

Local 
Government
Association

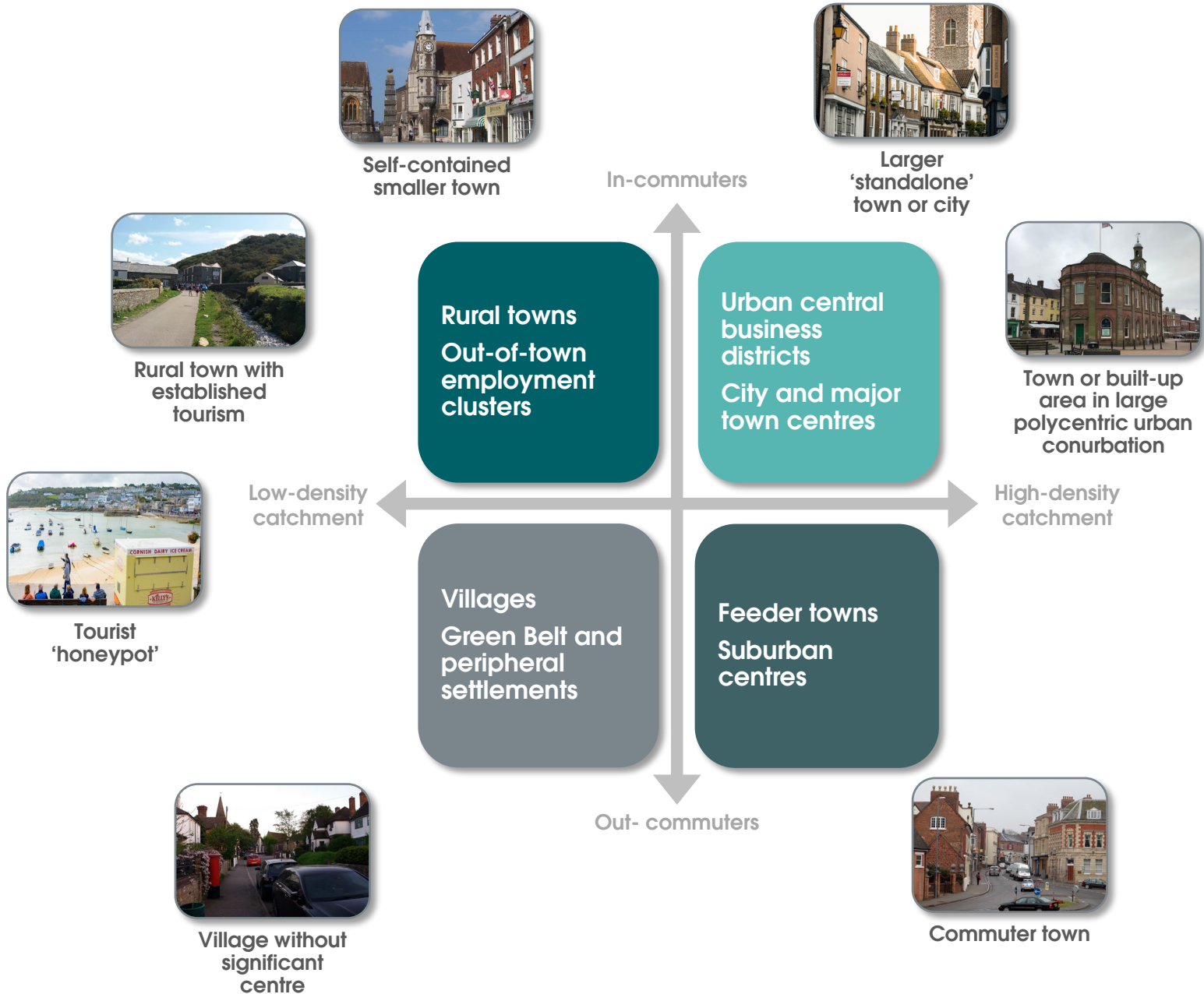
Resilient high streets

Challenges and solutions for creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the 'New Normal'

December 2021

TRAJECTORY

pragmatix 
advisory



Click on the button that best describes your location

How to navigate this document

TRAJECTORY

pragmatix
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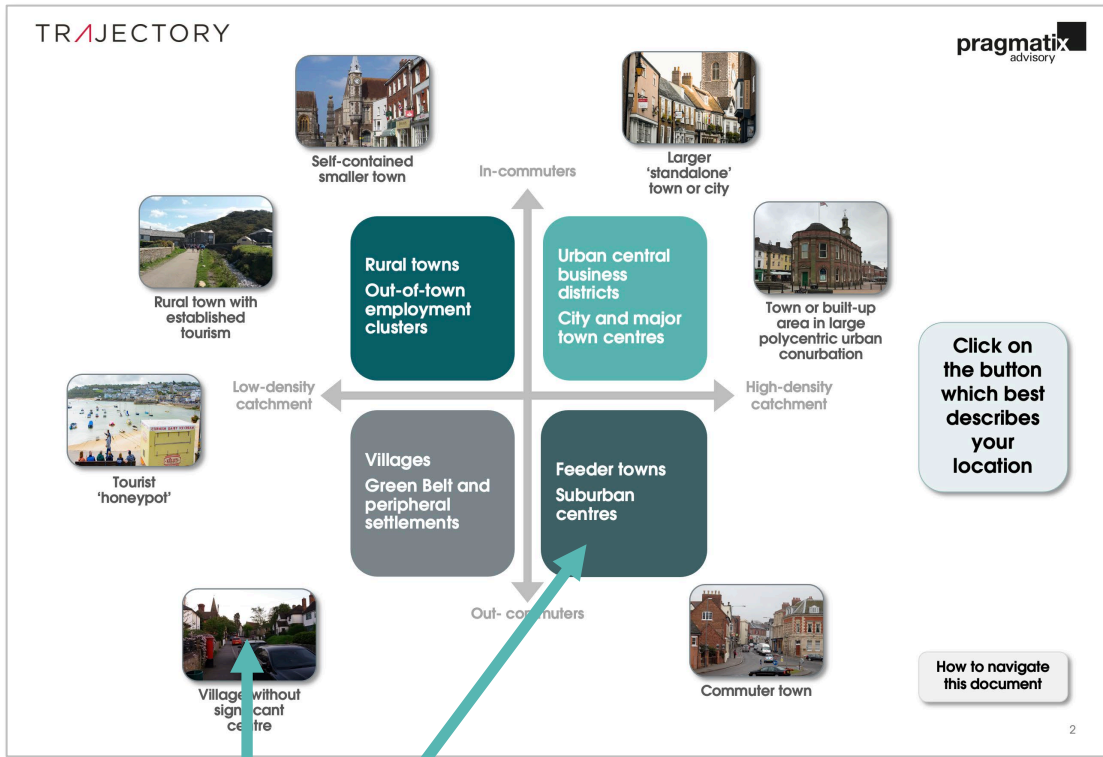
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The challenges and potential solutions identified in this guidance pack were compiled following a series of in-depth interviews with council officers, councillors and business representatives, alongside a thorough programme of desk research.

How to navigate this document

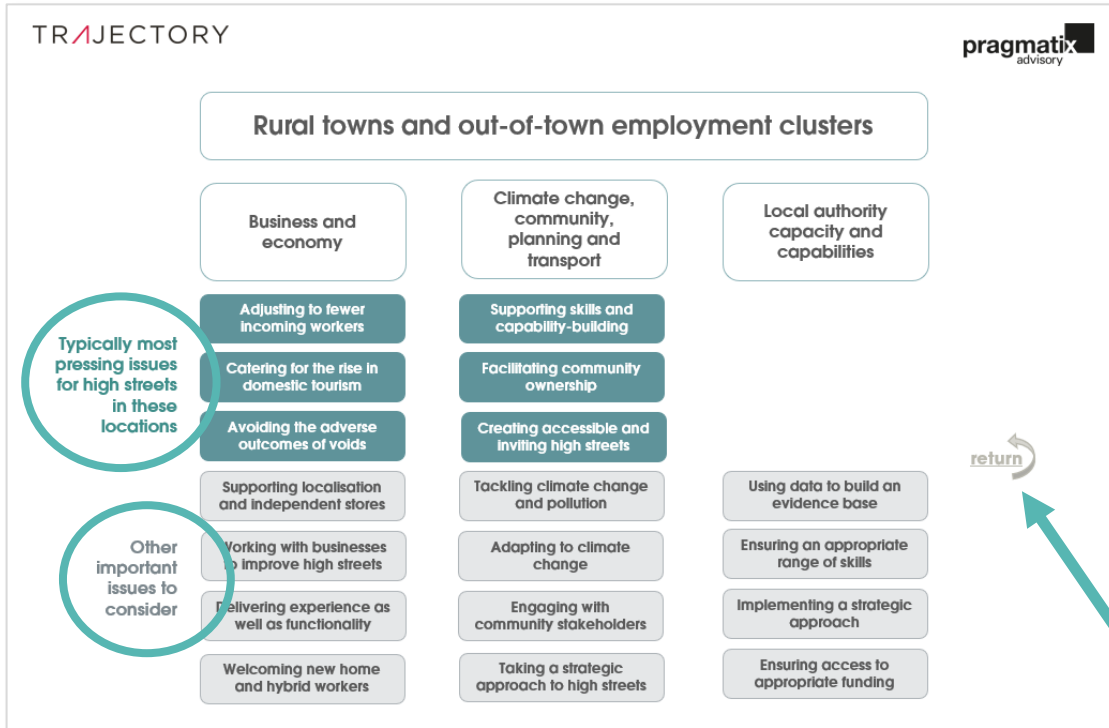


The landing page contains links to the main navigation pages for each high street type.

Select the option which best describes the location of your high street.

Clicking on a button will take you to a page with a list of the six most relevant challenges for your high street type, as well as twelve other significant challenges identified in the research.

These buttons are linked to navigation pages for each high street type



Choosing a high street type on the landing page will take you to a navigation page for your selection.

The 'typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations' are the challenges which are very relevant for your high street.

The 'other important issues to consider' areas are also informative, so should not be disregarded.

The 'return' button will take you back to the landing page.

TRAJECTORY pragmatix advisory

Adjusting to fewer incoming workers

Work patterns have changed during the pandemic, with varying rates of home and hybrid working noticeable across sectors and the country. High streets that have lost footfall must innovate to retain business activity.

Covid lockdowns and work from home mandates necessitated a major shift in working patterns, with knock on effects for high streets

Challenges

- Larger urban centres have lost footfall due to increased working from home and hybrid working.
- This has particularly affected the food and beverage

High street strategies

Resilient high streets with lower commuter footfall after the pandemic will innovate to increase spend per visit and further develop attractiveness to non-commuters.

Keeping commuters longer when they're around

- Expand the night-time economy, including supporting night-time transport from surrounding areas

Increasing spend per visit

- Providing a mixed offer increases the scope for individuals visiting multiple businesses
- Aim to increase

Further develop catchment

- Develop a p
- Create a tov
- Target new r

Encouraging e

- Target busin
- Provide flexit

Encouraging m

- Permit chang
- Look to deve

Timeframe: Im

Local authority first steps

Case study

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

In the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, commuters have been lost from big commercial areas. This has put pressure on chains and stores in areas that used to experience large amounts of footfall. To encourage commuters back into these areas, the council are using Greater London Authority data on Mastercard spending and O2 phone footfall to breakdown the trends in shoppers and workers over time, and design interventions based on their activity.

In addition to providing immediate insights into changing consumer trends in the area, the Borough council intends to use the data to establish a dashboard to track interventions and measure their success and assess how healthy they are economically and socially.

Other initiatives the council have used to maintain interest in the high street over the past year include new outdoor markets, sculpture displays, live music, and al fresco dining. The council have worked with major landlords on these projects, which have attracted families as well as independent adults.

Further reading:
 Demos via High Streets Task Force, [Build Back Stronger](#)
 High Streets Task Force, [how can I improve the night-time economy in my town centre?](#)
 Sound Diplomacy via High Streets Task Force, [A Guide to Managing your Night Time Economy](#)
 Urban Foundry, [Street Market: Quick Read Guide](#)
 Institute of Place Management via High Streets Task Force, [Evening Economy - 237 Vital and Viable Streets](#)

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Source: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (2021)

Each challenge has three slides.

The first includes some context in addition to the relevant trends and which high streets they apply to most.

The second contains high street strategies and local authority first steps.

The third consists of a case study and links to further reading.

Use the 'return' button in the bottom left-hand corner to return to the landing page and navigate back to your high street type of choice.



Business and economy

Adjusting to fewer incoming workers

Welcoming new home and hybrid workers

Catering for rise in domestic tourism

Working with businesses to improve high streets

Delivering experience as well as functionality

Avoiding the adverse outcomes of voids

Supporting localisation and independent stores

Adjusting to fewer incoming workers

Work patterns have changed during the pandemic, with varying rates of home and hybrid working noticeable across sectors and the country. High streets that have lost footfall must innovate to retain business activity.

Covid lockdowns and work from home mandates necessitated a major shift in working patterns, with knock on effects for high streets.

With many workers having spent eighteen months working fully or partly remotely, a return to pre-pandemic levels of in-person working are unlikely.

In April 2021, 42 per cent of surveyed workers in the United Kingdom hoped to work from home at least twice a week beyond the pandemic, while more than one fifth hoped to work from home almost all of the time.

To retain high levels of economic activity, high streets and town centres which benefited from higher levels of in-commuting will need to adjust their offer in the 'new normal' world of hybrid working.

Challenges

- Larger urban centres have lost footfall due to increased working from home and hybrid working.
- This has particularly affected the food and beverage sectors, and retail stores visited during lunchbreaks.
- Home and hybrid working reduces travel and thereby saves on carbon emissions. Replacing the lost business activity needs to be managed in an environmentally sustainable way.

Future trends

- Changing spatial economics
- Change in supply of commercial space
- The demise of distance
- New patterns of work

Applies to

- Large urban conurbation and large standalone town
- In-commuter high streets
- High density catchment area

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Resilient high streets with lower commuter footfall after the pandemic will innovate to increase spend per visit and further develop attractiveness to non-commuters.</p> <p>Keeping commuters longer when they're around</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the night-time economy, including supporting night-time transport from surrounding areas <p>Increasing spend per visit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a mixed offer increases the scope for individuals visiting multiple businesses during one trip to the high street • Aim to increase experiential and leisure activities and businesses <p>Further developing attractiveness to non-commuters, and widening the catchment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a programme of cultural events • Create a town loyalty card scheme • Target new markets, for example leisure tourism or conference trade <p>Encouraging employers with more physically present staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target businesses in sectors with growth potential • Provide flexible working spaces <p>Encouraging more residential accommodation on/around the high street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit change of use applications • Look to develop vacant council property for affordable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey residents and visitors on their reasons for visiting the high street, what's missing for them from the high street's offer, and elements which put them off • Gather and analyse credit card and mobile phone data, comparing pre-covid, pandemic footfall and post-restrictions
<p>Timeframe: Immediate challenge 0-3 years (response to and recovery from covid); thereafter, ongoing to tackle longer-term trends.</p>	

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Further reading:

Demos via High Streets Task Force, [Build Back Stronger](#)

High Streets Task Force, [How can I improve the night-time economy in my town centre?](#)

Sound Diplomacy via High Streets Task Force, [A Guide to Managing your Night Time Economy](#)

Urban Foundry, [Street Market: Quick Read Guide](#)

Institute of Place Management via High Streets Task Force, [Evening Economy - 237 'Vital and Viable' Factors](#)

Welcoming new home and hybrid workers

Work patterns have changed during the pandemic, with varying rates of home and hybrid working noticeable across sectors and the country. This offers opportunities for local high streets to benefit from increased footfall.

Towns with high numbers of residents who formerly commuted out to surrounding areas have benefited from the increase in people working from home during the pandemic.

This has provided a market for new businesses in such towns which can identify and provide for the needs of the new home workers in an appealing way.

This will include food offerings, but also such needs as stocking the 'home office' or providing flexible workspace, and hosting community events.

Not all new home workers will have high disposable income, but popping into the town or village centre is more likely to increase passing window shopping and give passing custom to street markets.

Challenges

- Some commuter towns have 'under-developed' economies in terms of number of businesses per resident – but they can still be affluent, with high employment rates.
- High levels of home working and hybrid working are likely to continue.

Future trends

- Purposeful town centres
- New patterns of work
- Changing spatial economics
- The demise of distance
- On demand expectations
- Localism
- Multi-use spaces
- Digital divides

Applies to

- Out-commuter high streets
- Low density catchment areas
- Village without significant centre

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Resilient high streets in areas with higher levels of home-working after the pandemic will innovate to attract and retain new visitors.</p> <p>Create a broader, higher value offer to attract and retain remote workers during the week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the `daytime economy` • Provide amenities former commuters previously accessed in urban centres, e.g. coffee shops, cafes, gyms <p>Remote workers will want convenience and flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide flexible working and multi-use spaces • Ensure high speed internet provision, either through gigabit broadband, 5G, or equivalent • Extended/alternative opening hours • Mixed offer of retail, hospitality and experiential businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use local consumer trends data (e.g. O2 phone footfall data) to assess pre- and post-covid visitor patterns • Determine demand for more multi-use and purpose-driven spaces on your high street • Survey residents and visitors to identify reasons for using the high street and gauge interest in potential local investment or projects.
<p>Timeframe: Immediate challenge 0-3 years (response to and recovery from covid); thereafter, ongoing to tackle longer-term trends.</p>	

Case study

Northumberland County Council

Northumberland County Council have been engaging with remote workers and less advantaged communities throughout 2021, hosting pop-up events around the area. In April, the council worked with a local charity to deliver 500 Easter eggs to families. They have also hosted a weekly neighbourhood pop-up socially distanced disco.

In the future, they are hoping to hold cookery demonstrations, comedy shows, and children's story time sessions to engage different groups in the community. They intend to continue to co-produce events, to ensure that any initiatives are influenced by communities' needs and wants.

The council work with the NHS Health Trainers, the voluntary sector, libraries, local businesses, community groups, and different council departments to engage as many sections of the community as possible in these events.

Further reading:

Create Streets Foundation via High Streets Task Force, [No Place Left Behind: The Commission into Prosperity and Community Placemaking](#)

Sara Nalaskowska via High Streets Task Force, [How to bring the city closer to people? Using spatial network analysis to create a 15-minute city](#)

Pragmatix Advisory for Local Government Association, [Rural recognition, recovery, resilience and revitalisation](#)

Catering for the rise in domestic tourism

Local authorities must adapt to take advantage of the rise in staycations and domestic tourism during and in the aftermath of covid, using heritage and natural assets as well as unique retail and experiential offers.

The rise in staycations and domestic tourism experienced throughout 2021 is predicted to continue, due to pandemic unpredictability and refreshed interest in exploring the United Kingdom.

Covid-restrictions initially hit English tourist towns hard, but restrictions on international travel saw an influx of new visitors to many popular destinations.

Staycations in the United Kingdom supported a 25 per cent increase in high street footfall in August 2021 compared to 2020, despite similar levels of pandemic restrictions across both years.

In the long term, international tourism is likely to see some recovery, but the extent of the resurgence remains unclear. Conferences and business travel will likely be affected, with a move to online or hybrid models alongside an increased desire for green travel.

Challenges remain for high streets reliant on international visitors, especially those in London.

Challenges

- Uncertainty about the future course of the pandemic
- Higher pressures on amenities and services caused by higher visitor numbers
- Ensuring mix of amenities appeals to new visitors, too – in both traditional resorts and newer destinations
- Conference destinations need to optimise benefits of in-person attendance
- Seasonality
- Reduced availability of overseas staff, due to departure from the European Union and travel restrictions

Future trends

- Covid scarring
- Shades of Green
- On demand expectations
- Evolution of money

Applies to

- Any towns/high streets with significant levels of tourism, or that could develop a tourist economy
- Out-commuter high streets
- Low density catchment areas

High street strategies

Resilient high streets draw on all their assets, with the local authority and their partners working together to create year-round appeal.

Ensure high street offer reflects the demands of the changing visitor-base

- Local authorities can work with business partners to identify gaps in tourist provision, such as overnight accommodation, utilities or conference facilities
- Partnership working can also identify workforce and skills needs, and how these could be addressed, for example through transport improvements or college provision
- Making town centres more visually appealing and helping tourists to navigate around the town centre can improve their experience, making a return visit more likely

Manage peak demand and capacity

- Sharing the load between towns can be helpful – where there is demand in one town which exceeds supply (such as for overnight accommodation), promoting other towns can boost their economy
- Various funding has been made available for improvements which will boost the tourist economy, such as the [Welcome Back Fund](#), the [Towns Fund](#) and [Coastal Communities Fund](#). Councils can keep watching for further grant announcements

Better exploit off-peak capacity

- Hold off-season events, celebrating local history, anniversaries, culture and assets

Local authority first steps

- Identify any immediate pressures on local services from increased tourism, for example additional refuse collection requirements, parking or congestion
- Support high street promotion and marketing more generally. Coordinate different interests – ensuring businesses are engaged in ways that work for them and aligning interests in advance of funding bids

Timeframe: Immediate challenge 0-3 years (response to and recovery from covid); thereafter, ongoing to tackle longer-term trends.

Case study

Lincolnshire

Connected Coast is the delivery body for the Towns Fund for Skegness and Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire. Both towns secured a Town Deal with the Government, resulting in nearly £50 million in funding from the Towns Fund and over £30 million of support from local and national organisations and businesses.

The area has a highly seasonal economy, dominated by caravan parks and amusement arcades. It was identified that Skegness had potential to develop a conference trade. The Embassy Theatre could be used for main conference sessions, but there was a lack of locations that could be used for breakout/fringe events. The development of such sites was included in the Town Plan.

The Skegness BID also included the establishment of a new further education college, providing new and digitally-delivered training opportunities, complementing existing provision and providing skills in demand by local employers. The Mablethorpe BID described the need for investment in shop fronts to make the town centre look thought about and cared about and increase its appeal to visitors.

Further reading:

Nikos Ntounis *et al* via High Streets Task Force, [Tourism and Hospitality industry resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

Local Government Association and The National Association of British Markets, [Festive Cheer: The local impact of Christmas markets](#)

Pragmatix Advisory for Local Government Association, [Rural recognition, recovery, resilience and revitalisation](#)

Working with businesses to improve high streets

Strong partnership working and clear communication form a solid basis for improving towns and high streets. Business improvement districts and other partnerships can bring together the council and local businesses.

Shops, pubs, principal councils, town and parish councils and other organisations and businesses that have a high street presence form a complex ecosystem. To unleash the power of this ecosystem, there must be strong partnership working and clear, open lines of communication.

A powerful form of partnership for improving high streets is a Business Improvement District (BID). These can raise funds for reinvestment into town centres and support local business growth over time. In 2016 the turnover of London BIDs had grown by 49 per cent since their inception, with a 3.8 per cent annual compound growth rate.

Regular communications with local businesses, such as newsletters, can also help, as well as business involvement in formal partnership structures, such as local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and boards for crime reduction, transport, and planning.

Challenges

- Councils need business input to ensure the best possible decision-making.
- Businesses need to be aware of council decisions that impact on them.
- Councils and businesses need to work together to take advantage of opportunities such as Town Deals.

Future trends

- Purposeful town centres
- Chain vs independent
- Agility vs resilience
- On demand expectations
- Localism
- Shades of green
- Green consumption

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies

Resilient high streets are best developed and maintained through strong engagement by and cooperation between private sector partners, supported and encouraged by councils.

Giving high street businesses the freedom to do their jobs

- The most successful partnerships with local businesses allow decisions to be taken independently from the council whilst providing strong and constructive channels of communication

BIDs are a proven mechanism for constructive business involvement

- Business improvement districts provide an established structure for businesses to coordinate, including investment in high street improvement funded by a levy on business rate payers
- A BID levy can be used for delivery of ‘clean, green and safe’ initiatives, such as place-marketing, employing on-street ambassadors, street cleaning, and installing planters and borders. This can help to increase footfall, build a high street brand, and improve the reputation of the area

Stakeholder engagement and involvement central to policymaking

- Local strategic partnerships provide a mechanism for taking strategic decisions across the area, with involvement from across the local public sector, the private sector, and the community and voluntary sector. With anchor institutions and major employers represented, they can have considerable funding at their disposal
- The local authority and its public sector partners can establish partnerships relating to specific policy areas and bring businesses into these, such as transport, planning and crime reduction

Local authority first steps

- Discuss with local businesses what their needs are, how they would like to be involved in decision making and what information flow they need with the council
- Work with them to identify the most appropriate structures. If a business improvement district does not exist for the town centre, discuss with them whether this could be of benefit.

Case studies

Lewes and Eastbourne

Eastbourne established a business improvement district in 2019, raising over £300,000 in their first year of operations via grants and the business to support the local area. Their key actions in their first year of operating include 'Dressing the Town' to raise awareness of independent businesses and encourage people to visit the town centre, organising Christmas and other events to increase footfall; and supporting businesses to claim covid relief grants. Eastbourne's local boxing club has been able to promote events and fundraisers through the BID's social media and communications channels. The BID installed nearly a kilometre of evening lighting and distinctive lamppost banners in their independent business area, in addition to 600 metres of bunting to draw visitors to the town centre from the seafront.

Halifax Business Improvement District (BID)

The BID team prioritises effective communication with organisations in and outside of the boundary, residents and visitors in their five-year business plan. The BID recently completed its first five-year term and won support to begin a second. Calderdale, the local authority, decided to not reopen its tourist information centre after the pandemic. The BID launched 'Discover Halifax' as an online replacement. The website is a cross between a tourist information centre, business promotion website, and BID support site. Discover Halifax contains information on local events, retail and food options in the town, the local gift card and loyalty card, history and accommodation. The site has been very popular with businesses and visitors to the town and strengthened Halifax's town brand.

Further reading:

Local Government Association, [Business Support](#)

Diogo Gaspar Silva and Herculano Cachinho via High Streets Task Force, [Places of Phygital Shopping Experiences? The New Supply Frontier of Business Improvement Districts in the Digital Age](#)

Institute of Place Management, Association of Town and City Management, The BID Foundation, [Written evidence submitted by the Association of Town and City Management, with the Institute of Place Management and the BID Foundation \(high streets in 2030\)](#)

Delivering experience as well as functionality

High streets can take advantage of the growing consumer preference for experiential and wellness purchases over material goods, building community cohesion in tandem.

Visiting the high street is no longer essential, so councils and businesses must find new ways to attract consumers.

Everyday purchases are increasingly made at out-of-town stores on online. The high street is becoming somewhere people want to spend time in pleasant surroundings for a wider mix of purposes, including leisure, socialising and shopping in independent or boutique stores.

Between 2011 and 2018, the number of people that consider leisure to be 'very important' to them increased by twenty per cent, while the number who considered work to be very important stayed the same. In 2018, 52 per cent of British adults surveyed would rather pay for a good experience than material possessions.

Consumer demand for experiential high street features can also be met by multi-use buildings and shopping districts providing multiple amenities. Businesses in the food and beverage, wellness, community, creative arts, and sports sectors can benefit from this trend.

Challenges

- Many high streets are still meeting demands of yesterday
- Buildings being vacated are often the wrong size or layout for new needs
- There are barriers to change of use
- Businesses may need additional facilities and/or training, especially to respond to online world and use of cashless payments

Future trends

- Purposeful town centres
- Changing spatial economics
- The Play Society
- Self vs stuff
- 'Fast Fail Factories' and adaptability
- Extended hours
- Evolution of money
- Localism
- Green consumption

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies

Resilient high streets are attractive to visitors for more than their retail offer or functionality. They are social locations to meet, eat and interact with friends, families and peers, and where the experience is what matters.

High-quality food and drink offer to bring in more higher spending visitors

- Host a permanent, regular or seasonal street food or farmers market
- If one already exists, look to improve accessibility
- Encourage al fresco dining for restaurants and cafes

Leisure activities and cultural events will create additional footfall

- Consultation with local businesses, community organisations, and residents can identify investment and project ideas which will satisfy the consumer demand for an experiential high street
- Establish tourist trails and apps signposting arts, heritage and entertainment opportunities

Establishing or further developing a night-time economy to boost spend

- Consider creating pedestrian zones
- Trial extended hours, both for business opening and public transport

A mixed offer and variety of business types will maximise footfall

- Consider change of use for retail voids
- Look to create shared business and community spaces, that incorporate cafes, art exhibitions, creches, meeting places for community groups, etc.

Local authority first steps

- Consider how local authority planning constraints may be limiting the high street offer, e.g. cafes unable to have pavement seating
- Discuss with town centre organisations, such as a business improvement district (if there is one), what measures could help provide a better experience for high street users
- Consider existing community events on your high street, and consult with local stakeholders to assess whether they are effective and sufficient
- Develop a communications strategy to advertise events in local, regional, and national media

Timeframe: Recovery from covid and long-term.

Case studies

Hednesford

Hednesford Town Council established a monthly farmers and craft market on their high street in October 2020. The market was launched to boost footfall in the town centre during the pandemic, by creating a covid-safe outdoor shopping experience once a month. The council coordinated with local shops and traders to develop the farmers market and was originally arranged by the council's then new Regeneration Manager. A newer position in the council, Market Manager, has recently been created. This is to enable better coordination of the 60 current stallholders, the waiting list, special events, and 10,000+ visitors to the market. In October 2021, it was named as the largest regular town centre market in their area.

Dorset Council

Between June 2020 and July 2021, Shaftesbury High Street was closed to two-way traffic to support social distancing. 83 per cent of businesses and 86 per cent of residents are in support of making the road permanently pedestrian-only. The number of market stalls on the high street tripled during its closure, and the council is looking to introduce a traffic restriction order to re-instate the pedestrian zone.

Stockton-on-Tees

The council has 98 community events scheduled throughout the year. This is the result of a concerted effort to bring the community together on a regular basis around shared celebrations, commemorations, and holidays. Included on the calendar is the Stockton International Riverside Festival, held annually with 5,000 attendees. In addition, the annual fireworks celebrations gather 50,000 people together. The council has a webpage clearly explaining regulation requirements for different types of events, and how residents or community organisations should plan and apply for relevant permissions from the council.

Further reading:

Urban Foundry, [Street Market: Quick Read Guide](#)

Association of Town and City Management, [100 Ways to Help the High Street](#)

Avoiding the adverse outcomes of voids

Increasing vacancies on high streets can cause blight, but careful planning, within a robust strategy, can help to identify both short- and long-term uses for these premises.

Covid has caused a significant rise in high street vacancies, but the vacancy rate across Britain had already been rising for years.

In 2020, around a third of addresses on British high streets belonged to retail shops, and ten percent to offices. Both of these have been significantly impacted by covid restrictions as working from home is reducing the demand for town centre office space and lessening footfall.

Retail vacancy rates across all locations have risen from 10.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2017 to 14.5 per cent in the third quarter of 2021. The rate on the high street was also 14.5 per cent.

Many local authorities are finding strategies for reversing this decline and putting their high streets on an upward trajectory.

While multiples saw a net closure of over 5,000 units in the first half of 2021, there was a net growth of around 800 independent stores, with the largest rises in fast food takeaways, convenience stores and barbers.

Challenges

- Chains have suffered on high streets for several years, a trend which has increased during the pandemic
- Anchor stores such as John Lewis and Debenhams have been closing around the country
- Can contribute to a cycle of decline – for a shopping mall, a street, or wider

Future trends

- Purposeful town centres
- Chain vs independent
- Evolution of money
- The demise of distance
- Localism
- Green consumption

Applies to

- High streets larger than 'micro'
- In-commuter high streets
- High density catchment areas

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Resilient high streets can have voids. But they are addressed quickly, and the vacant space is used constructively until permanently repurposed.</p> <p>Redeployment of empty properties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage a mixed offer of food and beverage, different types of retail, culture and leisure, meeting spaces for community groups/events, public services and employment space • Explore with businesses in growing sectors how voids could be repurposed to house further businesses in that sector • Large units could be subdivided into smaller units or converted into market halls • Outdoor spaces can be used for green space or community gardens <p>Focus on visual appeal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a long-term focus on frontage for a consistent, integrated high street appearance • Don't allow voids to lead to a lack of continuity in the frontage • Explore short-term uses with the community, particularly for prominent locations, such as murals, galleries, skate park, box park commercial units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure lines of communication with local businesses are strong enough to identify businesses that might wish to or be forced to vacate, whenever this is foreseeable • Develop appropriate strategies to support business survival and relocation • Develop a 'meanwhile' strategy, setting out ways of overcoming likely barriers • Examine scope to provide grants, short-term rent reductions and business rate discounts for start-ups, pop-up shops/stalls, those moving into vacant premises, and businesses wishing to diversify or improve their street frontage
<p>Timeframe: Recovery from covid and long-term.</p>	

Case studies

Stockton-on-Tees

In Spring 2021, Stockton was awarded £16.5 million from the Future High Streets Fund for their waterfront vision of the high street. The Tees Combined Authority will provide an additional £5 million to cover some costs. This programme will include the demolition of an outdated, unsightly shopping centre in the heart of the town, replacing it with a public park three times the size of Trafalgar Square. The park will contain lawns, wildflower areas, play parks, and space for picnics. Councillors approved the application to demolish the shopping centre in August 2021.

Welwyn Hatfield

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council turned a vacant former Peacocks store in Welwyn Garden City into a free retro gaming arcade. There were over 1,000 visitors in one weekend and queues to get in. It was open from 10am until 5pm and brought in people who had never visited the city before. It generated a huge amount of trade for surrounding businesses, such as the café next door.

Basildon

Basildon Council redeveloped a town centre property for use as an 'advice store' for providing employment-related skills. Its convenient location – close to the main council building, public transport and other amenities – led to over 2,500 residents dropping in between its opening in January 2019 and November 2019. Fifteen organisations were represented in the store at its inception, including the county council and its service providers, two housing associations, educational institutions, private sector companies and voluntary sector organisations. This had risen to 30 by March 2020. It has been used for CV writing workshops, digital skills workshops, interviews, a "Frazzled Café" on World Mental Health Day and signposting to other services, including health and lifestyle advice and training for specific sectors.

Further reading:

Local Government Association, [Dealing with empty shops](#)

Beyond Retail Taskforce, [Beyond retail: Redefining the shape and purpose of town centres](#)

Supporting localisation and independent stores

Residents and visitors increasingly want to buy authentic and local products from high streets, leaving room for councils to support independent start-ups in town centres.

Shopping locally is attractive to environmentally-conscious customers, and covid has only served to accelerate the trend as restrictions prevented people travelling out of their immediate area.

Independent local organisations can offer unique character to a town. A high street’s brand and reputation can be built from this character, using online pre-marketing and appropriate street dressing.

Globally, 68 per cent of consumers prefer supermarkets close to their homes, and 64 per cent think local stores are important for their communities. Half of the consumers surveyed are paying more attention to where products come from than they did pre-pandemic.

Challenges

- Chains have suffered on high streets for several years, a trend which has increased during the pandemic
- Anchor stores such as John Lewis and Debenhams have been closing around the country, and consumer polling indicates a growing preferences for local and independent businesses
- Consumers are demanding more environmentally friendly, sustainable products
- Independent stores and suppliers will have to work to retain customers gained during covid

Future trends

- Purposeful town centres
- Chain vs independent
- Evolution of money
- The demise of distance
- Localism
- Green consumption

Applies to

- High streets larger than ‘micro’
- In-commuter high streets
- High density catchment areas

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Resilient high streets will respond to growing consumer demand to shop local, and for shorter local supply chains and greater authenticity.</p> <p>Businesses that gained customers during covid must work to keep them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising in local newspapers, council social media, and at entry points to the town (bus and train stations, car parks) • Create a local loyalty card or gift card • Signage and wayfinding <p>Locally sourced food and products are becoming increasingly popular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a 'food trail' map of producers and suppliers to promote local businesses • Celebrate local producers with seasonal events and markets <p>Ongoing business support will be required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a BID • Provide subsidised rents or business rates for small businesses • Create flexible workspaces • Establish long term support schemes for new and existing independents in consultation with residents and businesses • Provide guidance or assistance recruiting staff • Provide digital skills courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse vacancy rates and the impact of covid on chain stores and independent stores • Survey residents, visitors and businesses to gauge consumer preference for independents and chain stores • Provide guidance to aid understanding of council/regulatory processes to new businesses
<p>Timeframe: 0-5 years Recovery from covid.</p>	

Case study

Lewes and Eastbourne

To support their array of independent businesses and retailers in 'Little Chelsea', Eastbourne's BID has installed new evening lighting and tree lighting, lamppost banners, and provided a grant for the street's Christmas event. Based on consultations with businesses in the town centre, Eastbourne BID's business plan and actions have prioritised creating an identity for the independent shopping areas near the high street. This has been done to support Eastbourne to become a known destination town in the South East of England.

In Autumn 2021, vacancy rates in 'Little Chelsea' were less than half of the national average, highlighting demand for independent businesses in Eastbourne throughout covid. Independents have performed better throughout the pandemic than the chain stores in Eastbourne.

Further reading:

Power to Change, [Saving the high street: the community takeover](#)
DTNI & CLES, [Time to Build an Inclusive Local Economy](#)

Climate change, community, planning and transport

Tackling climate change and pollution

Adapting to climate change

Engaging with community stakeholders

Supporting skills and capability-building

Facilitating community ownership

Taking a strategic approach to transport

Creating accessible and inviting high streets

Tackling climate change and pollution

Tackling climate change at a local level cannot be a siloed process; reducing emissions on high streets must be cross-disciplinary and engage stakeholders at every stage.

Local authorities across the country are playing a leading role in tackling climate change.

They are taking action to reduce emissions from transport, homes, public and private sector buildings, energy generation and waste.

Councils are also taking action to mitigate the impact of climate change on their communities and to invest their funds in a more environmentally friendly manner.

In April 2021, 17,000 electric vehicle charging points had been installed by local authorities across England.

Challenges

- Around 300 councils have declared a climate emergency but lack clear guidance on how to implement strategies to meet Net Zero commitments.
- The government's recent Net Zero Strategy sets out commitments to better integrate national and local climate interventions but does not present clear actions at either level.
- When planning specific interventions, there are often particular practical challenges around short- and long-term financing.

Future trends

- Shades of Green
- Green consumption
- Pedestrianisation and 'greener' access to town centres

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies

Resilient high streets have an attractive environment for workers, residents and visitors that is free from pollution and, considering all aspects of their operations, do not contribute to climate change.

Transport is a major source of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions

- Approach to decarbonising workers’ and visitors’ journeys to/from the high street will vary depending on geography
- Use policy to encourage greater use of cycling and walking for shorter trips, and public transport where the wider catchment is more densely populated. For more sparse catchments, focus on low/no emission private transport
- Work with public transport providers to deploy low/no emission vehicles
- Introduce low emission zones for private vehicles and work with hauliers and other commercial drivers to reduce emissions
- Expand provision for electric vehicles, especially charging points
- Increase residential densities close to high streets to reduce distances travelled

Energy-inefficient building stock on high streets add to climate change

- Use planning policy to encourage energy-efficient construction
- Support retrofitting of private and council-owned buildings, including through provision of advice

High streets as a source of renewable energy

- Use policy to encourage installation of renewable energy generation
- Consider energy generation from food waste
- Support the development of local renewable energy storage

Local authority first steps

- Assign responsibility for climate change policy to an officer with relevant skills and experience, or hire a new member of staff
- Establish a climate strategy working group with councillors, members of local environmental groups, and relevant policy officer to review council emissions, and discuss and propose relevant policy adjustments
- Research opening an environmental municipal investment fund to raise capital for relevant policies and interventions

Timeframe: 0-10 years.

Case study

Warwick District Council:

The local authority installed over 50 public charging points for electric vehicles in south Warwickshire car parks and installed eight on-road charging points in Spring 2021. The council has also introduced predominantly electric vehicles into its own fleet.

It is developing a Net Zero Carbon Building Planning Policy Document and has bid for Government funding for an [Ultra-low Emission Bus Scheme for Leamington Spa](#), involving overhead charging points.

Warwick District Council also provides links on [its website](#) to:

- [County Council's cycle route maps](#)
- [Liftshare.com](#) car sharing website
- [Zap-Map](#) website aiding electric vehicle drivers
- Information on Government grants towards [purchasing electric vehicles](#) and [installing home charging points](#)

Further reading:

Nikita Quarshie *et al*, via High Streets Task Force, [Worth the Weight](#)
Centre for Cities, [Cities Outlook 2020](#)

Adapting to climate change

The risk of extended heat waves and increased flood risk are the greatest direct threats to high streets from climate change. Introducing adaptation measures to mitigate these should be a local authority priority.

Reducing the effects of adverse climate events is becoming increasingly important in some areas of the United Kingdom, and local authorities can play a key role in preparing for this.

The United Kingdom experienced severe flooding and unusually high temperatures in summer 2021, affecting all regions.

Funding for local authority climate change adaptation programmes was withdrawn in 2015. This has led to the de-prioritisation of heatwave adaptation and similar initiatives.

However, worsened flooding and heatwaves could have a significant negative impact on the United Kingdom economy and public health.

In 2010, five million staff days were lost due to overheating, resulting in an economic loss of £770 million. Without flood protection infrastructure and housing modifications, floods in the United Kingdom could cause up to £32 billion in damage by 2027.

Challenges

- Flooding events are likely to occur more often and in new places across the United Kingdom in coming years.
- Summer temperatures are also likely to increase, and heatwaves become more frequent, with public health implications and infrastructure damage.
- With responsibility for green spaces, local authorities have a key role to play in increasing carbon dioxide absorption and improving biodiversity.

Future trends

- Shades of Green
- Localism
- Pedestrianisation and 'greener' access to town centres
- Fast-fail factories and adaptability

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Resilient high streets can withstand the impacts of extreme weather and rising temperatures, and remain safe, comfortable and attractive locations for workers, residents and visitors.</p> <p>Identifying and understanding relevant risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change will impact different high streets differently depending on exposure to tidal or river flooding, and storm water and wind damage. More snow and ice events should be planned for too <p>Ensuring the high street environment remains attractive in the heat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create areas of natural cooling and shade with tree planting, high street planters and green spaces • Growth in use of mechanical air conditioning needs to be offset through, for example, increased renewable energy generation <p>Reducing the impact of heavier storms and extreme weather events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce surface water run-off with tree planting • Use planning policies and discussions with developers to ensure there is adequate drainage <p>Building operational flexibility so that high streets remain open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop resilience plans for coping with future flooding events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review evidence on risks and impacts • Host a consultation with local residents and businesses on climate adaptation plans (particularly flood risks) to facilitate locally-led resilience planning • Use the national Heatwave Plan for England to identify short-term actions to be implemented at local authority level
<p>Timeframe: 0-10 years</p>	

Case study

Hebden Bridge

The town was severely affected by flooding when it was hit by Storm Eva in December 2015 and Storm Ciara in February 2020. As part of the Government's Flood and Coastal Erosion Investment Plan, £4.4 million has been pledged for the Hebden Bridge Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The scheme was introduced by Calderdale council and the Environment Agency following the floods in 2012 and 2015. Flood hubs have been set up around the borough, and a number of public consultations have been held with residents and businesses to identify the urgent needs of the community.

A key stakeholder group exists, meeting every other month, and is formed of representatives from across Hebden Bridge. This includes schools, the disability access forum, the business forum, Rotary club, and local government representatives.

All of the plans and activities of the scheme can be found on the [Eye on Calderdale](#) website, including strengthening river walls, improving riverside property protection, and improving the draining of surface water.

Further reading:

Sylvia Kruse *et al*, via the High Streets Task Force, [Conceptualising community resilience to natural hazards](#)

Gordon Brockie *et al*, via the High Streets Task Force, [BID Safe and Secure Report](#)

Engaging with community stakeholders

Coordinating local strategies, investments and projects with relevant community stakeholders will facilitate effective design and delivery, aligning with community needs and demands.

Engaging with community stakeholders can provide a contextual understanding of the needs of the area.

Residents, local businesses, school representatives, and community organisations can offer valuable insights into where investment is needed and what sorts of initiatives will be welcomed by different groups in the community.

Community engagement ought to be used to develop both long-term visions and deliver short-term goals, and the Local Government Association has advised that effective engagement with all sectors of the economy and the community is vital for developing recovery plans from the pandemic.

Community engagement can provide qualitative insights into challenges and needs for high streets, and tools such as surveys and workshops can be far-reaching or focused.

Challenges

- Increasingly, residents and visitors are not using town centres for retail alone.
- Demand for family friendly spaces, and locations that you can spend time in without paying, is growing in urban centres.
- Commercial units stand empty across the country.
- In London, 20,000 commercial units had been empty for at least six months in 2018, and 11,000 for over two years.

Future trends

- Purposeful town centres
- Changing spatial economics
- Change in supply of commercial space
- Multi-use spaces
- Private/ Public Partnerships
- Purpose led business
- Community ownership

Applies to

- High streets larger than micro
- Out-commuter and in-commuter high streets
- High- and low-density catchment areas

High street strategies

Resilient high streets are ones which reflect the needs of the communities that use them. Giving these communities a central role in their development will help to ensure that high streets meet these needs.

Specific improvement projects can be strengthened by engaging with communities throughout

- Involve affected communities from the start of any planning any improvement
- Work in a continual dialogue with residents and other stakeholders, exploring their ideal outcomes with them, and feeding back on progress towards them throughout the process

Permanent governance structures can be set up to give communities ongoing input into matters affecting their high streets

- Decision-making bodies can be based on sub-council geographical levels: 'neighbourhood forums', 'ward assemblies' or 'local committees'
- They can also be set up for community involvement in particular policy areas, such as public transport, high street improvement, planning local events, parks and leisure, environmental policy and climate change

Supporting communities to develop their own solutions

- Providing information about [community rights](#) can encourage this
- Supporting community and voluntary sector groups is also helpful, as these are staffed by local residents and service users and can act as their champions

Local authority first steps

- Survey members/attendees of existing bodies on their opinions of whether more can be done to improve community engagement processes
- Residents and other stakeholders currently outside these groups can also be surveyed
- Establish a 'local compact' for working with the community and voluntary sector if it does not already exist.
- If there is an appetite for working in equal partnership with local people at a strategic level across the council, consider becoming a '[Co-operative Council](#)'

Timeframe: 0-10 years | Short-term and long-term regardless of the pandemic

Case study

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

The council has created a citizens' panel of 2000 residents to gain insights into what they want to see on their high streets. A market research firm was commissioned to establish the panel and contact citizen members, and the panel matches the diversity of the borough and will provide their views on consultation topics for a year between April 2021 and May 2022.

The objectives of the panel are to ensure the council is aware of the views of different communities in the borough, maintain high standards of services, identify resident priority for improving life in the borough, and provide useful insights into the council's decision-making process. The panel completes online surveys, and takes part in focus groups, workshops, and online discussions on borough-wide initiatives.

There are already active and vocal community groups in the borough, but the council is eager to ensure that all voices are heard. To do this, the panel facilitates open conversations from all demographic and socio-economic groups.

Further reading:

National Council for Voluntary Organisations, [Working with Local Compacts](#)

Local Government Association, [Working in Partnership](#)

Locality, [The Power of Community](#)

NAVCA, [Local Infrastructure Support](#)

Supporting skills and capability-building

High streets require a diverse and changing range of skills to successfully engage visitors and be economically viable. Local authorities can support businesses, residents, and community groups to develop these skillsets.

Building relevant skills and capabilities in town centres will be important for delivering on the government’s ‘build back better’ aim.

Over three-quarters of low-skill job openings in August 2021 required digital skills, rising to 83 per cent for high skill roles. But in April 2021, over a third of employees aged under 35 reported feeling overwhelmed by the technology they were required to use whilst working from home.

Groups that could especially benefit from support include elderly residents, business owners, and young people not in education, employment or training – three quarters of adult learners using Leeds City Council’s skills programme are from the 20 per cent most deprived socioeconomic areas.

The Local Government Association emphasises the importance of adult community education for place shaping, improving employment opportunities, supporting health and wellbeing, increasing integration and strengthening local economies and communities.

Challenges

- The digitalisation of the economy and ongoing development of new technologies risks excluding certain groups of society from effective participation in their communities and society at large.
- 22 per cent of people in the United Kingdom lack the digital skills needed for everyday life.
- Elderly citizens, individuals with poor literacy skills, and residents from disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle to keep up with changes such as shifts to cashless payments, socialising online, and automation.

Future trends

- Automation
- Digital divides

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Businesses in resilient high streets have access to a motivated, appropriately skilled and adaptable workforce, able to service the changing needs and demands of the local catchment area.</p> <p>Retail, hospitality and experiential skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify trainers from within the council’s staff, volunteers in the community, or low-cost social enterprise organisations • Partner with local further education providers <p>Addressing increasing digitalisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand and improve the adult community education services available to high street businesses and local residents <p>Work hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a workforce able to deliver on the necessary hours demanded by consumers • Demand for workers with a willingness to adapt and operate beyond traditional ‘working hours’ <p>Look to build labour market resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host training workshops tailored to specific demographics and skill groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult users and providers of existing adult community education services • Undertake an assessment of local demand for skills and capability-building services • Use available data on the socio-economic skills gap around your high street • Survey local businesses, residents, and community groups to understand needs and demands for training to keep up with new trends (such as automation, move to cashless operating, and AI)
<p>Timeframe: 0-10 years</p>	

Case study

Essex County Council

The county has one of the highest business start-up rates in the country but is economically limited by low productivity due to a lack of skills among residents. Retraining residents and employees is central to the council's strategic themes of renewal after the pandemic and equality of opportunity.

The council has centred skills in its four-year levelling up plan for 2021-2025. Improving skills and building residents' capability will support people getting into and creating good green jobs, facilitating green economic growth, reducing economic and social inequalities, and improving health outcomes for the most disadvantaged people in the county.

In November 2021, the council was awarded over £750,000 of Levelling Up funding dedicated to digital skills transformation on Essex's high streets. The funding will be used to provide accelerated digital learning from staff in independent businesses on the high streets around the county. The levelling up bid for was developed in collaboration with local businesses and community groups such as the Young Essex Assembly, Essex Community Foundation, Essex Rural Partnership, and South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

Essex County Council also participates in the Basildon Advice Store – see above.

Further reading:

Local Government Association, [Work Local](#)

Facilitating community ownership

Community ownership can empower the local community to retain what they see as important, and develop the high street in a way which is valuable to them.

Community ownership and management of assets on and around the high street can have a key roll to play in their regeneration.

Community land trusts can be used to build housing which can remain affordable in perpetuity, but can also be used for community spaces. There has been growing emphasis on community asset transfer over the past decade, culminating in the recent launch of the government’s Community Ownership Fund, which provides match funding to community groups wishing to take over ownership of local cultural, community, or heritage assets.

Using tools such as community asset transfer can enable the social sector to have a stronger presence in town centres, developing civic pride and purpose-driven high streets.

Community land trusts could deliver well-needed affordable homes in urban and rural areas, generating increased footfall on high streets. In 2015, the Local Government Association calculated that council-led local land trusts could quickly deliver 140,000 homes over four years.

Challenges

- Coordinating residents, businesses and service users with disparate views
- Raising funds for community purchase of assets
- Ongoing management and maintenance costs of assets
- Projects may not be financially viable

Future trends

- Community ownership

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Community ownership of assets contributes to high street resilience by empowering local people to develop their town centre in a way which is valuable to them.</p> <p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Land Trusts can create additional residential accommodation where demand outstrips private supply • Provision of affordable and social housing <p>Keeping important local assets open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable productive use of vacant and underused buildings in town centres • Pub • Village shop or post office • Historically or culturally significant buildings <p>Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to engage and build relationships with a wide variety of community stakeholders • Give local residents a say in how their high street is developed and managed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify place management stakeholders and gauge community interest in community ownership schemes for the high street and surrounding areas • Establish communication channels with all stakeholders • Identify individuals with relevant knowledge and expertise • Host a community information session with residents and community organisations • Dependent on level of interest, host training sessions on community asset transfer and establishing community land trusts or cooperatives
<p>Timeframe: 0-10 years</p>	

Case study

Dorset Council

The number of community land trusts in Dorset has grown over the past few years. Many people buy second homes in rural and coastal areas, reducing supply and pushing up prices. In response, community groups have come together to form three fledgling land trusts.

In addition to these social enterprise activities, this community land trust – now named the Wessex Community Land Trust – produced 123 homes between 2010 and 2015 which are exempt from Right to Buy. The land trust partners with a housing association, purchasing the land, and leasing it back to the housing association to build and manage the housing. The trust is responsible for allocations and planning applications.

Further reading:

Centre for London, [Community Town Centres](#)

Power to Change, [Saving the high street: the community takeover](#)

CLES, via the High Streets Task Force, [Community-led development: a roadmap for asset ownership](#)

Taking a strategic approach to transport

Transport policy must be designed and implemented with consideration of climate change and local emissions reductions commitments, including private and public transit.

Covid, the move to lower emission vehicles and trends in funding are all impacting on public transport strategy.

In the initial period of national lockdown, bus use outside of London dropped by 89 percent of pre-covid levels. This is on top of an existing decline in the rural bus network of twelve per cent since 2011.

Within five years, it is forecasted that operating costs for zero emission buses will be cheaper than diesel, gas, and petrol buses. However, expanding rural bus rollout could be limited by inadequate funding, staff capability and insufficient demand to maintain regular services.

The Local Government Association estimates that underfunding of local bus services is approximately £700 million a year.

Challenges

- The shift to working from home is likely to result in public transport use remaining lower than before covid.
- Flexible working patterns will also have an impact, reducing rush hour journey volumes.
- Rural buses often have longer routes and lower fares.
- Low/zero emission buses typically require a high capital outlay.
- The ban on diesel and petrol cars comes into force in 2030, requiring investment in the EV charging network now.

Future trends

- New patterns of work
- The demise of distance
- On demand expectations
- Localism
- Accessibility
- Shades of green
- Pedestrianisation and greener access to town centres

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies

Councils with resilient high streets have transport strategies that best meet the needs of their catchment areas, with councils that are planning ahead for the rise in both private and public green transport use.

Spatial allocation across different centres

- Appoint staff with relevant skills for developing data-informed long-term transport strategies and managing bus and train operations within the local authority

Tackling emissions

- Introduce low emission zones for private vehicles (this will not be appropriate in low density catchment areas where public transport is not easily accessible)
- Establish a plan to scale up the EV charging network, with a particular view to meeting demand when the ban on the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles in 2030
- Update transport strategies to consider electric vehicles, trends towards and away from buses and trains, the emergence of e-scooters and mopeds, walking, cycling, and tourist buses

Cooperate with providers to ensure high street needs are recognised

- Establish a Statutory Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators to make mutual commitments and develop a closer working partnership

Securing funding

- Apply for relevant government funding such as local transport authority allocations in the Capability Fund and Levelling Up funding
- Consider establishing a municipal investment fund for a local green transport project

Local authority first steps

- Identify current and expected levels of demand for green public transport and sustainable private transport
- Assess current provision of EV charging points and rapid charging points, and compare with predicted growth in demand
- Arrange a consultation meeting with local bus operators to identify key issues and begin to build a relationship

Timeframe: 0-10 years

Case study

Hertfordshire County Council

In 1999, the County Council established the Intalink Partnership – a collaboration between the council and bus and train companies operating within the county. In 2020, the partnership was elevated to a statutory Enhanced Partnership. This was the first Enhanced Partnership for bus services. The partnership is funded by county council capital and revenue funding, developer contributions, and reinvestment of operator revenue.

Under the Partnership, the County Council has a commitment to provide or improve public transport facilities and measures, including:

- Bus lanes and traffic signal prioritisation
- Real time infrastructure and information
- Ticketing schemes

In return, bus operators have committed to provide:

- Newer, cleaner vehicles
- More frequent, evening and weekend services
- An extended network
- Lower ticket prices
- Access to data on a monthly basis

Further reading:

Independent Transport Commission, [The shape of changing bus demand in England](#)

Mark Kleinman, via the High Streets Task Force, [Policy challenges for the post-pandemic city](#)

Creating accessible and inviting high streets

In the context of high streets, transport policy must consider entry points, accessibility, and reasons for visiting. Engaging stakeholders is an essential part of designing and implementing transport systems which work for all.

The success of the high street depends on people being able to access it.

They may do so by walking, cycling, using a car, or by public transport. Boosting footfall requires considering the modes of transport used by each type of traveller.

Visitor journeys can vary over time. Adapting to changing transport needs in the area requires skilled strategy management and development.

In larger urban centres, schemes such as Park and Ride can significantly reduce town centre congestion. In 2019, Oxford's Park and Ride bus services had a daily average of 8,000 passengers, replacing 4,000 cars entering the city centre.

A switch from motor vehicles to cycling and walking for getting around town centres reduces carbon emissions and exhaust pollution. Several local authorities trialled pedestrianisation during the pandemic to support social distancing, and a few intend to maintain these areas.

Challenges

- Public transport and car parking infrastructure will need to be updated in tandem with changes in commuting patterns, high street usage, environmental concerns, and the growth of electric vehicles.
- Pedestrianising high streets requires important stakeholder management to avoid creating difficulties for local businesses or introducing inadequate accessibility provisions.

Future trends

- On demand expectations
- Accessibility
- Pedestrianisation and greener access to town centres

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies

Resilient high streets are welcoming, easy to access and navigate around.

Entry points need to draw visitors into the town centre

- Welcome signage and a good first impression
- Ensure good connectivity between public transport hubs, car parks and the high street
- Consider green 'park and ride' schemes

Address bottlenecks to ensure visitors can move around the town easily

- Plan for the introduction of cycle lanes within highways improvement schemes to access and navigate high streets and their surrounding areas
- Establish strong lines of communication between housing, transport and economic development teams to plan for changes in demand
- Consider a workplace parking levy to cover short-term transport improvements or incentivise shifts to using public transport

Visitors need to know where to go

- Introduce signposting for a range of popular destinations and high street amenities from stations and car parks to cater for visitors arriving for different purposes around the town
- Effective wayfinding should be integrated into large new developments

Local authority first steps

- Set up a local panel to engage in detailed consultation on any proposed works, involving representatives from Business Improvement Districts, Chambers of Commerce, and Local Enterprise Partnerships where they exist
- Install air pollution monitors on the high street, such as nitrogen oxide diffusers, to gather data on risk and where action is needed
- Assess the 'walkability' and attractiveness of your high street by following pedestrian routes and identifying areas of need relating to signage, street dressing, distance between key points, and lighting
- Survey local residents and visitors on the above points regarding walkability and attractiveness

Timeframe: 0-10 years

Case studies

Plymouth City Council

Plymouth's train station is being regenerated with a new multi-storey car park and an improved pedestrian route to the city centre. The pedestrian route will have a higher vantage point, allowing views of the sea, which will enable visitors to have a clear sense of the layout of the city and their situation within it.

Using funding from the Transforming Cities Fund, the Council are investing in a network of multi-modal [Mobility Hubs](#) across the city. This includes 300 electric vehicle charging points, 400 e-bikes, a car club, 0.5 megawatts of solar carports, a smart journey planning system, and facilities such as bike repair equipment.

Scarborough

Welcoming visitors to the town with a purposeful and multi-use offer creates a strong arrival impression. Sitting north of the high street, Scarborough's railway station is the gateway to town, and the area around the station is being transformed to combine office space with leisure, health and retail. The council intends to fund the work using revenue from the sale of other council buildings, and potential 'Levelling Up' funding. The plans were announced as part of the council's blueprint masterplan for redeveloping the town centre.

Green transportation links from the station to the rest of the town are proposed, including a car club, electric car hire, a cycle hub, improved access to bus services, and electric charging points.

Further reading:

Sustrans, [Traffic-free routes and greenways design guide](#)

State of New South Wales, [Department of Planning Industry and Environment, Great public spaces – guide and evaluation tool](#)

Local authority capacity and capabilities

Using data to build an evidence base

Ensuring an appropriate range of skills

Implementing a strategic approach

Ensuring access to appropriate funding

Using data to build an evidence base

Strategic decisions are given credibility when they are founded in reliable, data-driven insights, and are more likely to deliver need-based results.

Developing a plan to revitalise any particular high street and help it thrive depends on having a strong picture of what makes it tick.

This needs to be based on solid evidence and clear metrics. There are a wealth of data sources that local authorities can mine to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their high streets and the opportunities and threats they face.

This can cover the demographics of people using the high street, or it can describe the businesses operating on the high street – what sectors they belong to, how many workers they have and the sizes of their buildings. Crucially, trends in this data over time can be identified, to see how towns are being affected by trends in wider society, which business sectors and sections of the population are growing and which are declining and so forth.

Quantitative data can be used to compare towns with each other and with regional and national averages, and complemented with qualitative data for a fuller picture and detailed insights into the lives lived on the high street.

Challenges

- The context and any caveats to data must be understood if conclusions are to be correctly drawn.
- There may be a trade-off between detailed insights into a specific town and wide geographic comparability – different datasets may be applicable to these two purposes and they may be difficult to match up.
- Local authorities need staff with the skills to interrogate the data, pick out the most telling statistics and identify the trends behind them. In some cases, further investigation may be required, involving another round of data collection.

Future trends

- Levelling Up
- Digital divides
- Ageing society
- Regional inequality
- Purposeful town centres

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Resilient high streets gather and analyse data to inform policy making, track trends, and provide a solid evidence base for funding applications.</p> <p>Purpose of gathering data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides insight and the ability to track over time the number of high street visitors, and reasons for visit • Helps councils to identify trends and adjust policy accordingly, e.g. need for extended opening hours, requirement for additional public transport or car parking • Robust data can be used to support applications for funding – hard evidence will always be more persuasive than anecdotal accounts, but qualitative data still has an important role to play <p>New sources and approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological advances mean a large proportion of people have a smart phone on them while visiting the high street. Access to anonymised mobile data can aid councils in seeing how visitors move about the town centres, ascertain where they have travelled from and track how long they stay • Mobile data can be used to map traffic flow and congestion, and help advise roads and transport policy in and around the high street • Anonymised credit card data can show where visitors are spending money on the high street, how many businesses they visit on average per trip, what the average spend is, and what time of day has turnover is highest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify relevant new data sources, e.g. mobile phone network providers, credit card providers, Office for National Statistics • Outline a strategy for ongoing data gathering and monitoring of the high street
<p>Timeframe: 0-1 year, carry out analysis over short period to create starting point for policies</p>	

Case studies

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

In order to encourage commuters back into the borough's commercial centre, the council is using Mastercard spending and O2 phone footfall data to breakdown the visitor trends.

The data will be used to establish a dashboard to track the effectiveness of interventions specifically designed to increase footfall in target areas.

Lewes and Eastbourne

The local authority tracks vacancy rates across different key streets in Eastbourne. For example, recent vacancy data has demonstrated that their street of independent businesses, 'Little Chelsea', has a vacancy rate that is half the national average.

The insights gained from this data allows the council to measure successful sectors, trends in consumer preferences, and the success of high street interventions.

Further reading:

Nexus Planning, via High Streets Task Force, [Future: Department Stores](#)

Centre for Cities, [High Streets Recovery Tracker](#)

Metro Dynamics, [21st Century Towns](#)

High Streets Task Force, [How do I deal with vacant premises in my town centre?](#)

Ensuring an appropriate range of skills

Having the correct staff is essential for the effective delivery of local government services, across all policy areas.

Improving high streets and town centres requires skills to be pooled from many different policy areas.

This includes planning and housing; culture, heritage, tourism and leisure; environment and resilience; transport and infrastructure; and finance and local business support.

High quality strategy and programme delivery also requires a variety of skillsets, including community and business engagement, data gathering and analysis, support for digital and innovative transformation, and developing strategic vision. Although councils are limited in the staff and contracts they can afford, having the correct skills and capability in place should be prioritised for strategy and service delivery.

The Local Government Association identifies a lack of staff expertise and capability in transport as being partially responsible for the inability of local authorities to deliver strategic public transport programmes. In 2020, it was found that 40 per cent of public sector organisations lack the skills required for the digital transformation.

Challenges

- Staffing needs to be planned to ensure all of these are covered either internally or externally, but also that all staff are working as an integrated project team with clear understanding of roles in processes.
- Council budgets have been extremely challenging for many years which limits ability to invest in staffing.
- The delivery of services is likely to be prioritised over internal organisational investments, creating a “vicious circle” of requiring additional capability but not allocating funding to employ new staff with updated and relevant skills.

Future trends

- Levelling up
- Internet of things
- Digital divides
- AI
- Virtual Realities
- 4th Place and digital culture
- Evolution of money

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Authorities with resilient high streets have staff leading projects with appropriate experience and skills in the specific project area. They are also open to bringing in external consultants when required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish best practice for staffing and communication during cross-department programmes. For example, kick-off meetings held with relevant staff across the council, monitoring meetings held at regular intervals with key staff across departments, and regular email communications maintained • Develop a long-term skills strategy, and integrate planned role creation to avoid reactive vacancy filling • Prepare to employ external experts when appropriate for one-off, time-limited, in-depth analysis of specific issues • Create incentives to attract staff with the relevant skills via a strong council workplace brand and flexible working options • Deliver internally or bring-in external training and workshops for staff teams on specific skills relevant for programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform an audit of staff skills and council strategies impacting on high streets to identify gaps in skills and posts • Consult with key community stakeholders, from business and community organisations, to understand where additional staff support is needed • Assign responsibility for overseeing skills and capability to a senior relevant member of staff
<p>Timeframe: 0-10 years</p>	

Case study

Newcastle City Council

The Council has both a Director of Place and a Programme Manager for their City Centre Transformation programme. They work alongside numerous teams, including capital investment, major projects delivery, economic development, skills, infrastructure and transport. The council believes that a key to its success has been getting the correct team in place in time to take advantage of funding opportunities.

It also believes that existing council staff may have a clear vision but don't know everything necessary to finesse every practical detail – it is a strength to know where your capacity and expertise end, and to bring in expertise from outside. Consequently, the council employs short-term consultants to advise on specific programme areas. Having a shared viewpoint between councillors and officers on this has been vital to establishing an effective staffing structure for the transformation programme.

Further reading:

High Street Task Force, [How can strong partnerships help in my transformation plan and how can I create them?](#)
Institute of Place Management, via the High Streets Task Force, [Collaboration – 237 'Vital and Viable' Factors](#)

Implementing a strategic approach

Introducing a cross-sector strategy for improving high streets can provide valuable structure for development and encourage informed medium-term planning using data and community insights.

A long-term, strategically thought out plan is key to building high street resilience.

Town centres within local authorities are all unique, but there will be common issues affecting all of them. The development and introduction of planning policies offers community stakeholders the opportunity to integrate their needs and wants into a medium-term enforceable strategy.

Neighbourhood and Local Plans can be an important tool for safeguarding local assets and guiding development in local areas. Preparing plans is a resource-intensive and complex process, but plans provide vital opportunities to protect green spaces, require developers to integrate green infrastructure or affordable housing into their sites, protect heritage assets, and plan for high street transportation improvements.

Acknowledging differences in needs and demands between high streets, particularly those that are rural and urban, is essential for providing adequate services for each area.

Challenges

- A lack of comprehensive policy can lead to local developments which are detrimental to the community and environment
- Eighteen per cent of local planning authorities lack any neighbourhood planning activity
- Each high street has its own stakeholders and governance structures
- Some towns may be significantly larger or more appealing to visitors, or receive greater funding due to higher deprivation - this could cause resentment or a sense of neglect

Future trends

- Levelling up
- Purposeful town centres
- Public/private partnerships
- Localism
- 'Fast Fail Factories' and adaptability

Applies to

- All high streets

High street strategies

Resilient high streets have councils that take a long-term and strategic approach. Resilience is built by ensuring high streets address the current and future needs and demands of their catchment population, and developments are financially viable and socially beneficial.

Develop a high streets resilience and medium-term development strategy:

- Integrate the strategy into a wider economic development plan
- The plan should strategically address specific objectives for the high street, e.g. vacancy rates, seasonal footfall, community event attendance, business skills gaps, visitor satisfaction
- Community stakeholders should be consulted to define these objectives, in addition to using data-based insights
- Use best practice from surrounding or similar local authorities, considering their economic development or strategic delivery plans
- The strategy should include a delivery timeline, milestones, and critical success factors

Establish a high streets future team to develop and progress strategic improvement plans:

- Representation from key community stakeholders and cross-department membership to represent the different sectors involved is key (i.e. economic development, transport, planning)
- Instate regular meetings with a set agenda, including updates from each sector-team comparing against key milestones and critical success factors in the strategy, and the identification of next steps in line with the strategy timeline

Local authority first steps

- Consult community stakeholders to identify potential members for a high streets future team. Stakeholders should include business representatives, organisations working with hard-to-reach groups, schools, and residents
- Begin scoping initial areas for improvement

Timeframe: 0-10 years

Case study

Northumberland County Council

Morpeth, a historic market town in the North East of England, was struggling under development pressure, leading to inappropriate development which did not suit the character of the town or protect its heritage.

In 2016, the local council passed their neighbourhood plan to last until 2031. At referendum, 93 per cent of voters in the community voted in favour of the plan, highlighting its popularity.

During their consultation period, the neighbourhood plan steering group involved residents, businesses, and developers, to ensure that all local needs and demands were considered.

The plan accounts for local demands for protecting heritage, providing affordable homes, and mitigating against flood risks. In 2008, Morpeth suffered from severe flooding, and was able to integrate robust policies into the plan to address future flood risk, as well as protect existing flood alleviation infrastructure in the town.

Further reading:

Metro Dynamics, [21st Century Towns](#)

High Street Task Force, [Unlocking Your Place Potential](#)

Ensuring access to appropriate funding

Transformative high street initiatives can be realised using external funding opportunities offered by public sector bodies.

Whilst levelling up and covid recovery are key priorities for government, the amount of money local authorities have to spend from revenues has decreased by sixteen per cent since 2010.

On average, a quarter of local authority funding comes from government grants but there has been a 37 per cent cut in central government grants between 2009 and 2019. Many local authorities have raised more council tax in response.

The United Kingdom government has made a range of funds available specifically for levelling up and covid recovery. In addition, other government departments and agencies issue around 250 grants to local authorities each year.

Many of these grants will be suitable for some aspects of projects supporting high streets and town centres, for example the Community Renewal Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund and Active Travel Fund.

Challenges

- Around one third of central government grants must be bid for.
- Bid writing is often extremely time consuming, with short deadlines and no guarantee of success.
- Many grants are only available for one or two years.
- Integrating unconfirmed external funding opportunities into high street development plans can create risky dependencies which may not be fulfilled.

Future trends

- Government funding
- Private/ Public Partnerships
- Levelling Up

Applies to

- High streets larger than 'micro'
- In- and out-commuter high streets
- High- and low-density catchment areas

High street strategies	Local authority first steps
<p>Resilient high streets have strategic development plans that are flexible to new funding opportunities, but are not dependent on them.</p> <p>Monitor and assess funding streams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Government Association finance e-bulletin Build Back Better High Streets plan has information on the key grants The Local Digital newsletter updates on resources available from public sector bodies Grants Online is a free monthly newsletter with information on grant funding opportunities Monitor central government and private sector <p>Proposal writing skills and capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how to develop bid-writing capabilities Identify skilled staff in other teams and whether they could offer assistance preparing proposals Hire consultants to prepare bids when appropriate <p>Have a business plan that's flexible to new funding opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure funding criteria are appropriate for the high street you want and work for your community Don't sacrifice strategic development plans to fit funding requirements Aim to have 'shovel ready' projects planned for funds with short turnaround time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign responsibility for monitoring funding streams to a member of staff Identify lessons learnt from previous failed and successful bid attempts List organisations and companies that could be partners in joint ventures or have been investment partners in the past
<p>Timeframe: 0-10 years</p>	

Case studies

Cherwell District Council

From 2016 to 2019, Bicester was one of ten demonstrator sites for the Healthy New Towns programme run by the National Health Service. The council collaborated with the programme's partners to develop and submit a bid. The programme has delivered:

- Three five kilometre walking and running routes around the town, and a fifteen-minute town centre walk (the routes are fully accessible for wheelchair users)
- A cross-town cycle route
- Improved pedestrian and cycleway signage
- An urban air quality project using satellite data
- Health improvement consultations with small businesses, community groups, and schools

Warwick District Council

In 2021, the council was awarded £10 million in funding from the government's Future High Streets Fund. The funding will go towards developing Leamington Spa's Creative Quarter, laid out in their 2020-2025 Creative Framework. Derelict buildings will be redeveloped to increase space for the growing creative and digital gaming sector.

Further reading:

Revo, [Investing in the Future: Can we fix our "broken" town centres?](#)

Create Streets Foundation, [No Place Left Behind](#)

Navigation pages

Rural towns and out-of-town employment clusters

Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Business and economy

Adjusting to fewer incoming workers

Catering for the rise in domestic tourism

Avoiding the adverse outcomes of voids

Supporting localisation and independent stores

Working with businesses to improve high streets

Delivering experience as well as functionality

Welcoming new home and hybrid workers

Climate change, community, planning and transport

Supporting skills and capability-building

Facilitating community ownership

Creating accessible and inviting high streets

Tackling climate change and pollution

Adapting to climate change

Engaging with community stakeholders

Taking a strategic approach to transport

Local authority capacity and capabilities

Using data to build an evidence base

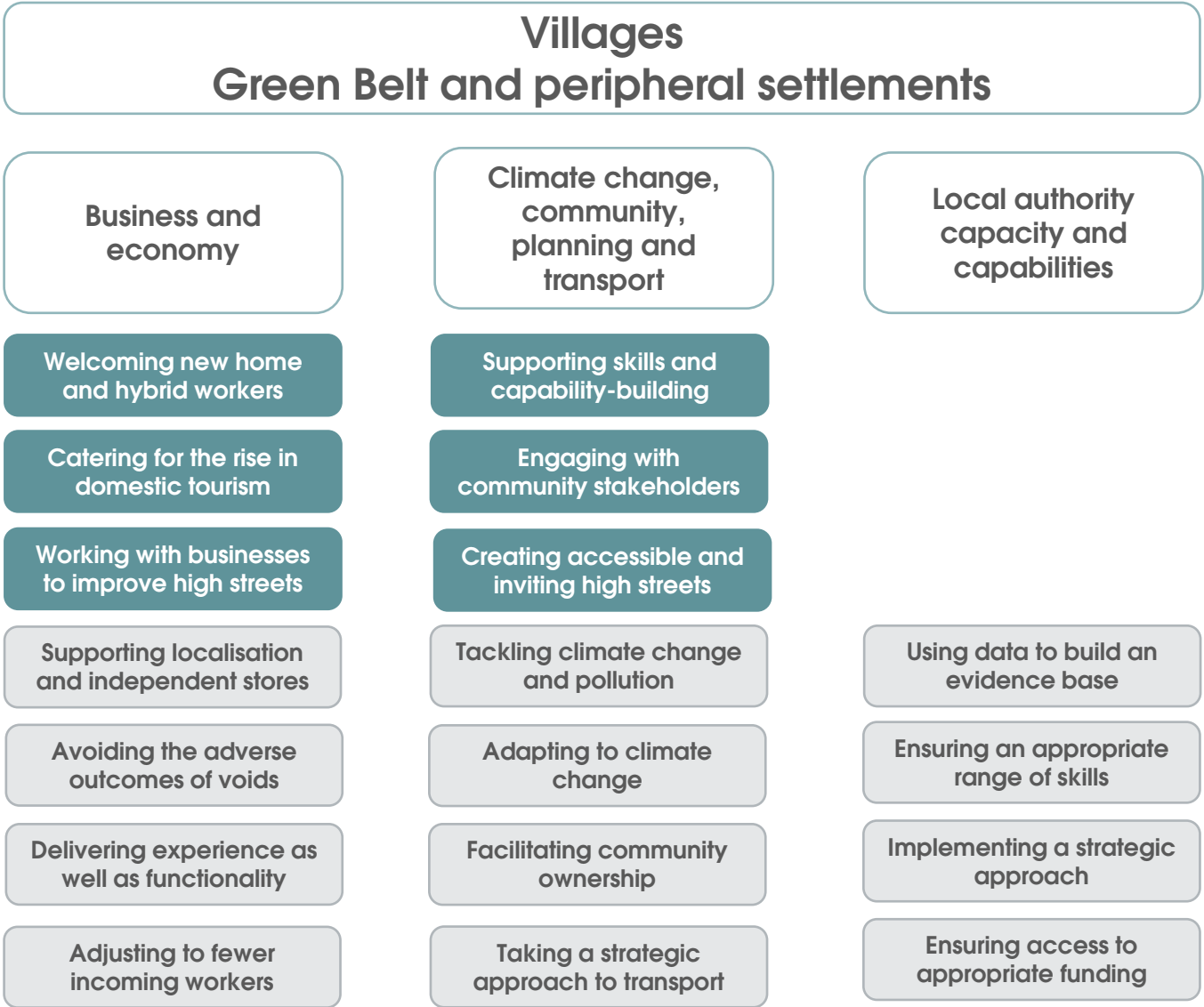
Ensuring an appropriate range of skills

Implementing a strategic approach

Ensuring access to appropriate funding



Other important issues to consider



Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Other important issues to consider



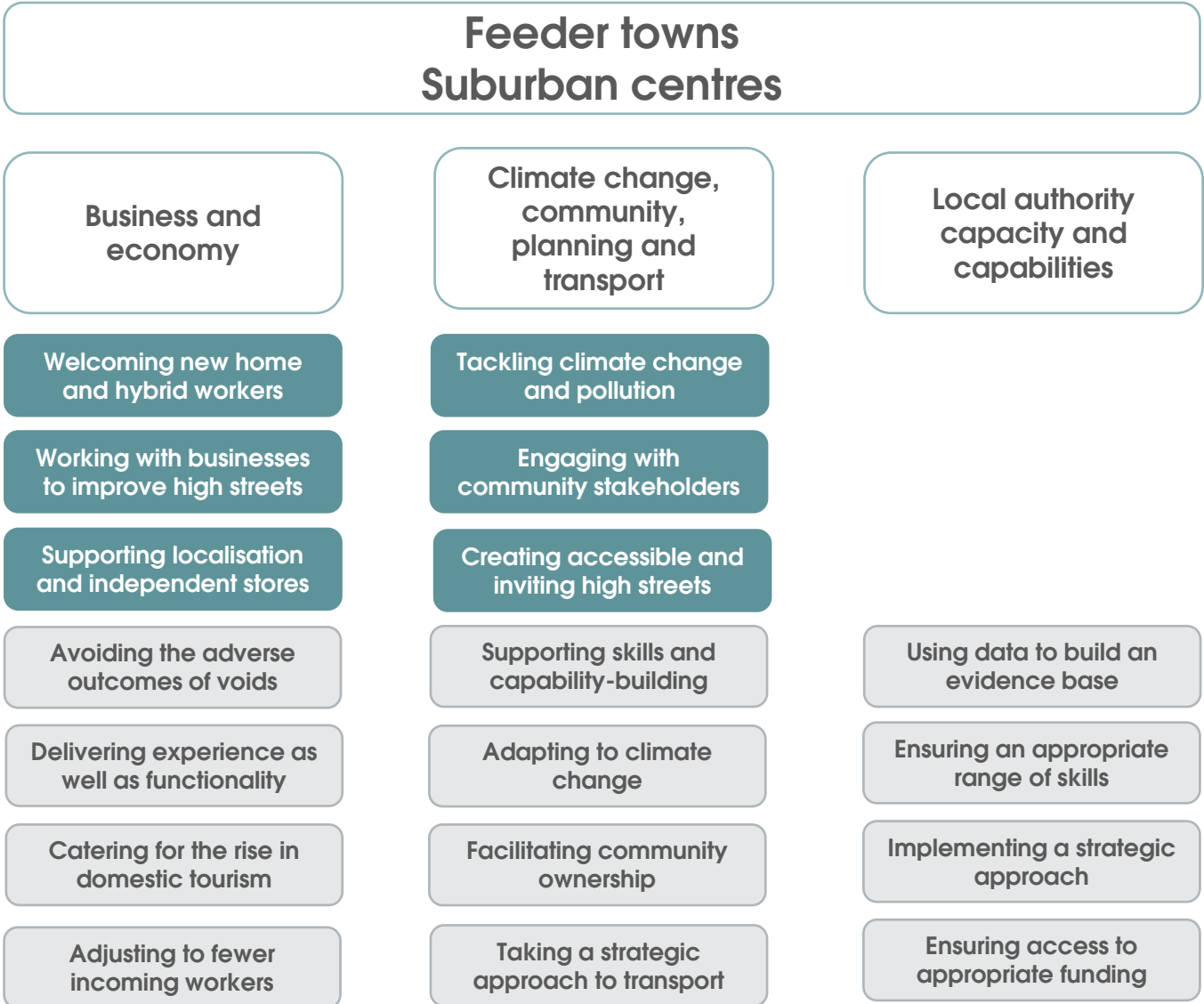
**Urban central business districts
City and major towns**

Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Other important issues to consider

	Business and economy	Climate change, community, planning and transport	Local authority capacity and capabilities
Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusting to fewer incoming workers Delivering experience as well as functionality Avoiding the adverse outcomes of voids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting skills and capability-building Taking a strategic approach to transport Creating accessible and inviting high streets 	
Other important issues to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting localisation and independent stores Working with businesses to improve high streets Catering for the rise in domestic tourism Welcoming new home and hybrid workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackling climate change and pollution Adapting to climate change Facilitating community ownership Engaging with community stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using data to build an evidence base Ensuring an appropriate range of skills Implementing a strategic approach Ensuring access to appropriate funding





Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Other important issues to consider



Tourist Honeypot

Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Business and economy

Catering for the rise in domestic tourism

Working with businesses to improve high streets

Delivering experience and functionality

Avoiding the adverse outcomes of voids

Supporting localisation and independent stores

Welcoming new home and hybrid workers

Adjusting to fewer incoming workers

Climate change, community, planning and transport

Adapting to climate change

Engaging with community stakeholders

Creating accessible and inviting high streets

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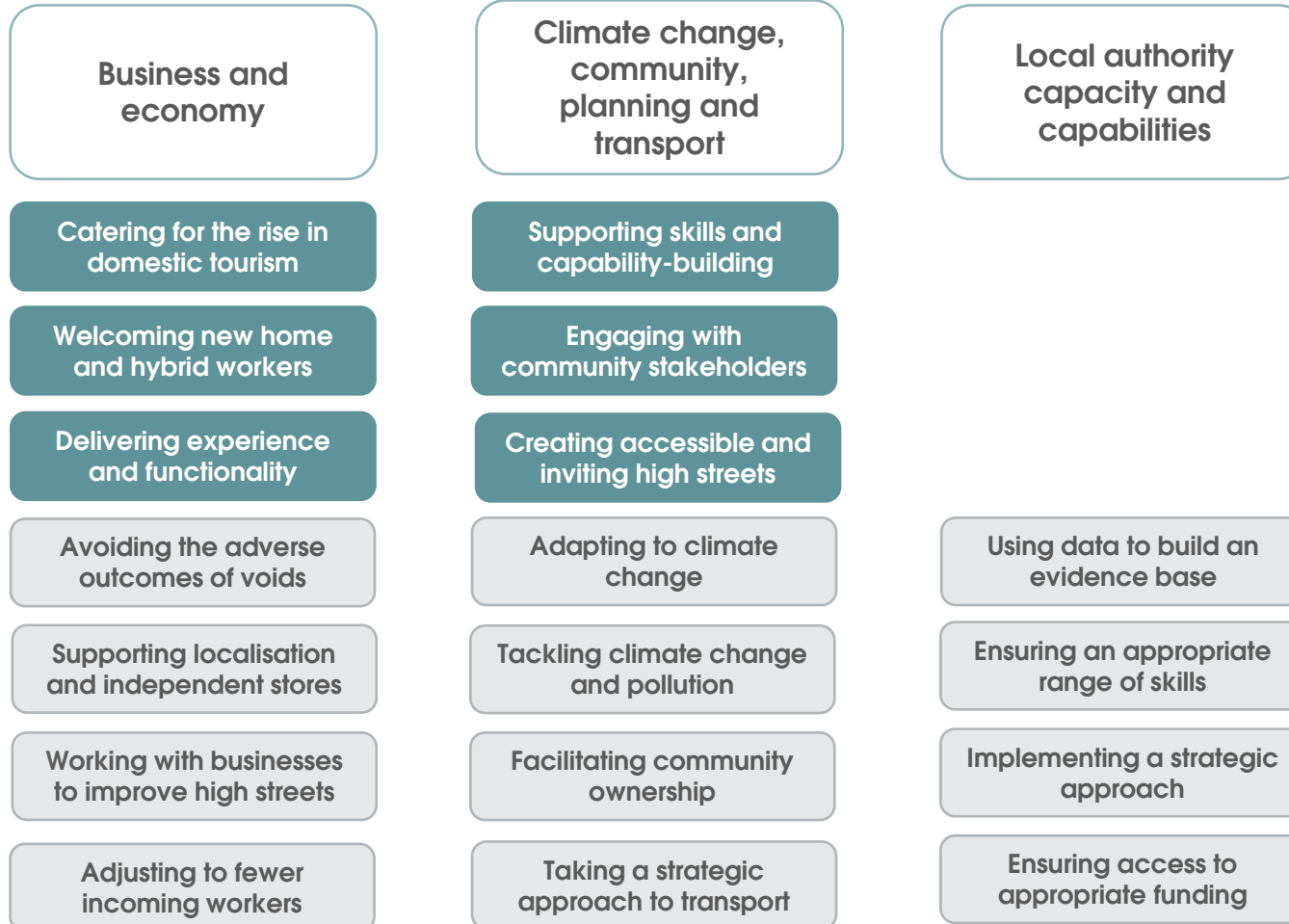


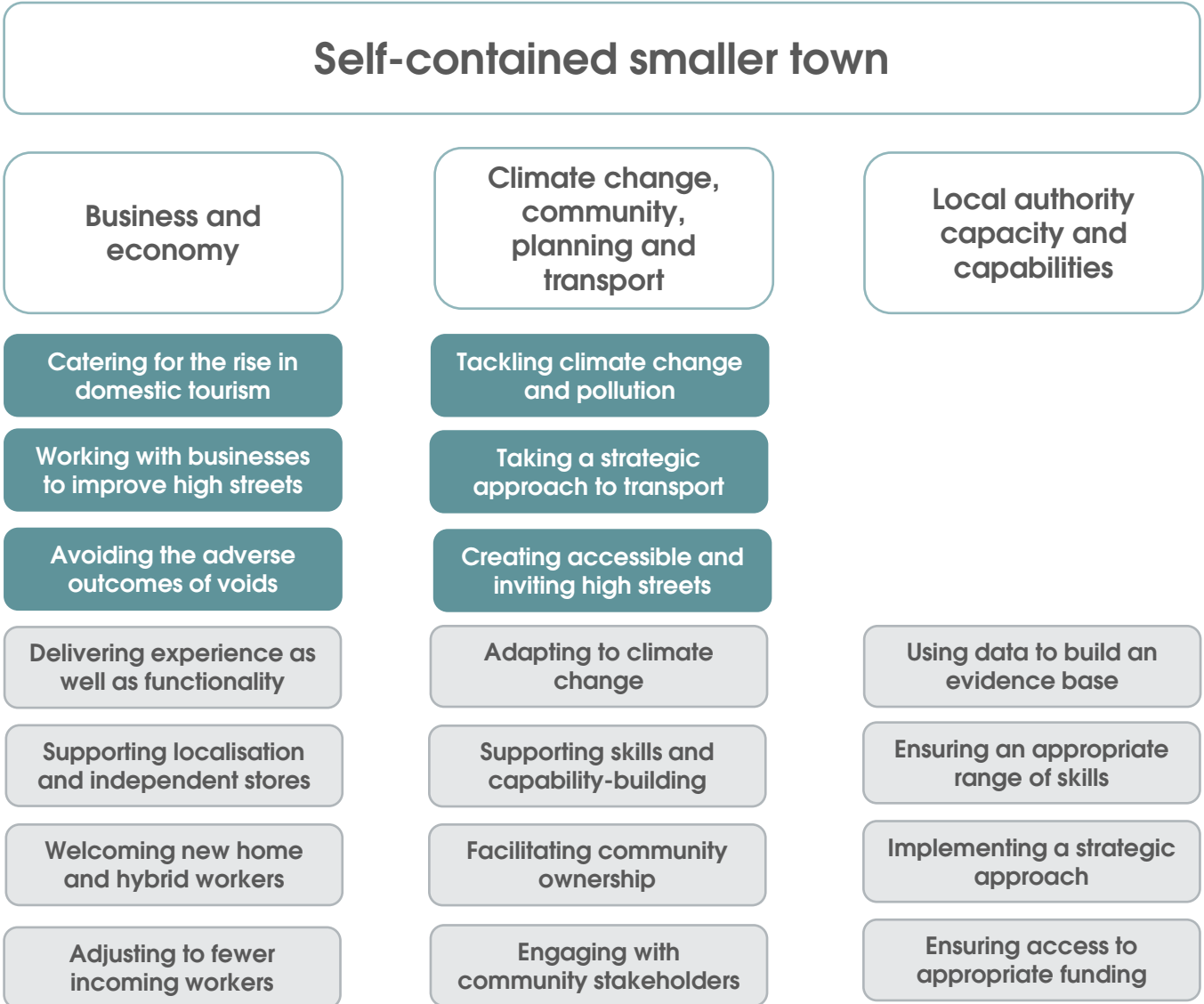
Other important issues to consider

Village without significant centre

Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Other important issues to consider

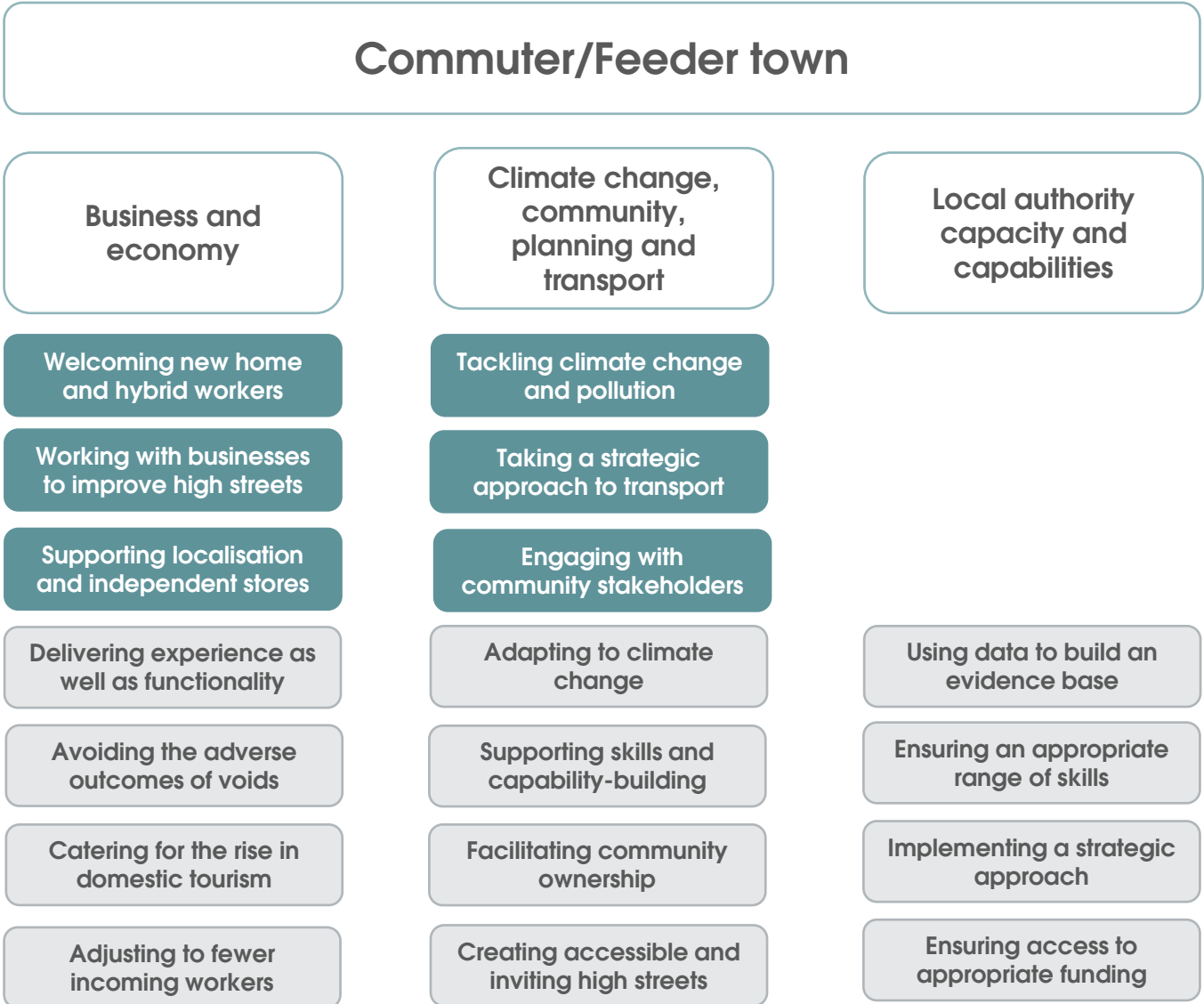




Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations



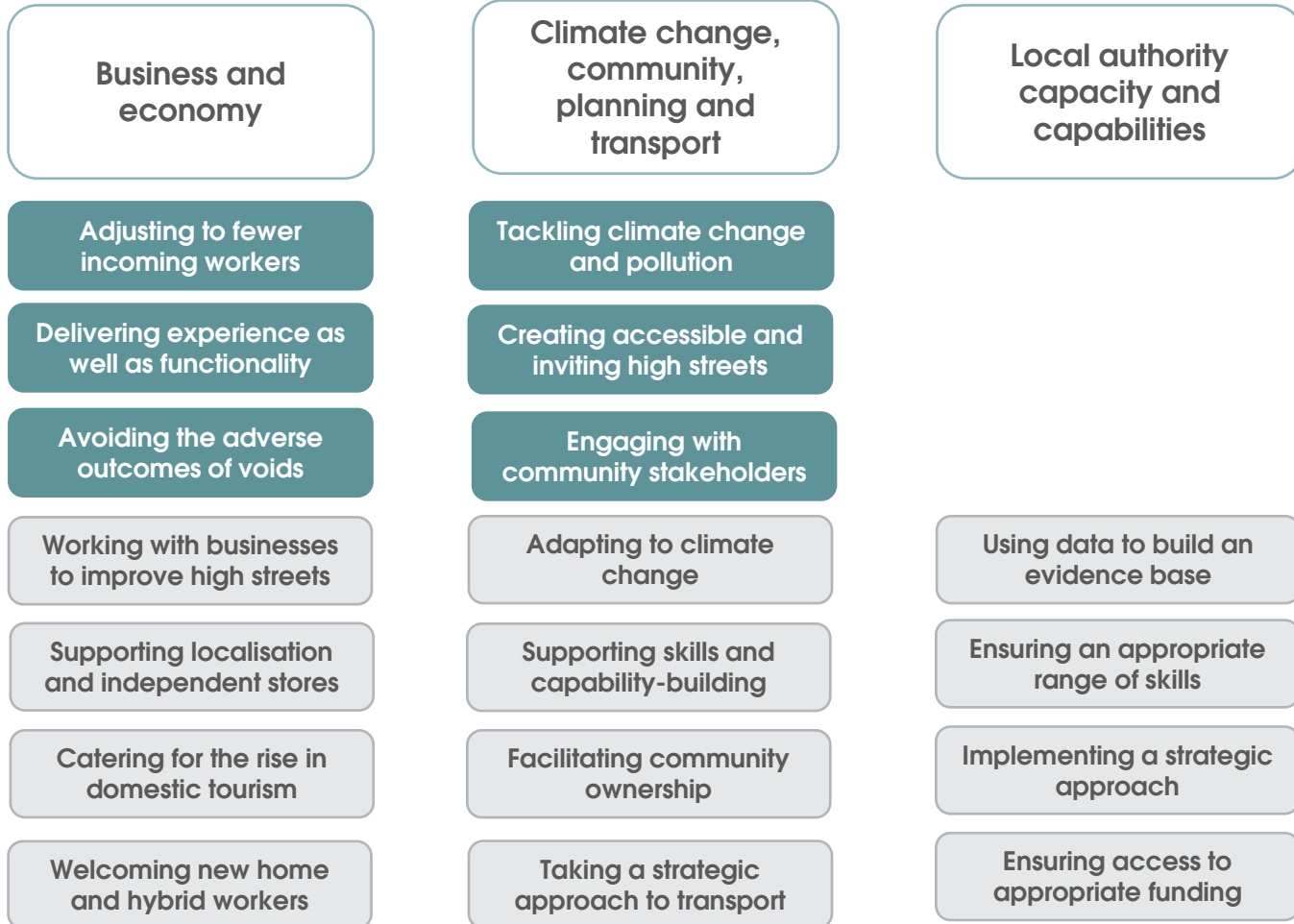
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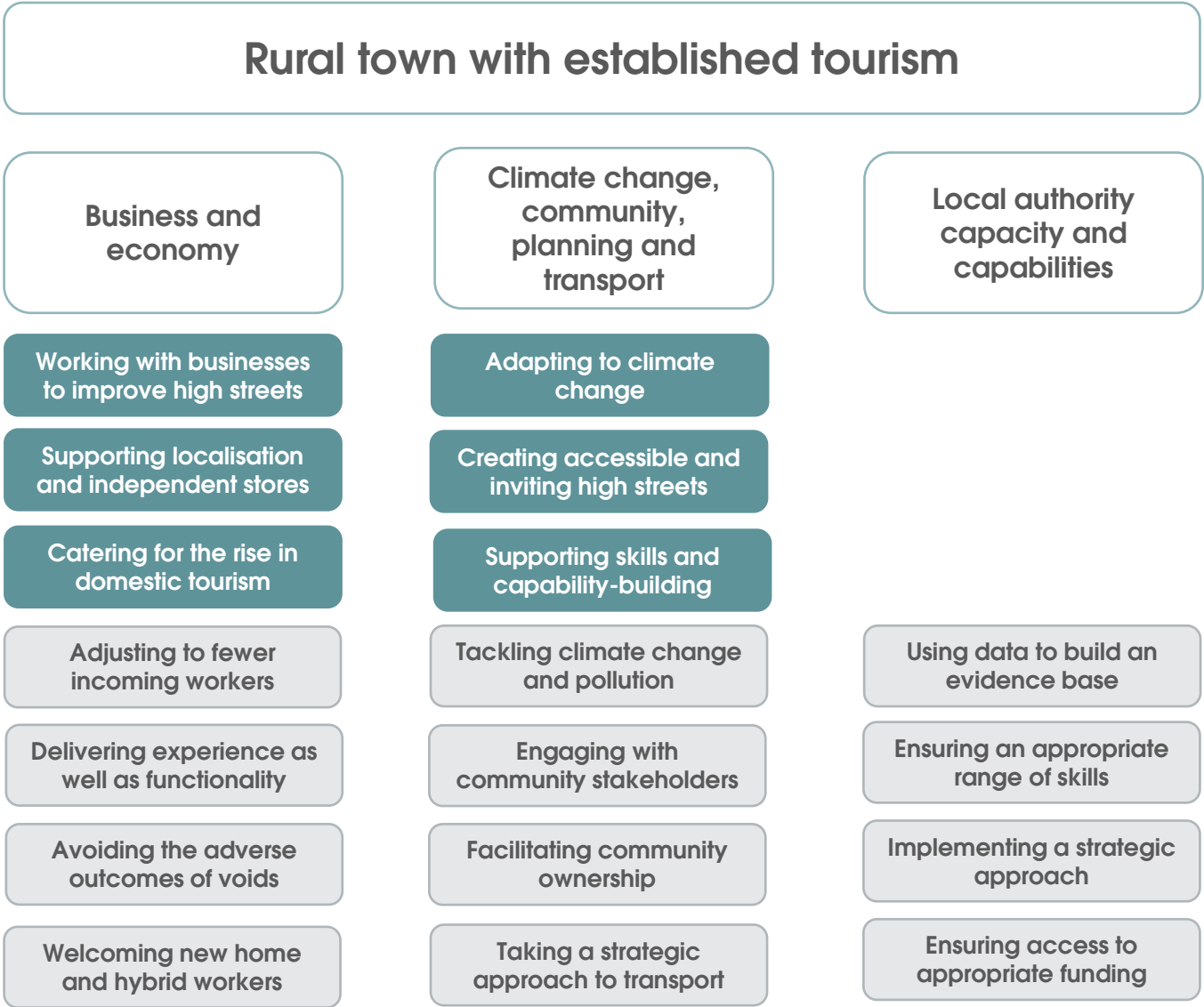


Larger 'standalone' town or city

Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Other important issues to consider





Town or built-up area in large polycentric urban conurbation

Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations

Other important issues to consider

	Business and economy	Climate change, community, planning and transport	Local authority capacity and capabilities
Typically most pressing issues for high streets in these locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusting to fewer incoming workers Delivering experience as well as functionality Avoiding the adverse outcomes of voids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking a strategic approach to transport Creating accessible and inviting high streets Supporting skills and capability-building 	
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