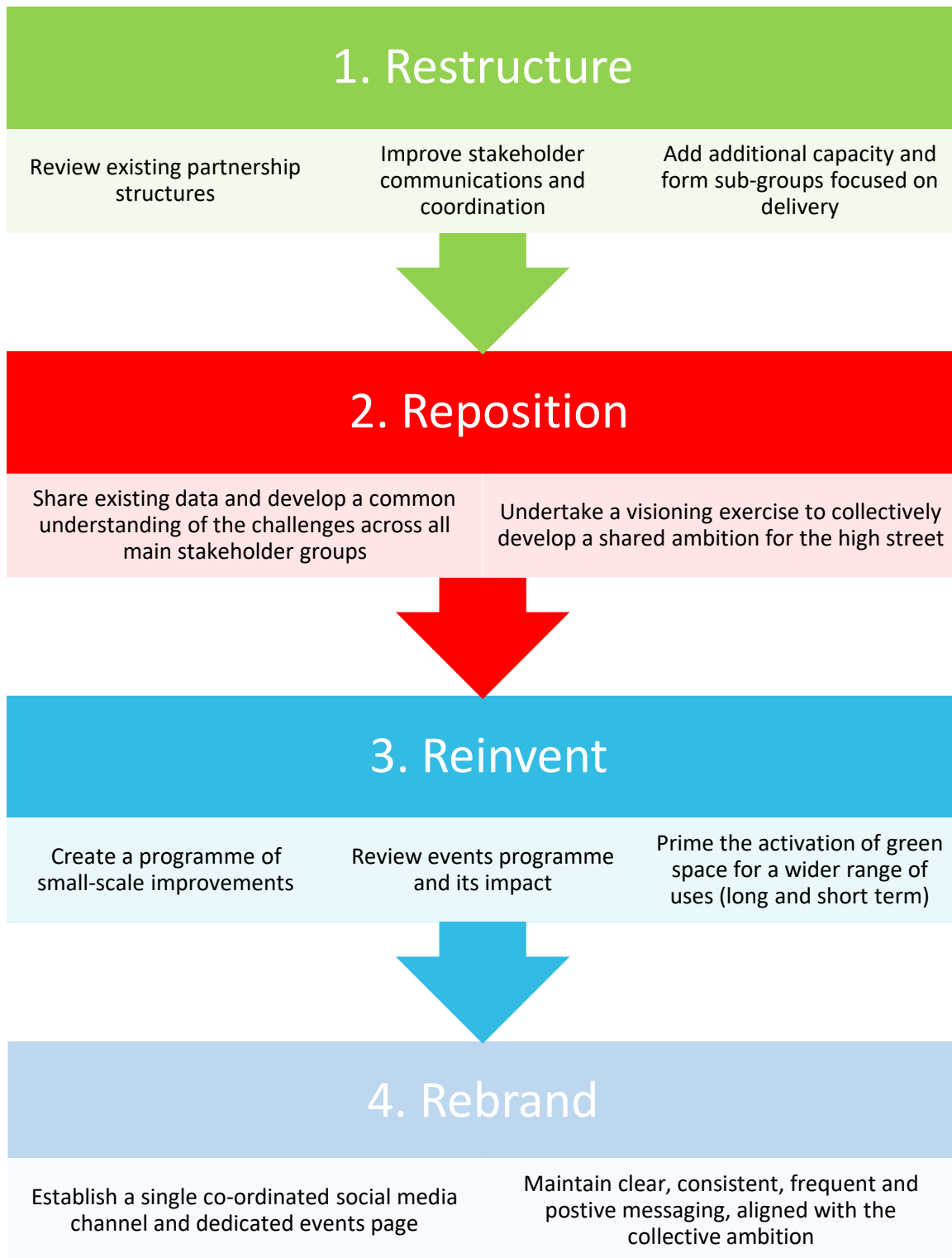
What should you prioritise?

Reposition	Reinvent	Rebrand	Restructure
• We don't know who uses our town centre	• We have plans but nothing is going on in our town centre	• We have lots of things happening but the town still has a poor reputation	• We can't make decisions
• We don't know how our town centre functions	• We rely on the existing offer to drive footfall	• We need to change perceptions	• We have done things in past but they haven't worked
• We have data but don't do anything with it	• We rely mainly on shopping to attract people	• We don't communicate well with other local stakeholders	• We don't speak to other local stakeholders
• We don't have a clear idea about how future trends will affect the high street	• We find that local people go elsewhere for the products and services they need or want	• We don't do enough to celebrate local distinction and creativity	• We don't know how to engage with a wider group of stakeholders
• We don't have a clear and shared vision for the future of the town centre	• We don't know how to change the offer in our centre	• We don't have a clear sense of place	• We need large-scale physical change

Figure 1

Our summary of the situation in Polesworth, therefore, is reflected below:

Repositioning	**Reinventing**
Polesworth is a multifunctional and liveable centre serving its catchments is well understood. Sharing data, especially footfall is important and should continue. However, the future is less clear and there is a need for a collective ambition for the village which will secure wider buy-in. There is potential to reimagine Polesworth as a more powerful leisure and recreation orientated destination making more of existing green and blue assets.	There is need for minor improvements regarding the functional qualities of the village and its appearance. More events and activities might boost footfall and spend. The Action Plan presented later will provide some ideas where to start.
Rebranding	**Restructuring**
Polesworth has great assets but does not shout about them enough. The challenge, therefore, is not one of reputation, but more about place awareness. This can be achieved using low cost social media channels, but messaging has to be consistent and clear. Consequently, collective agreement of where the village is going is needed first.	There is a need to develop partnership working and grow capacity of networks. Better communications are needed between different stakeholders. The partnership development work being undertaken by Chris Gregory (in post until March 2025), will help with this.

Table 2: strategic priorities

1. Restructure

Review existing partnership structures

Improve stakeholder communications and coordination

Add additional capacity and form sub-groups focused on delivery

2. Reposition

Share existing data and develop a common understanding of the challenges across all main stakeholder groups

Undertake a visioning exercise to collectively develop a shared ambition for the high street

3. Reinvent

Create a programme of small-scale improvements

Review events programme and its impact

Prime the activation of green space for a wider range of uses (long and short term)

4. Rebrand

Establish a single co-ordinated social media channel and dedicated events page

Maintain clear, consistent, frequent and postive messaging, aligned with the collective ambition

Vital and Viable Polesworth: The IPM's 25 Priority Interventions

This tool identifies potential interventions which should have the most impact on making high streets attractive, or resilient. Importantly, these interventions should also fall within the control of local stakeholders, provided they work together in collaboration. It is not the case that all places have to act on all 25 Priorities. Rather, the framework is designed to help communities establish local priorities and build meaningful and practical solutions.

The underpinning research was initially undertaken in 2014 and identified 201 potential areas of intervention. Following a year of piloting and testing with 10 UK towns, additional interventions were identified based on this local experiences. This framework 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 25 Priorities that local place leaders should focus on, to support the vitality and viability of their high streets and centres. To help further, , we have listed the top-rated factors into 25 priorities, presented in detail in Appendix 1. But, to make the list more palatable to local decision-makers, we have organised the priorities in the following way:

What affects the look and feel of the high street or centre?

4) Experience 5) Appearance 12) Place marketing 20) Crime and Safety 22) Liveability

How does the town centre function?

1) Activity Hours 7) Necessities 14) Accessibility 11) Walkability 24) Functionality

What does the town centre have to offer?

2) Retail Offer 8) Anchors 9) Non-Retail Offer 10) Merchandise 16) Attractiveness 17) Markets 18) Recreational Space

How does the town centre need to change?

15) Diversity 19) Barriers to entry 21) Adaptability 25) Innovation 23) Redevelopment Plans

How is the town centre managed?

3) Vision and strategy 6) Place management 15) Networks and partnership

Figure 2

Understanding what people love about the town, and what changes they want to see

During the workshop, we discussed structural challenges to high streets in general, past, present, and future, before calling for participants to reveal the big changes they would like to see happen in Polesworth. This was achieved by asking participants to map out from memory the broad structure of the high street, revealing what they understand as constituting the high street, its attractions, and its limits (See Appendix 2 for a list of what each group reported). We also asked people to mark out existing qualities they would want to see protecting for the future, before asking them to identify what changes they would like to see. Table 3 (below) summarise what people identified. Benchmarking these features against the IPM's 25 Vital and Viable priorities, begins to reveal how Polesworth is performing as a place.

Priority	What people love ♥	Changes people want to see ⭐
What affects the look and feel of the high street?		
Appearance		Top Club (working men's club) to be refurbished
Liveability	Nethersole Flats	
How does the high street function?		
Activity hours		Better opening hours for health centre
Necessities	Fire station (as a general facility), ,	Public toilets More seating and dwell space
What does the high street have to offer?		
Retail offer	**Cliffords RSVP card shop** (2x) High street provision in general, Toolbox Hardware	Bigger, better gym (indoor and outdoor)
Anchor	**The Abbey (4x)**	
Non-retail offer	**Wok Chinese takeaway** (2x), Jag Bar (2), ,social club	
Recreational space	**River Anker (2x),** canal, Pooley Park, [Abbe] Green Park, Playing fields, recreation ground	Pavilion to be returned to Abbey [Green] Park More activation of the green and blue space e.g. events, sports, cafe
How does the high street need to change?		
Diversity	Memorial Hall / Library (3)	
How is the high street managed?		
No response	No response[1]	

Table 3: what people love/changes they'd like to see

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[1] No response simply means nothing in relation to theme was raised by participants during the workshop. However, this does not mean the theme is not important or does not need addressing.

The mapping exercise revealed much about what is important to Polesworthians. The village centre is strongly recalled and legible, a small but well-serviced centre. On the positive side, participants focused strongly on the retail and non-retail offer. People identified several assets, including health, library and community centres, school, heritage buildings, pubs and social clubs, the abundance of green and recreational space, the river and canal. The Abbey is an anchor as it provides a strong destination for both local and non-local visitors, as well as contributing to the picturesque and historic qualities of the village. Ultimately, Polesworth is a highly liveable village benefiting from amenities found in larger centres. The subsequent discussion and feedback showed that Polesworth stakeholders greatly value their high street for its heritage, food and drink offer and community infrastructure, and its small size contributes to a strong and active community. We would add, as we did in our presentation, there is a well-reviewed hospitality provision nearby Dordon, which might be included more in terms of the broader offer. In terms of future development, **community and heritage assets need protecting**.

It was encouraging to see the number of things people love outweighing the list of things people want to see change. Problems often mentioned in other towns, such as, anti-social behaviour, or general poor appearance, were not major concerns for the participants. However, benchmarking what people would change against the 25 Priorities, reveals there are some factors to work on. Participants recognised the linear nature of the high street, which limits events that might warrant a road closure. This brings attention to adjacent streets and spaces, such as the park, playing fields, and open space defined by the River Anker/Coventry Canal. Several participants, whilst appreciating the value of the open space, noted concern these **assets were underutilised in terms of everyday and temporary activation,** with potential to host a more events which might draw people and spend into the high street as well. An important consideration, therefore, might be a stronger focus on **connectivity, walking routes and signage** to ensure visitors unfamiliar with Polesworth are clearly directed to the high street offer. An additional consideration is places not far away, such as Pooley Park and nature reserve, green and blue infrastructure underpins a much stronger **leisure and recreation destination** than found in Polesworth. A long term vision for Polesworth, might consider how a similar yet complimentary offer might be created in the village.

The village is generally clean and picturesque, with several unique and outstanding architectural heritage assets. Workshop participants, however, drew attention to the **working men's club as in need of refurbishment**. From our site visit, we would also recommend improvement to the back of the garage (on Grendon Road) overlooking Abbey Green Park Play area, the unkempt traffic island (Bridge St/Grendon Road) which provides a weak entry point to the village, and the forecourt of the Polesworth Club which could be quickly improved with simple planting and colour.

Better **functionality** also appears to be a concern, with some raising the issue of public toilets, benches, and need for more seating. These would be classed as '**necessities**' – one of the 25 factors, albeit one that should represent a 'quick win' for the village. **Opening hours** (in relation to the health centre) are also important among the vital and viable factors as coordinating these provides more reasons for the town centre to be frequented. Opening Hours are classed as part of the 'Functionality' of the centre. However, we would advise a broader review of opening times given how working, shopping, and leisure patterns have changed post-pandemic. Certainly those residents

working elsewhere before returning home to Polesworth might find few open businesses or services.

A concern would be no one mentioned or raised issues in relation the management and governance of the high street. Partnership development is being addressed by Chris Gregory, and there does need to be more discussion within Polesworth about the development of a share ambition, partnership (with clear governance), and delivery of specific projects. The worry might be there remains an expectation that the council does it all, whereas a range of local stakeholder need to take collective responsibility for the high streets

Barriers to change

During the second part of the workshop, we presented a range of placemaking ideas, before asking stakeholders to identify what barriers needed to be removed to enable similar activity to happen in Polesworth. Our examples included ideas about trialling new activity times, spreading or moving activity into different parts of the town, greening, shop-front improvements, and a plethora of creative, micro-interventions. Importantly all these are real projects, found in other places mainly across the UK. We do this intentionally to inspire local people by showing what is possible. The projects are also all scalable, to fit the requirements of specific locations, big or small. Finally, the examples are not prescriptions, rather they are presented as you might present items in a catalogue. We hope some of the projects will resonate locally, to inspire stakeholders to find simple solutions which make it easier for people to work together and gradually transform the high street. Once again we have grouped and benchmarked barriers against the IPM's 25 Priority Interventions, summarised in the table below:

What affects the look and feel of the high street?	
Place marketing	• Communication – visitor facing • We need to attract more residents to events like the placemaking [workshop] or ask them why they aren't here.
How does the high street function?	
Walkability	• Better signage • Disability (access) • Better public transport to encourage outsiders in
What does the high street have to offer?	
No response	• No response
How does the high street need to change?	
No response	• No response
How is the high street managed?	
Place management capacity	• Organisation • People and time / Limited volunteers • Funding
Networks and partnerships	• Lack of everyone working in harmony with each other • Co-ordination

Table 4

According to the participants, place management capacity and organisation requires further development. From the IPM's experience, without effective partnerships and networks in place, in a situation where all are collaborating and working to a collective ambition, achieving change will be difficult. Consequently, we would advise the **next steps for stakeholders to consider is what networks and partnerships are needed to drive both short-term wins, but also manage steps towards a long-term vision for the town.** In short, Polesworth needs a coordinated, multi-stakeholder and area-based approach to improve the high street, harnessing the skills, experience

and resources of public, private and non-governmental sectors. The ongoing partnership development work with **Chris Gregory** will be helpful in this respect, although other facets of place management will require attention – for example – **revisiting the vision for Polesworth,** as the concerns of local stakeholders perhaps reflect a **lack of vision or strategy** which would achieve wider buy-in and support. This needs to be a simple idea that wins backing of all stakeholders and community. For example, a clean, green, historic centre that serves its local communities, might be good start point for this discussion. A facilitated visioning workshop might be helpful in this case.

Nothing was mentioned during the workshop which we are able to benchmark about how the high street needs to change. From our perspective this encompasses **diversity** (range and quality of shops, tenant mix, alternative store formats etc., factors which affect consumer choice); **Barriers to entry** (cost and availability of space on the high street to enable new business formation or in situ expansion); adaptability (or existing units); **Innovation** (opportunities to trial new products and services); and **Redevelopment Plans** (opportunities to address planning blight or physical challenges through regeneration plans). There perhaps needs to more consideration locally about creating opportunities for new entrants which might help to not only fill gaps in provision, but also help adapt the centre in terms of its future resilience. There perhaps needs to be strategic consideration of these factors and alignment with long-term planning and regeneration objectives.

This should feed into a review of existing capacity and assessment of networks and governance arrangements for the high street. Additional capacity is needed, together with wider representation of voices from the local community, especially younger people. The challenge for the IPM's approach is that our recommendations need to land with a coalition of the willing, and it seems more partnership development might be needed in this case. A quick win, might be simply to **improve communication between local stakeholders**, including better interaction between and within the three local authorities to overcome both silo working and perceived lack of coordination. Other places, for example, have created their own local high streets Task Force to address issues like this. The partnership should then consider the following barriers identified in the workshop.

1) **Walkability** refers the quality of walking conditions including safety, comfort, and convenience. Although the high street is walkable in terms of distance and time, without significant slopes and barriers, better linking of assets and functional spaces such as car-parking, together with signage which adds greater distinction to the town might be considerations to take forward as a partnership. Consideration is also needed here in terms of disability access.

2) **Place marketing** refers to the development and subsequent promotion of Polesworth, together with the construction of a sensible image for the village which builds on local distinction to establish a USP, which appeals to both residents, and wider to visitors to nearby attractions. Polesworth has quality assets, but they not well publicised online e.g., through visitor channels such as Tripadvisor and Booking.com. There is existing online marketing such as Explore North Warwickshire, but we would suggest this needs review to strengthen the promotion of community events, community facilities, local traders, and the ample green and blue infrastructure. We might suggest there is greater focus on promotion of specific events, as some drive footfall more strongly than others. Whereas some local traders seems to consistently promote offers and events, this appears not to be consistent or reciprocal. All traders, for

instance, should be engaged in positive messaging. Other towns have simply formed on online identity, e.g., Bishopgate Road (York), but importantly, success requires constant and positive messaging.

3) **Accessibility** concerns the ease and convenience of getting to Polesworth by different modes of transport. Polesworth railway, as the community knows, is served by just one train a day, in one direction. Although there are relatively frequent bus services during the day, there appears to be no services in or out of town after 8pm. Should these challenges be resolved they would lead to fundamental transformation, however, accessibility is difficult to resolve in the short term. In terms of what a local village partnership might influence is limited, but nevertheless other places have initiated ultimately successful campaigns to improve local services. For now, becoming advocates for change is probably best.

Your ideas to transform Polesworth

Finally, we introduced the IPM's 25 Priority interventions. We asked participants to share their ideas about potential short-term projects that could be enacted quickly by local stakeholders. These are captured below:

What affects the look and feel of the high street?	
Appearance	Flowers / flower displays
	Bling up benches, lampposts, and street furniture / repair street furniture / Street maintenance and dressing
	Green up the high street / Bridge Street
	Collective and business led shop window displays and competitions
Place marketing	Marketing and publicity
	Development of digital offer
	What's on info/ what' on
	Symbol (for the village)
How does the high street function?	
Necessities	Parking (awareness) / car parking
	Seating (Bridge Street)
Walkability	Signage / lots more signage to shops
	Develop waterway connections and trails
	Wayfinding and signage (canal magazine)
	Signposting from canals
	Reinvigorate poetry trail (3x)
What does the high street have to offer?	
Markets/events	More events / More activities involving more people
	Offer weddings at the Tithe Barn
	Music events in the park
	Beer, food, and music festival
How does the high street need to change?	
Barriers to entry	Develop youth offer
How is the high street managed?	
Place management capacity	Bidding for grants
Networks and partnerships	Include all parts of the community
	Involvement of more businesses

Table 5

We have taken these ideas on board, and most are reflected in the Action Plan.

Polesworth Placemaking Action Plan

1: Improving the look and feel of the high street

Challenge	Quick wins	Longer-term actions	Supporting resources
In general, the appearance and public realm are good, but several small projects might further improve the charm and distinction of the village	Initially complete an audit of public realm Construct an itinerary of basic repairs and improvements to existing street furniture (lampposts benches) Encourage local businesses to put planters/floral displays/hanging baskets, outside premises Rally residents and school children into a clean up Polesworth day e.g. litter picking	Establish Polesworth in Bloom Encourage community and business sponsorship / ownership of specific planters etc. Encourage volunteer led micro-gardening and informal planting at pre-selected sites. Improve the traffic island to create a more visually appealing welcome to the high street.	Great Public Spaces: Guide and Evaluation Tool FaceLift: A transparent deep learning framework to beautify urban scenes How do I Improve Public Space in my Town Centre? Friends of Queensbury High Street Litter Pickers (video case study) Pride in Place: Tackling Environmental Incivilities
Maintain quality of shopfronts, shop display and premises upkeep.	Complete an audit of shop fronts and displays Identify best practice and encourage shop owners to share tips on window display and basic facade maintenance. Improve the back of the garage overlooking Abbey Park Introduce basic planting/colourful schemes on the forecourt of the Polesworth Club	Refurbishment of Polesworth club façade and forecourt Activate small grants to enable basic improvements, cleaning, and repairs to building frontages, facades, signage, and shutters. Organise a best window display competition.	Plinth Rating Manual The Art of Window Design Shop front Grant Scheme

Challenge	Quick wins	Longer-term actions	Supporting resources
The assets and events Polesworth has to offer are not well known or promoted within the existing catchment and beyond	Establish low-level, low-cost social media channels (managed locally) to ensure a clear, consistent messaging is used to promote the high street offer, festivals, and events. Ideally independent traders should lead this, but for now create an Ambassadors Group from the stakeholders present at the workshop. Focus initially on simply coordinating the promotion of existing events Ensure where good service is available it is suitably communicated via existing platforms such as TripAdvisor. Review and change how Polesworth is currently represented via official websites	Conduct wider stakeholder engagement with people and organisations to evaluate joint promotion and offers to drive footfall and spend on the high street. Highlight to others that change is happening, and they too can have role in this regard. Communicate the benefits of the wider area not just in terms of its offer but also the access to nearby greenspace. Develop a longer-term marketing and communications plan that includes a dedicated website. Organise a branding workshop, to develop logo and design guide for all comms	Marketing We are Withington Digital, cultural and social connectivity Decentralised place branding through multiple authors and narratives: the collective branding of a small town in Sweden Love Bishy Road Rebranding the High Street Telling your story

Table 6

2: Improving the functionality of the town centre

Challenge	Quick wins	Longer-term actions	Supporting resources
Signage and wayfinding might better connect Polesworth assets to the high street.	Improve connectivity through basic signage and pathfinding, e.g., use planters and simple creative installations to mark routes and amplify pedestrian links and routes Focus on connecting canal/river walking routes through Abbey Park to the high street and existing parking areas Ensure disability access is considered from the outset	Working with wayfinding specialists, access groups (RNIB, Disabled Groups) and wider community to implement practical and consistent signage and wayfinding solution, which also contributes to a sense of destination Reinvigorate the poetry trail e.g. extend and promote – make it more visible and connected – extend beyond towards the river and canal	25 priorities – Walkable Footpaths Design on Renovation of City Centres: A Model of Assessments Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access Walk Inverness: Wayfinding How To Guide Meanwhile City: How temporary interventions create welcoming places with a strong identity
Some concern there is a mismatch between the opening times of local services and when people are best able to use them	Review opening times of the health centre and other facilities, using baseline data from the footfall count. If needed,trial early evening events, markets, and pop-up stalls, marquees for flexible community use, street music and entertainment. Experiment with extended opening hours, especially to create synergy with non-retail anchors and boost activity during quieter hours.	Consider greater flexibility of opening times in alignment with events and long-term changes in shopping activity	Establishing a footfall baseline Manual footfall counting guidance Temporary Use as a Participatory Placemaking Tool Trader and community-run markets: A practical guide to setting up, running your market and accessing support Meanwhile city: How temporary interventions create welcoming places with a strong identity How can I improve the night time economy in my town centre?

Challenge	Quick wins	Longer-term actions	Supporting resources
Some necessities are missing or need improvement	The audits suggested above might extend to include a review of seating, parking, and viability of a business-led toilet scheme. Trial a business-led toilets scheme	Review redevelopment plans to ensure greater public access to toilets are facilitated. Install new seating / consistent design which accentuates heritage.	A toilet on every high street: Regeneration workshop The decline of the great British toilet Engaged project: On-the-ground engagement and co-design report Pedestrians with disabilities and town and city streets: From shared to inclusive space? Creating Better Streets: Inclusive and accessible places Street design or age-friendly neighbourhoods
With regards to parking It is not clear whether locals are concerned with a lack of parking, or, signposting to existing parking provision.	Review basic guidance on Parking Consider trials inl ow cost signage to direct visitors to existing parking.	Based on learning from the trial ensure parking signage is linked to your wayfinding plans.	Innovative Practices in Parking Provision Guidance on Parking Provision in Town Centres Linking People, Place and Parking
Polesworth is poorly served by public transport	Being advocacy campaign and establish the level of local support for improvements. Win MP backing and engage with transport providers to assess options	Engage with transport providers and develop action plan of how to improve it. Other towns have initiated local campaigns to improve, notably rail connectivity, some of whom have been eventually successfully targeting capital funding	Railfuture Campaign for Better Transport

Table 7

3: Improving the town centre offer

Challenge	Quick wins	Longer-term actions	Supporting resources
Although some events are organised in Polesworth, some drive footfall more than others. There is scope to run more events throughout the year, but more needs to be done to link events to the high street in terms of footfall and spend.	Use the park and playing field to trial makers markets and food festivals throughout year. Establish Tithe barn as a wedding venue Install temporary low cost wayfinding to navigate event goers to existing high street offer.	Establish a regular events programme. Local ideas included beer, music and food festivals in the park, together with makers and craft markets	Foodie Friday (Stockport) Trader and community-run markets: A practical guide to setting up, running your market, and accessing support
Despite ample green space, concern opportunities for leisure and recreation could be developed further through temporary and long-term activation **Potential for flooding perhaps limits long-term permanent development, but other options might be explored.**	Introduce more sport activities to the recreational area and playing field e.g. work with local education providers Nearest Park run is Kinsgbury, could there be one in Polesworth aswell? If not establish a charity fun-run around the park. Could local traders be helped to establish pop-up /mobile presence at markets and events? e.g. trial a pop-up café.	Evaluate bigger/better gym facilities Restore a pavilion in Abbey Park Establish a permanent café in the park Establish a stronger network of trails which lead from the high street Assess potential to develop natural assets as a stronger anchor for Polesworth., including the canal and river.	Recreational space Safer Parks: improving access for women and girls Pop-up cafes: a guide Encouraging Exploration and Play in Underused Public Spaces: An Activity Trail
In addition to improvements to shop frontages, more retailers might consider best practice in terms of merchandising and display.	Provide support and provide guidance on merchandising e.g., organise peer-to-peer learning sessions, or bring in external expertise to work with local traders	Establish best-window display competition. Trial coordinated window displays in alignment with events/seasons.	Merchandise Value Merchandising Store Characteristics Range and quality of shops Assortments

Table 8

4: Creating opportunities to change

Challenge	Quick wins	Longer-term actions	Supporting resources
Younger people are not involved in decision-making and there is little on offer to attract them to the high street	Focus events on engaging younger people e.g., run a Teenage Market, or similar, to provide a show case for local creative talent and entrepreneurs.	Establish more permanent activities on the high street likely to appeal to younger people, children, and families	Teenage Market National Youth Market How can cities reimagine public space to support children and families? High Streets Taskforce Online Learning: Understanding Futures Users of the High Street Young People's Engagements with Heritage
Limited opportunities for new businesses to find a presence in the high street, which may limit capacity to change and adapt in the future	Engage landlords and commercials agents to ensure to curate new tenants Explore options to create flexible, cheap, coworking space e.g. Norwood High Street Using markets to showcase local talent or enable businesses to establish a presence in the town.	Ensure long-term business incubator space, flexible, short-term leases/shared space is considered in long-term development plans.	High Street Rental Auctions Planning in England: permitted development and change of use A platform for places: Reviving town centres by changing how communities access property Coworking in the city The Power of Norwood High Street

Table 9

5: Improving place management

Challenge	Quick wins	Longer-term actions	Supporting resources
Stakeholders were concerned their existing partnership lacks capacity	Take stock of all the local voluntary or community organisations in Polesworth Identify additional partners, focusing on greater diversity, e.g., younger people Add public and private interests to the network Aim to engage more residents and all local business Establish a trader led subgroup to lead on promotion.	Delegate delivery of specific projects to named organisations/individuals. Coalesce volunteering action around any emerging partnership. Crowdfund for equipment to start a greening group or a festival and events committee as the basis for more formal governance structure later. Facilitate both formal and informal community-led placemaking initiatives, with greater involvement of community organisations and schools/businesses and volunteers to support maintenance – e.g. establish a green network.	Altrincham revitalisation What makes effective place-based working Shared decision-making Withington: Power of Community Case Studies: Architectural Heritage Fund Revealing Waterloo: A Placemaking Strategy
Communication and coordination between the different levels of government need improving	Establish a simple shared communication channel. In Grimsby, partners used Facebook! Ensure membership is linked to clear ground rules e.g. talk the town up!	Establish a partnership online presence and use the ambassador group to spread the message more widely. Simply organise some quick wins to start galvanising the local community. Provide leadership and co-ordinate events in the town centre	Networks and Partnerships with Councils Developing strategies for effective town centres Partnerships
Although the current position of Polesworth is strong, there is concern stakeholder do not share a collective ambition for change – one which will ensure wider buy-in and establish a much clearer identity for Polesworth	Undertake a visioning exercise, but keep it social rather than administrative e.g., review positive reviews and messages for a user perspective	Determine message for local community, short term visitors, identify correct channels. Begin to establish a long term vision e.g. could green space be developed as a nature reserve e.g. small ponds/lakes and greater biodiversity -	Saving the High Street – the community takeover Community businesses and high streets: 'taking back' and leading forward Take Back the High Street: Putting communities in charge of their own town centres

Table 10

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.

Appendix 2: What people love about town and things they'd like to change

Things people love ❤	Changes people want to see ⭐
Group 1	
• Fire station • Toolbox hardware shop • Card shop • Memorial Hall and Jag Bar • Wok Away Chinese Takeaway • Abbey	• Bigger and better gym (indoor and outdoor)
Group 2	
• High street provision in general • Nethersole Flats • Recreation Ground • Library • Abbey Green Park • Anker • Canal • Pooley Park	• Public toilets • Pavilion to be returned at Abbey Green Park • Better opening hours for health centre • Top Club (working men's club) to be refurbished •
Group 3	
• River Anker • Abbey • Memorial Hall Library • Cliffords • Working Men's Club • Playing Fields	• More seating and dwell space •