

Revitalising town centres

A handbook for council leadership



Foreword

Leadership for town centre revitalisation

News of household name retailers struggling and images of boarded up local shops are often used to suggest the imminent collapse of the high street and our town centres as we know them. The reality is that in fact many councils are already creatively leading a revival of their local town and city centres.

Time and creative leadership are necessary for the physical aspects of our town centres to adapt to the massive changes in shopping habits, global trends and what attracts people to town centres. The responses required for managing change are necessarily complex and will need to be different depending on the size and location of a place. Councils throughout the country are already taking ownership of their town and city centre challenges, demonstrating that council leadership has a key role in using the knowledge, commitment and services of their authorities to ensure their town centres are adaptable to change.

Part of the response to town centre revitalisation requires big thinking – avoiding the traps of having a narrow focus on retail, one particular street or block or single issues such as parking, anti-social behaviour or business rates. Town centre success requires a multitude of factors to be successful.

Many town centres are finding a new purpose – a rebalancing of the functions they serve including employment, commercial, leisure, community, housing, healthcare and educational uses.

Successful councils are doing this through a range of tools, including long-term master-planning, proactive use of compulsory purchasing order (CPO) powers and land assembly, but key to success is a strong evidence base, meaningful engagement with the town's stakeholders and embracing new technology. They avoid dealing with single issues and responding to anecdote alone and instead take a much more strategic approach.

This handbook is designed to offer practical advice and act as a checklist for councils' decision-makers. Senior managers and elected members should find it equally helpful. The handbook is also complemented by a more detailed set of structured resources to be found on the Local Government Association (LGA) website at www.local.gov.uk/town-centre

I hope you find it a valuable resource in planning the future of your high streets and town and city centres.



Councillor Martin Tett

Chair of the LGA's Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board

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Revitalising town centres

A handbook for council leadership

Leading a town centre revival

Town and city centres face long-term issues that merit sophisticated and sustained solutions which create new understanding of interrelated issues and promote cooperation between different sectors and partners. They also abound with opportunities to bring benefits to residents and businesses in the very heart of their communities. Councils and their leaders are in a position to take a broad perspective and bring different interests together in a way that those championing single issues cannot.

Taking a joined-up approach

Local authorities can take a leading role or be important partners in sustaining communities through town centre revitalisation. Councils' roles combine statutory functions such as planning, housing, buildings conservation, public transport, highways and parking with strategic coordination and innovative intervention and economic development with partners.

This will involve a mixture of the right baseline surveys to understand the issues; engagement with business, community groups and other local stakeholders; agreement on and resourcing of a collective action plan to tackle issues; development of a suitable partnership to energise, communicate and coordinate delivery; and the routine monitoring of impacts to measure success.

About this handbook

This handbook and the accompanying online toolkit offer guidance on how to approach the revitalisation of town and city centres by delivering long-term impacts and using broad principles that can be tailored to meet local needs. The handbook was informed by a LGA-led seminar of senior practitioners in November 2017 and it has been compiled jointly with the People & Places Partnership. It is intended to provide a high level overview to guide councils in taking a strategic and evidence-based approach. The handbook contains suggestions of further reading, helpful resources and examples of good practice that can be accessed through a more extensive and detailed online toolkit.

Following town centre trends

Contrary to tales of high street ‘gloom and doom’, current trends show that creative council leadership is able to help town centres adapt to unprecedented market changes.

Positive trends

Recent figures¹ from the Local Data Company indicate that many town and city centres may be beginning to adapt. The number of empty shops has been falling slowly for five years and the independent retail sector showed particularly buoyant growth in 2017.

Retail restructuring

According to the British Retail Consortium,² restructuring by retailers could mean fewer though better paid jobs with a divergence in how communities are affected. The loss of a further third (900,000) of retail jobs by 2025 will hit struggling centres in particular and they need to prepare through an up-skilling of staff into new roles.

Focusing on food

According to a recent report on eating out in town centres,³ by Springboard and the NPD Group, improved performance of high streets is being driven by a booming and inventive food and drink sector, such as street food or markets. Population growth will lead to 800 million more eating out visits by 2027. Whilst day-time footfall has declined cumulatively by 3 per cent since 2013, footfall post-8pm has risen 1.4 per cent.

Embracing heritage

Instead of the historic environment being a constraint, there is an authoritative case that it creates a desirable town centre experience. According to Historic England in its report on the changing face of the High Street,⁴ creating a greater sense of ‘destination’ gives town centres a competitive edge.

Developing digital

Rather than an outdated view that the ‘internet’ threatens town centres, the Government-backed Digital High Street 2020 report⁵ concludes that investment in digital infrastructure and basic skills could be critical to revitalising high streets in a digitally dominated world.

Improving travel

A Government-backed technology and innovation centre,⁶ has estimated that the provision of personalised journey information and the ability to reserve a parking space and be guided to it, could improve traveller satisfaction on an annual 11.6 billion journeys in the UK.

Informing strategy

Local authority-led strategy needs to follow an evidenced-based understanding of changing customer habits and refreshed roles for town centres. This will help over-come the risk of focusing on single issues and underplaying the role of technology or changing shopping habits.

Developing a forward framework

Successful approaches to leading a town or city centre revival can benefit from a self-assessment of current council strategy. This handbook proposes using the F-factors checklist developed by the People & Places Partnership⁷ for creating a 'forward framework' for town centre revitalisation. Key elements to consider are:

Foundations: the process should be underpinned by an up-to-date review of existing strategies, collective objectives and evidence from recent surveys.

Function: action planning should begin with a clear statement of identified issues; recognition of council and partners' roles; the creation of suitable responses; acknowledgment of gaps in delivery; and identification of impact measures.

Form and Folk: next comes the development of appropriate organisational 'form' to coordinate activity including defining the roles of key partners and wider stakeholder engagement through 'folk'.

Finances: financial planning needs to include identifying opportunities for fund raising, inward investment and partnership sustainability.

Forward planning: finally, everything gets written down as a 'forward framework' and regularly reviewed.

Using the 'town centre checklist'

Revitalising a town centre involves coordinating a range of activities, possibly over many years. This self-assessment 'town centre checklist' uses a series of prompts to help councils and their partners gauge current and future processes in strategy development and the delivery of town centre improvements. The remainder of this handbook provides advice on taking forward each of these component activities and links to further resources.



Town centre checklist

Success Factors

FOUNDATION	
Evidence and objectives	Has a baseline survey of issues been completed, aims defined, objectives, scope and long-term monitoring of impacts agreed?
FUNCTION	
Parking, travel and access	Is an integrated and customer-focused parking, travel, and access strategy in place?
Planning and property	Are there robust town-centre-first policies, master-planning, priorities within and between towns and has work been coordinated with town centre businesses and landlords?
Streetscape and public realm	Has a funding strategy and ongoing, prioritised streetscape and public realm improvement plan been agreed with an understanding of 'connected value'?
Business support	Is there tailored training/mentoring and a strategy to enhance the quality and distinctiveness of retail, services, hospitality and leisure businesses based on current provision, trends and knowledge of competing centres?
Place branding and marketing	Is there a clear understanding of the town brand with pooled budgets and a creative, collective marketing campaign?
Digital technology and data	Is there an ongoing assessment of digital infrastructure and skills with an investment plan and approach for the collective use of data in marketing and monitoring the town centre?
FORM	
Governance and influence	Is there an appropriate structure, membership and credibility to coordinate local stakeholder activity and influence cross-departmental or other strategic partnerships?
FOLK	
Community engagement and coordination	Is there strong public, private and community engagement with active and coordinated involvement in planning and delivery that extends to community assets development and is backed by a clear communications plan?
Roles and capacity	Are there an effective chair, suitably skilled board, employment of necessary staff, effective management of trained volunteers and clear lines for joint working with other stakeholder groups?
FUNDING	
Finances and investment	Is there an organisation with robust financial procedures and strategy agreed for diverse and sustainable fund raising and income to support a town centre? Is it 'run as a business' with inter-relationships understood and investment secured?
FORWARD PLANNING	
Strategy and plans:	Is there a well-defined 'forward framework' comprising an overarching vision/strategy, a rolling organisational business plan and a parallel action plan coordinating delivery on the ground?

Foundations: evidence and objectives



Contrasting and complementary business and customer perceptions of Southwold town centre.

Improving a town centre without first investigating the issues is like baking a cake without knowing the ingredients.

A good place to start in developing a strategy for revitalising a town centre is to measure key indicators and gauge local opinion. From this it is possible to identify the issues; begin to develop tailored responses and hopefully demonstrate success. Local authorities are especially well-placed to lead such evidence gathering because of the breadth of their responsibilities and the opportunity it can provide to bring together otherwise disjointed data held by different council services and other organisations.

Tracking trends

It is important for councils to track national trends. Recent figures from the Local Data Company, for example, indicate that the number of empty shops has been falling slowly but consistently for five years.

Retail services including barbers and hairdressers, leisure services such as gyms, cafes, restaurants and bars, and convenience stores are prominent amongst the recent openings and point to the increasing service function of town centres.

Using a 'suite' of performance indicators

Quantitative indicators can be used to assess the performance of a town centre including footfall, foot-flow, vacancy rates, parking occupancy, rental levels, business mix, community assets, public services, customer origins and purpose of visits. Customers' digital footprints can be used in cost-effective and confidential ways to help understand how they use a place.

Understanding 'personality' of place

Qualitative surveys can be used to tell more about the 'personality' of a place including its users' and non-users' perceptions, the confidence of businesses, the impacts of place on profitability and sentiments around identity and brand.

Formulating objectives and actions

Putting the ground work in to gathering performance measures and perceptions provides a factual basis for engaging stakeholders, jointly agreeing objectives and creating a shared action plan for town centre revitalisation. A constant focus on agreed indicators and routine monitoring of changes will be essential in keeping responses on-track and identifying impacts.

Case studies

Waveney District Council has supported the Southwold Coastal Community Team to survey performance measures and perceptions of the town centre to provide evidence for strategy development and funding bids.

Warwickshire County Council is amongst the local authorities working with Loughborough University to use a digital high street index to monitor digital activity and community/customer engagement to determine future investments.

Function: parking, access and travel



Sleaford's integrated parking strategy addresses the whole customer journey including attractive access routes linking the town centre and peripheral car parks.

When parking is such an essential service, how can councils get it right?

Car parking is one of the most talked about issues in town centres and frequently cited by businesses as a cause of poor performance. Improvements need to focus on the whole journey in to town, however, whilst recognising parking as a pinch-point for customers.

Adopting joined-up thinking

Local authorities are parking providers and many manage on-street parking. Council leaders can help ensure that parking provision is considered in a joined-up way that relates to other responsibilities including traffic management, strategic planning and economic development. This needs to take account of how car use is changing in town

and cities, for example, and how housing growth might be better planned to connect conveniently to town centres.

Reducing congestion

Town and city centre streets have evolved over centuries and traffic and congestion act as a barrier in accessing and enjoying them. Councils have a leading responsibility in alleviating this and there are examples from across the country of the steps that innovative councils are taking to reduce congestion and its impacts. The recent LGA report on tackling congestion in towns and cities⁸ provides case studies including the introduction of a workplace parking levy by Nottingham City Council, mobility as a service in the West Midlands and Oxfordshire's use of big data to help people tailor their route to avoid congestion.

Getting between the parking lines

All too often parking providers, town centre managers, business groups and other stakeholders divide in to opposing camps when it comes to parking. It is vital to get between these parking ‘battle’ lines from an early stage get agreement on a more integrated way of working. This will alleviate the frequent criticism received by councillors and parking managers.

Taking a customer-led approach

It is important to take a customer-led approach to parking and to understand the different needs of visitors, workers, local residents and pop-and-shop casual users. Parking provision and policy should be considered in terms of the way its quality, quantity, cost and convenience affects people’s access to town centre shops and services. New technology offers opportunities to provide seamless parking as part of improved journeys in to town by helping locate available spaces, providing cashless payment and flexible durations of stay.

Creating a positive agenda

The British Parking Association is supporting the ‘Positive Parking Agenda’⁹ as a programme inspired by its local authority members which aims to change the way parking is perceived nationally including “improving access to services and the economic vitality and vibrancy of town centres and high streets”.

Case studies

Oxfordshire County Council has developed a satnav app that provides a free, two-way data exchange to share real-time traffic updates between drivers and help reduce congestion.

North Kesteven District Council has prepared an integrated parking strategy for Sleaford that links quality, quantity and cost of provision with an understanding of customer needs, town centre access, placemaking and growth.

Function: property and planning



Southampton's iconic West Quay created through public-private partnership.

The pivotal role of councils in shaping planning and development can underpin long term change when combined with the understanding of their hands-on responsibilities for town and city centre management.

Councils set out the vision and framework for the future development of an area through local plans, including policies on new retail parks and housing developments. They also determine detailed decisions on planning applications and change of use. For town centres to prosper, it is vital that such decisions are made with town centre impacts in mind and for planning to be proactive in underpinning revitalisation.

Planning proactively

Achievable steps for proactive planning are part of recommendations from a Government-backed property industry task force¹⁰ aimed at giving a new purpose to town and city centres:

- long-term masterplanning to rebalance the role of town and city centres
- new retail capacity models based on evolving shopping patterns
- new ways to overcome fragmented property ownership in town and city centres.

Such a proactive approach is echoed in the new LGA report 'Planning positively through partnership'¹¹ which emphasises the importance of involvement of key stakeholders in local plans, site assembly and community engagement.

Unlocking property investment

Town Centre Investment Management and Zones are new concepts offering a leading role for councils in land assembly and unlocking property investment.

The concept seeks to mirror the investment, collective ownership and asset management provided by shopping centres. As a report¹² published by the British Property Federation advocates, strong leadership through masterplanning will be key and councils can also choose to be local investors.

Influencing the business mix

At a detailed level, councils have some powers to determine the mix of town and city centre businesses to ensure sustainability, promote public health and ensure that the whole community is suitably served. Recently the LGA has been working with member councils to strengthen and make better use of these powers.

The 'Tipping the scale'¹³ report features case studies where the planning system has sought to introduce restrictions on the proliferation of fast food takeaways. The LGA's councillor handbook on gambling regulation¹⁴ summarises councils' responsibilities and highlights recent changes introduced by the Gambling Commission, including the requirement for gambling operators to carry out local risk assessments.

Case studies

Southampton City Councils' city centre masterplan is helping to achieve integrated, large-scale development including significant amounts of good-quality housing and transforming a brown-field site into an iconic, new leisure-led development.

Gateshead Council has used a Supplementary Planning Document on hot food takeaways to avoid clustering of such A5 uses detrimental to the vitality and viability of a local centre.

Function: streetscape and public realm



The Turner Contemporary is part of **Margate's** town-wide cultural and heritage-led revival.

Councils have the leading role in creating well-designed places that are prosperous and welcoming and benefit both businesses and residents.

To make better use of the streetscape and public realm of town and city centres it is important for councils to use their knowledge of the design principles, procedures, processes and partnerships required for successful placemaking.

Placemaking principles and procedures

Councils have an important role in placemaking but it is sometimes worth a reminder of the principles and processes of what is involved – it is the shaping of public spaces and buildings through community-based participation, planning, design, delivery and management.

Although a little dated, the universal design principles for placemaking as set-out in a 'Councillor's guide to urban design'¹⁵ are still useful. The guide also outlines the tools available to planning authorities to deliver high quality urban design including urban design frameworks that link higher level design principles and more detailed development briefs.

Adding value

There is evidence from reports such as 'Paved with gold' by CABI¹⁶ that better streets result in higher market prices. Similarly, according to Historic England in its report on the changing face of the high street^{xiii}, at a time when people are increasingly looking for a leisure experience rather than simply a range of shops to visit, investing in the public realm and streetscape can be used to give town centres a potentially competitive advantage.

Managing processes and partnerships

In the recent joint LGA and Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association publication on the role of culture in placemaking, there is a strong emphasis on the processes and partnership working required for effective delivery. The report showcases a range of different approaches to placemaking¹⁷ that all share common 'success factors', including effective community engagement, strong partnerships, local champions and demonstrating success to unlock further funding opportunities. The publication concludes that councils are uniquely placed to facilitate and drive placemaking by drawing on the collective knowledge of staff and partners.

Creating healthy high streets

The community and cultural benefits of effective placemaking can be wide-ranging as evidenced by the recent Public Health England review¹⁸ of the causal relationships between well-designed town centres and the health of local users. The report defines the characteristics of safe communal spaces that create healthier, safer and more cohesive communities. Its recommendations include closer working between council and public health professionals in ensuring that urban design is inclusive for all in promoting health and facilitating walkability.

Case studies

Thanet District Council's Margate Old Town Heritage Initiative has helped to transform previously neglected buildings into attractive, desirable properties and improve the public realm as part of a wider action plan to promote investment.

Kingston Council has revitalised the town centre through projects celebrating its ancient market heritage including contemporary architecture and public realm that has created a beautiful space and has boosted market trading so that it generates an estimated £6 million annually for the local economy.

Function: business support



Rotherham's Makers Emporium where over 100 makers, artists and crafters have had chance to test-trade and grow their businesses.

Councils that are in tune with local customer demands can play a vital role in kick-starting a renewal of business performance and revival in collective town centre performance.

By developing council-wide strategy that follows an evidence-based understanding of changing customer habits and demands, councils can support town centre businesses in adapting and creating new opportunities.

Evolving retail role

Shops and shopping will continue to evolve and play an important role in town and city centres aided by local strategy that adapts to national changes and local circumstances. According to the British Retail Consortium¹⁹ retailers can respond in-part with training and investment in technology that will create better paid jobs, although there may be fewer of them.

As well as brokering national schemes such as the Apprenticeship Levy, councils can have a key role in determining the retail role and growth of neighbouring centres, working with partners in place branding and marketing plus supporting independent shops through digital skills and infrastructure.

Focusing on food

According to a report on eating out²⁰ one of the key factors driving the better performance of high streets relative to shopping centres since 2014, is that their offer has widened, particularly in the food and beverage sector. The report highlights that there is a large customer base who are not in town during the day. It points to the fact that footfall post 5pm has risen 0.7 per cent up to 8pm and by 1.4 per cent post 8pm.

This trend is evidenced by recent monitoring of the food and drink sectors showing that nationally there are 16.7 per cent more restaurants than in 2012 and that high streets are leading the way.

Local networking

Councils can help businesses to help themselves by surveying their needs, supporting local networks, working with chambers of trade and helping to establish new business improvement districts (BIDs). Such a coming together can enable mentoring in skills such as visual merchandising, achieve savings through group purchasing, enable joint marketing and create new town centre events.

Working with BIDs

Business improvement districts are a model for local delivery of town centre revitalisation that has grown rapidly in recent years. A BID is a business-led organisation set up to improve an area with funding from a levy on local businesses. Whilst BIDs bring extra resources, they should be considered as important allies to local authority-led regeneration alongside councils' statutory roles such as planning and their wider community remit.

Case studies

Rotherham Council's business vitality grants have helped twelve new independent retailers open in the town centre and over 100 makers, artists and crafters have been supported to test-trade and grow their business at the Makers Emporium on the revamped High Street.

Canterbury Council and the City's BIDs have worked together in supporting Canterbury in becoming one of 70 towns and cities who have been awarded the Association of Town and City Management's Purple Flag accreditation in recognition of work to support a high quality evening and night time economy.

Function: place branding and marketing



Footfall in **Wakefield** has been boosted by new tourism attractions and events.

For town and city centres to distinguish themselves from the functionality of retail parks or shopping online, it is important to collaborate with communities and emphasise their cultural character and create a collective place brand.

In essence, a place brand should be a shared understanding and expression of place to enable a full range of consistent and coherent communications activities to support your place marketing objectives. Events will also be a critical element of engaging the local community and attracting new visitors.

Place marketing

A place marketing strategy needs to have clear aims and objectives, use a range of channels, breadth of and insight and have clear methods of evaluation. It is also vital to make sure that place marketing is captured in a simple, straightforward and engaging story that residents, partners, businesses and stakeholders can understand and rings true. Advice on how to develop an authentic place

story is available as part of guidance on place branding on the LGA's online Comms Hub.²¹

Identifying the brand

Recent work by the LGA underlined that effective and sustainable place marketing must be authentic and show an understanding of distinctiveness, which is reflected in the marketing collateral and is supported by online resources. A report written for Historic England²² provides an authoritative understanding of heritage-focused place branding. The report proposes good practice including developing a shared online resource and creating flexible place branding and marketing materials for different local stakeholders to use.

Promoting the visitor economy

A recent LGA report²³ recounts how the visitor economy can help councils to showcase the unique identity and heritage of places

by contributing distinctive branding to area-wide destination management and marketing. Councils play a vital strategic leadership role in achieving this through engagement between local tourism forums and Destination Management Organisations. In return, town-based tourism can help underpin the viability of the £2.6 billion that councils invest annually on supporting culture, heritage, sport, business and major events.

Managing multi-purpose places

The Institute of Place Management's high street UK2020 study²⁴ identified 25 priorities for local action for places wanting to increase footfall and ranked cultural and community factors such as entertainment and leisure, multi-functionality, recreational space, attractiveness and place marketing, alongside issues such as the retail/services mix and accessibility.

Driving growth

In its report on driving growth through the arts,²⁵ the LGA provides a reference point for the ways that councils can lead local growth through investment in arts and culture including town and city centres. Such investments help boost local economies by attracting visitors, creating jobs, boosting businesses, revitalising places, and developing talent. Cultural anchors such as libraries, theatres or museums can play a key role in hosting events, attracting additional footfall, underpinning regeneration and boosting the evening economy.

Organising festivals and events

Town centre festivals and events including specialist markets can celebrate local culture and provide benefits for the local community and economy. According to the LGA's new report on Christmas markets,²⁶ evidence of wider benefits include additional

purchases and raising the profile of places by attracting new visitors. The report also highlights that customers expect authenticity in events and often more could be done to systematically measure impacts. The joint LGA and Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association publication on the role of culture in placemaking²⁷ puts a strong emphasis on the community benefits. By creating vibrant events and experiences in town centre locations, areas can boost wellbeing, improve mental health and tackle isolation.

Creating partnerships

In the report on improving places²⁸ by the Arts Council and Mayor of London (2017) there are examples of how BIDs, cultural organisations and local authorities can work together to help town centres thrive. The research highlights the success of such partnerships and creative programming in boosting the economy, bringing people together, promoting tourism and civic pride, and revitalising neighbourhoods. The report's conclusions identified a pivotal role for local authorities including brokering contacts between organisations and promoting best practice in managing the night time economy.

Case studies

Wakefield Council has invested significantly in developing tourism in the district by supporting major cultural attractions such as The Hepworth Wakefield and developing its own tourism attractions, events and festivals.

Derbyshire County Council is working with Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire and partner authorities to develop the county's visitor economy by boosting the capacity, quality and identity of individual towns as part of wider destination management and place branding.

Function: digital technology and data



The **Gloucester**-based UK Digital Retail Innovation Centre will test, develop and share applications of innovative town and city centre technology.

Rather than seeing changing shopping habits as a threat, it is important to be forward-thinking in how digital opportunities can help town centres develop.

Whilst global shopping habits have changed with the internet, leading to concerns about the changing role of our town centres, there are also tremendous opportunities to use digital technologies to improve how people enjoy and experience what town and city centres have to offer.

By embracing digital in planning and providing for its uptake, councils can help boost the way local town centres are promoted, accessed, used, organised and understood. It is an essential part of giving places a commercial advantage and should be a building block of wider tourism promotion too.

Taking retail online

The Government-backed digital high street 2020 report²⁹ made four principal recommendations that it considered as critical to the revitalising town centres in a digitally dominated world and where councils can assist through local leadership including: enabling sufficient access through infrastructure; improving basic digital skills; sharing knowledge and innovative practices between authorities; and a High Street digital health index to monitor impact. The report has a strong focus on helping independent retailers to upskill in their digital capabilities.

Extending the digital impact

Restaurants, cafes, pubs, cinemas and other important non-retail services need to similarly be able to maximise opportunities offered by digital technology to understand and target customers better. A town's digital strategy can link an understanding of underperforming sectors with an understanding of identity, branding and place marketing as well as wider pooling and sharing of data. The local leadership of a place-based digital strategy should also consider the role of digital as part of local stakeholder engagement.

Valuing data

The ethical use of digital data from sources including travel movements, parking, mobile phone activity, social media interaction and Wi-Fi usage provide cost-effective and informative insights about the changing use of town centres. Local authorities may have access to a wide range of data and be trusted users of such aggregated information. Procedures for the collection and use of digital data should be included within town centre action plans as a way of increasing understanding, targeting marketing and monitoring change.

Case studies

Gloucester City Council and Gfirst Local Enterprise Partnership have commissioned Marketing Gloucester to test and develop town-wide future city technologies including opening the UK:DRIC – a new national centre for digital retail innovation within a city shopping centre.

Leeds City Council has worked with the city's BID to offer a free digital service providing real-time key city intelligence to businesses (footfall, parking etc.) and a communications hub for information sharing.

Form: governance and influence



Public and private partners in **Blackburn** celebrate gaining national recognition for their joint work to improve town centre performance and challenging perceptions.

Turning around a town or city centre is a complex and long-term venture. Experience shows that it requires resources and leadership and should not be left to chance.

Many local authorities have used their leadership role to enable and provide long term support for town centre revitalisation, including through capacity building, start-up funding and creating authority-wide links. Councils should carefully consider their roles in supporting and sustaining viable partnerships from the outset, or otherwise they risk being set up to fail.

Form following function

The form of an organisation refers to its setup, structure, governance, partnerships and legal status. The form of a partnership should follow its function. Key determinants of organisational form for how councils support town centres will therefore include: the balance sought between being a consultative partner or a delivery body; available financial support and the need for independent fund raising; and ensuring that council policy supports reaching out, engaging with and empowering sectors of the community rather than being overly prescriptive.

Evolving organisations

There are many variations of the organisational models available for leading town centre revitalisation and how councils can support these. Councils need to consider the type of partnership that they will have confidence in to best offer joint working and added value without later leading to strained relationships. The appropriate organisational form is also likely to evolve over time and two organisations can work side-by-side with clearly defined roles.

Different options for organisational form include: council-led partnerships which coordinate activity and often inform policy; business-led town teams which can be very “can-do” and have a marketing focus; neighbourhood planning groups which can help shape future growth and impact on town centre; development trusts which are very adept in managing community property; and BIDs which combine financial independence and business leadership.

Reinventing public-private partnerships

New advice on unlocking growth through partnership from the LGA and British Property Federation³⁰ proposes innovative means of driving forward local growth by encouraging local authorities to foster stronger public-private sector partnerships. This can be achieved by: ensuring a convincing and realistic vision; using land assembly tools; developing commercial mind-sets and being committed to improving infrastructure.

Case studies

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has worked with the town’s Business Improvement District to improve public spaces, reduce anti-social behavior and run events marketing and social media campaigns that are changing town centre performance and challenging perceptions.

Pembrokeshire County Council has successfully used the F-Factors model to review its relationship, future governance, influence, impacts and ongoing support needs for its county-wide, town centre revitalisation programme.

Folk:

community engagement and coordination

It is essential to involve and engage with communities to spread the workload, improve perceptions about a town centre and promote its increased use.

Communicating and coordinating

Effective communication and coordination across partnerships is key. This extends beyond local authorities from the transparent recording and sharing of decision-making with partners; engaging with media, staff and stakeholder groups; and keeping the wider community informed and aware of ways to get involved.

This can be best achieved by developing town centre communication plans that outline the audiences, channels to use and responsibilities of councils amongst partners. Increasingly, digital engagement techniques such as e-bulletins and social media provide new opportunities for reaching different stakeholders including 'hard-to-reach' groups like young people.

Engaging stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement techniques offer the opportunity to broaden the impacts of council involvement. A council should develop its approach to stakeholder engagement with a clear focus on 'why', 'who' and 'how'. The LGA's recently published councillor's workbook on neighbourhood and community engagement,³¹ provides helpful guidance on the role of members in achieving this and its guide to engagement³² provides comprehensive advice for councils looking to engage with residents.

Transferring assets

The joint LGA and Locality guide on empowering communities by making the most of local assets,³³ offers councils guidance on enabling the improved use of under-used public buildings by transferring their ownership. Such community asset ownership harnesses the creativity and commitment of local residents and creates sustainable enterprises that provide local services and contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of town centres.

Folk: roles and capacity

Maximising the impact of town centre revitalisation will involve a council working with partners in ways that both add value and overcome the complexities involved.

Clarifying roles and responsibilities

It is important to be very clear about the respective roles and responsibilities of partner organisations and individuals including ongoing involvement from council staff across departments.

Broadly the roles required include:

- Leadership and coordination: facilitation; secretariat, reporting and coordination; strategic connections and influence; financial management; fundraising; communications and marketing including digital; and community engagement.
- Project development and delivery: suitable delivery experience; necessary technical expertise; project management skills; suitable development and delivery experience; and maintenance support identified.
- Support from third parties: local authority; private sector; peer-to-peer and parallel projects; learning networks; landowners; strategic authorities; funders.

Assessing skills and capacity

It is important for a partnership to actively consider and review if it has the right blend of skills and experience to match its function and address local needs. This should be done with an understanding of the limits on the levels of council support, individuals' time constraints as volunteers and budgetary pressures. The required skills and knowledge will also vary as the partnership evolves and different projects progress.

Funding: finances and investment

Funding and financial management oils the wheels of local revitalisation and needs to be considered in a number of ways by councils both directly and in how they support partnership development.

Committing councils

To boost activity and provide stability to partnerships, as key partners it is helpful if councils can be clear about their long-term commitment in cash and other in-kind support. This will help underpin other fund raising.

Operating organisations

It is important to be clear about the costs necessary to run effective partnerships and secure such revenue costs to avoid unnecessary distraction from delivery.

Delivering projects

Effective financial planning including fund raising, budgeting, project management, capital costs, income generation and maintenance need to be provided for to ensure successful project delivery and local impact.

Sustaining investments

Ensuring sustained benefits from projects and investments requires a sophisticated understanding of how town centres work as businesses and the 'connected value' for example between parking provision, better public spaces, increased footfall from events, land assembly for development and a diversified business mix. Councils have an important role in sustaining such investment through their strategic planning remit, provision of improved services and as property owners.

Forward planning: strategy and plans

For a partnership to evolve in its effectiveness, it is important to plan for constant progress through regular review and writing things down.

This can be achieved by annually reviewing the checklist and updating a 'Forward Framework' comprising an overarching strategy and two component plans:

Business planning

An organisational business plan covering the foundations, form, folk and organisational finances will determine whether there is an effective and sustainable partnership able to deliver improvements. This organisational plan should define the interrelationship and respective roles of partners such as the local authority, town council, business partners, Chamber of Commerce or a BID.

Action planning

A town or city centre action plan is necessary to determine and define objectives, projects, responsibilities, budgets, timescales, outcomes and impact measures as the building blocks of the coordinated delivery of improvements on the ground. The annual review of such an action plan should begin and end with a review of available evidence and the monitoring of impacts and changes.

Resources for local government (end notes)

- 1 Retail and leisure report summary
<http://info.localdatacompany.com/retail-leisure-report-summary-h1-2017-download>
- 2 Retail 2020 report
<https://brc.org.uk/media/57612/retail-2020-report-1.pdf>
- 3 Eating out opportunity
www.spring-board.info/review-download/Retail-Destinations-The-Eating-Out-Opportunity
- 4 The changing face of the high street
https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/changing-face-high-street-decline-revival/773_130604_final_retail_and_town_centre.pdf/
- 5 The digital high street 2020,
http://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/Digital_High_Street_Report/The-Digital-High-Street-Report-2020.pdf?2
- 6 Traveller needs study
<https://ts.catapult.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Traveller-Needs-Study-1.pdf>
- 7 F-Factors checklist for revitalising town centres
<http://people-places.co.uk/our-specialities/>
- 8 A country in a jam: tackling congestion in our towns and cities,
www.local.gov.uk/tackling-congestion
- 9 Positive parking agenda
www.britishparking.co.uk/Positive-Parking-Agenda
- 10 Beyond retail: redefining the shape and purpose of town centres,
<http://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/Beyond-Retail.pdf?2>
- 11 Planning positively through partnership
www.local.gov.uk/planning-positively
- 12 Town Centre Investment Zones; getting investment back into the high street
www.bpf.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/TCIM-summary-paper.pdf
- 13 Tipping the scales; case studies on the use of planning powers to limit hot food takeaway
www.local.gov.uk/tipping-scales-case-studies-use-planning-powers-limit-hot-food-takeaway
- 14 Gambling regulation: councillor handbook
www.local.gov.uk/gambling-regulation-councillor-handbook-england-and-wales
- 15 A councillor's guide to urban design
<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/councillors-guide-to-urban-design.pdf>
- 16 Paved with gold
www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/report/paved-gold-real-value-street-design
- 17 People, culture, place; the role of culture in placemaking
www.local.gov.uk/people-culture-place-role-culture-placemaking
- 18 Healthy high streets; good place-making in an urban setting
www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthy-high-streets-good-place-making-in-an-urban-setting
- 19 Retail 2020 report, British Retail Consortium, 2014.
<https://brc.org.uk/media/57612/retail-2020-report-1.pdf>
- 20 Market growth monitor
www.cga.co.uk/all-reports/marketgrowthmonitor-april-2018/
- 21 Place for local branding for local government -the basics
www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/place-branding
- 22 Place branding and heritage
<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/2016-heritage-and-place-branding/>
- 23 Local solutions: boosting the visitor economy,
www.local.gov.uk/local-solutions-boosting-visitor-economy
- 24 High street UK2020
www.placemanagement.org/special-interest-groups/managing-places/town-and-city-centresdowntowns/town-centre-policy-and-research/hsuk2020/
- 25 Driving growth through local government investment in the arts
www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/driving-growth-through-lo-334.pdf

- 26 Festive cheer: the local impact of Christmas
www.local.gov.uk/festive-cheer-local-impacts-christmas-markets
- 27 People, culture, place; the role of culture in placemaking, LGA and Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association, 2017
www.local.gov.uk/people-culture-place-role-culture-placemaking
- 28 Improving places
www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/improving-places-culture-business-improvement-district-partnerships
- 29 The digital high street 2020, Great British High Street Campaign, 2015
http://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/Digital_High_Street_Report/The-Digital-High-Street-Report-2020.pdf?2
- 30 Local development, growth and regeneration through successful public/private collaboration, LGA and British Property Federation, 2017
<https://www.bpf.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/BPF-LGA-unlocking-growth-through-partnership.PDF>
- 31 Councillor's workbook on neighbourhood and community engagement
www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-neighbourhood-and-community-engagement
- 32 New conversations; LGA guide to engagement
www.local.gov.uk/new-conversations-lga-guide-engagement
- 33 Empowering communities by making the most of local assets
www.local.gov.uk/empowering-communities-making-most-local-assets-officer-guide



Local Government Association

18 Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email info@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk

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