CAFÉ

SALE

gfirst
growing gloucestershire

ATCM
association of town & city management

successful town centres – developing effective strategies.

"understanding your high street"

Town Centre *(description)* • This report uses 'town centres' as an overarching term to cover city centres, town centres, district centres, local centres and small parades, from small centres to market towns, large city centres and high streets. The Association of Town and City Management (formerly Association of Town Centre Management) proposes the following as a broader, more holistic description of key elements or characteristics of a town centre: *A retailing centre that serves the needs of the local community; • Leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities; • Access to public and private sector services; • An employment and business sector; • Accessibility by a number of transport options; and • The perception by the local community as their town centre.*

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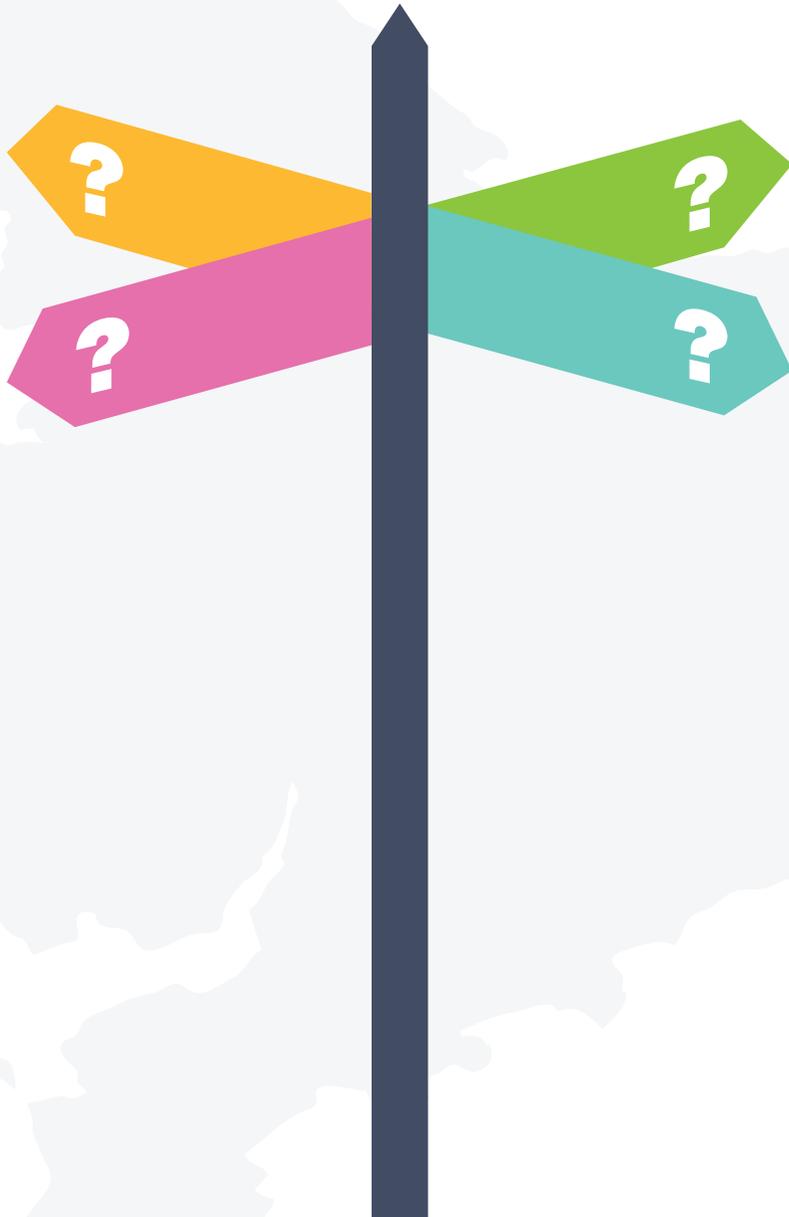**1 Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster**
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United Kingdom

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executive summary.

The high street and the retail sector are facing a period of flux with tremendous pressures from local, national and global consumer trends, including rapid changes in the fiscal climate affecting local authorities. This situation has become particularly acute since the global economic downturn of 2008, which many see as the start of a significant long term global restructuring of the world's economy.

Building on the findings of recent Government thinking, including the "Understanding high street performance" report by Genecon and the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published in 2012, this study argues for a fresh approach to the situation faced by the retail sector, the high street and more generally, town centres across the country.

Instead of a reactive approach to consumer trends, this report argues for a re-think of the strategic positioning of town centres to reclaim them to their rightful position and role as places that serve their communities, visitors, businesses and key stakeholders, with a quality of experience that encourages them to keep coming back, and staying longer.

In line with this, the achievement of prosperity for town centres is aligned here with their strategic aspirations and ability to satisfy changing demands, which this report suggests includes a holistic approach to the integration and management of the daytime, evening and night time economies. These three segments of the 24-hr economy should be seen as part of one menu that town centres offer in an economy increasingly driven by customer experience and perceptions. To achieve this, key town centre decision makers - who should include the business community as well as local residents - need first to establish a vision for the future of their town centre that is anchored in the 'personality' or unique characteristics of their town, sometimes referred to as the 'DNA' of the place.

the aims of this study are to:

1. **Present a set of tools that will help places of different sizes** *(from small market towns to large city centres and potentially also villages and rural locations) to plot a locally tailor-made strategic road map towards prosperity, informed by their stakeholders.*

2. **Develop and present a state-of-the-art Town Centre Classification Matrix linked to a 'personality' test for town centres.** *This tool, which can be used for individual retailers and businesses as well as entire towns and tourist destinations, represents the first stage of strategic positioning and includes key elements of perceptions among visitors, residents and businesses.*

3. **Develop and present a new and clear national performance framework for town centres.** *This framework is linked to the Town Centre Classification Matrix and allows places to evaluate their current situation and to monitor progress towards their strategic vision or objectives. This is achieved through a ground-breaking approach that effectively demystifies the concept of town centre performance indicators. Each indicator is explained in an approachable manner with data collection methodologies that include the possibility of using commercially available data or adopting a do-it-yourself method to field research locally.*

4. **Empower and support communities:** *Town Teams, Portas Pilots, local authority representatives, businesses operating in or near town centres, trader organisations, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), town centre managers, business improvement district managers, policy makers, town planners, charities, national retail associations, shopping centre managers, urban regeneration practitioners, tourism officers, consultancies and researchers.*

5. **Help locations and centres of all sizes to make key investment decisions,** *adopting a strategic approach using decision support tools (including key performance indicators) that enable decision makers to prioritise and deal with local issues effectively.*

Additionally, the indicators used in this study also support users who wish to pursue further market research to gain a better understanding of their town centre and the complexity of interactions between different parameters. This includes the differences that may exist in some places between facts and perceptions (e.g. reported retail crime versus perceptions of crime and safety in the town centre). As in any change management context, it is vital to know the facts so that informed decisions can be taken to prioritise available resources effectively.

1. introduction.

Town and city centres are complex places that serve a wide range of people and purposes. The importance of healthy vibrant town centres has been highlighted in recent years in certain locations due to the visible effect of vacant shops and a perception among some that their towns are not providing them with all the services they want or need, with a negative impact on their quality of life. Town centres, and those who operate in and manage them, are having to adapt to changing circumstances as global issues impact on local conditions. Similarly, local authorities are also having to adapt to rapid changes in the fiscal climate and increasingly challenging budgetary constraints.

As with any change process it is important to be able to measure where we are, monitor progress, learn from others and realistically compare and measure performance. This report and accompanying tool kit aims to facilitate and support all those with an active interest in improving the experience and vitality of town centres so that they, in turn, provide a healthy sustainable operating environment for the businesses and communities who depend on them.

Perhaps one of the most widely recognised roles of a town or city centre is shopping. Retailing is one of the most important economic sectors in the UK. Figures from the British Retail Consortium (BRC)[1] show that retail sales in the UK reached £303 billion in 2011 with more than a third of consumer spending going through the 284,490 retail outlets that operate in the UK.

In the European Union (EU), including the UK, figures by the European Commission show that the retail and wholesale services sector represents 11% of the EU's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounts for almost 15% of the EU's total employment. The European retail sector is characterised by a very high share of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly micro companies (more than 95% of retail businesses)[2].

The impact of the retail sector goes well beyond economic output. Research has shown that a diverse retail offer can also contribute to the social well-being of local communities[3], and serve as a key driver for tourism by increasing the attractiveness of town and city centres. In fact, retail has made a significant contribution to urban regeneration[4] and the vitality and viability of town centres in the UK for decades by contributing to their socio-economic health[5].

This line of thought, linking the vitality of the town centre with the social as well as economic well-being of the local community, is becoming progressively accepted by academics, practitioners, local authorities (see Local Government Association's "Alternative high street" report)[6] and policy makers in the UK[7].

After decades of 'silo thinking' that analysed the situation using a single prism approach (e.g. retail or transport or environment or inward investment, etc.), the need to adopt a holistic approach is becoming increasingly evident when considering emerging government policy across the UK and the wider European Union[8].

High streets and town centres could be thought of as living ecosystems[9] where retail alone may not be the only (or even necessarily fully dominant) factor affecting their performance as attractive places in which to live, work, play, visit and shop.

As our high streets continue to evolve, some of them are attempting to build closer relationships with their wider regions[10] and become more resilient[11] to changes and fluctuations in global or national economic conditions. The complexity of issues affecting the performance and prosperity of town centres and high streets has become increasingly recognised. According to the Centre for Cities think tank and the Urban Land Institute: since 2008, a global economic scenario without precedent in the UK[12] and internationally[13], continues to affect high streets, town centres, consumers and communities at all levels.

At a time when town centres and businesses operating on the high street are facing a growing array of operational challenges, evidenced by a steady decline in store numbers on high streets, this report offers a number of tools that can help town centres and their key stakeholders. By understanding and re-positioning themselves strategically to better serve their communities and visitors in line with the ethos (or 'personality') of each location, town centres can re-emerge at the centre of the community, cultural and civic life with retail as a key – though not always a dominant element.

Store numbers on high streets in the UK

(Source: British Retail Consortium)
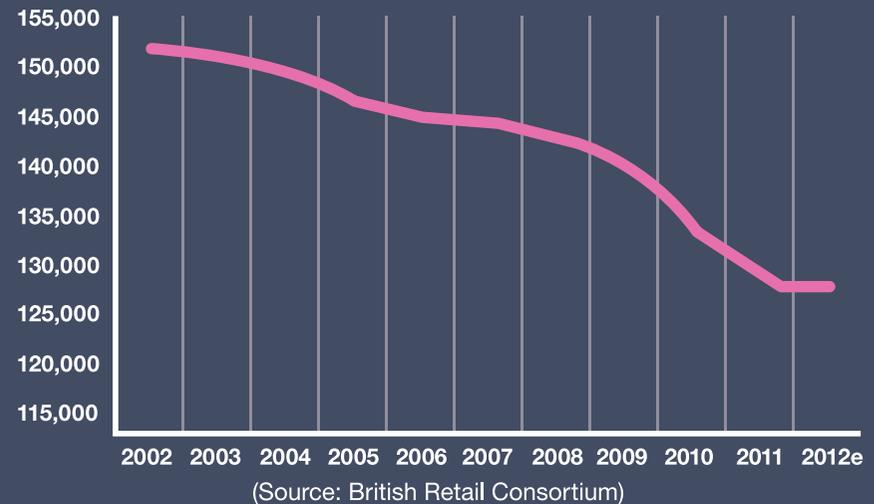
To support the development of effective strategies in town centres, two of the key tools provided by this study include:

1. *A strategic classification of high streets and town centres based on their 'personality' as perceived by key local stakeholders.*

2. *A national framework for town centre performance with an indicator-based toolkit that allows for data to be collected without prior experience of market research.*

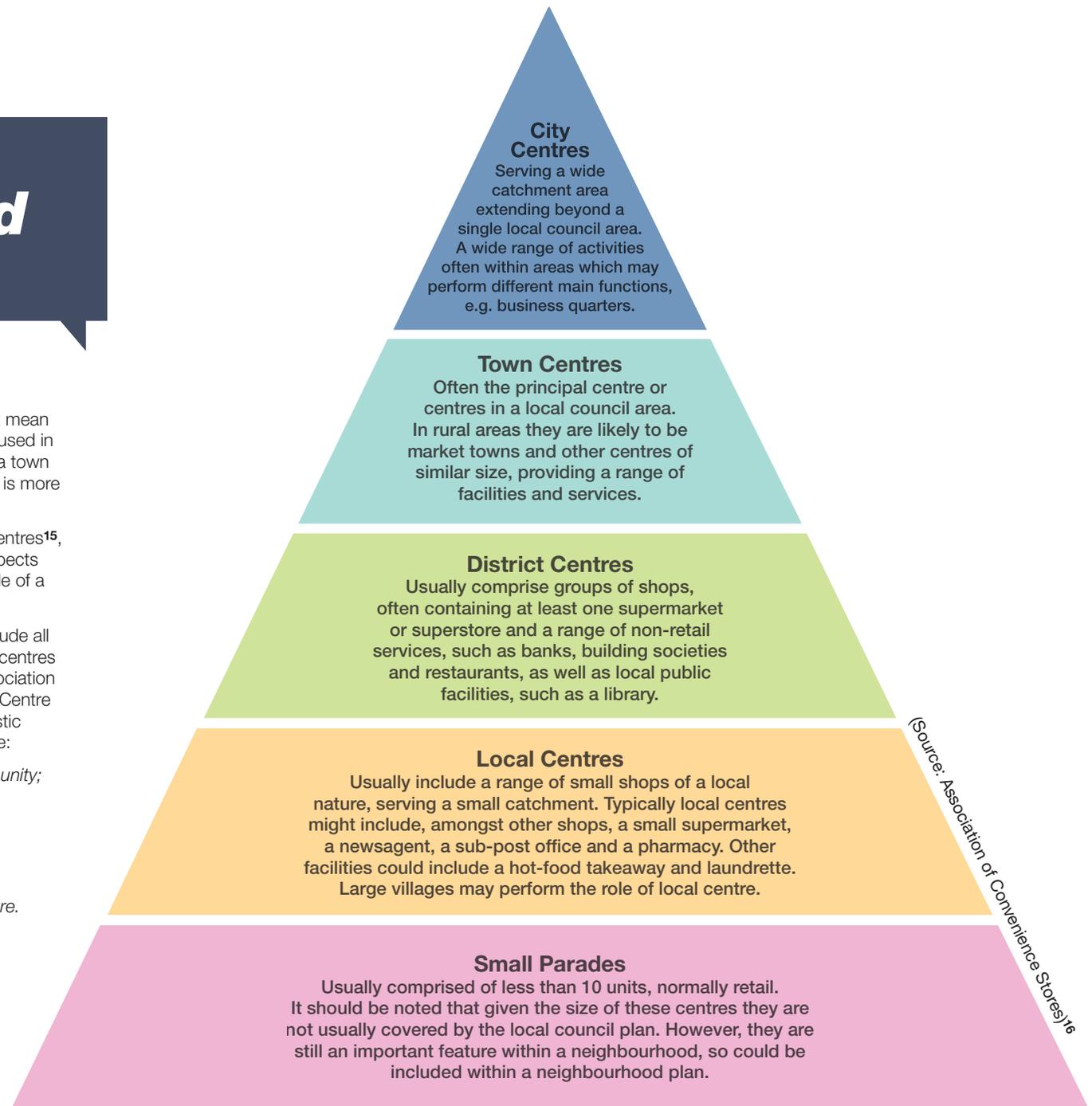# 2. high streets, town centres and performance.

High street versus town centre.

To most people, 'high street' and 'town centre' are terms that mean the same thing. Not surprisingly, both terms have often been used in interchangeable fashion[14], though it would be fair to say that a town centre covers a wider area than a high street and, as a result, is more likely to provide a more diverse offer.

Although there have been several attempts to classify town centres[15], studies have often focused primarily on planning issues or aspects of retail offer. The classification shown below offers an example of a largely retail-focused classification.

This report uses 'town centres' as an overarching term to include all the categories shown in the diagram opposite – from smaller centres to market towns, large city centres and high streets. The Association of Town and City Management (formerly Association of Town Centre Management) proposes the following as a broader, more holistic description of key elements or characteristics of a town centre:

- A retailing centre that serves the needs of the local community;
- Leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities;
- Access to public and private sector services;
- An employment and business sector;
- Accessibility by a number of transport options; and
- The perception by the local community as their town centre.

City Centres
Serving a wide catchment area extending beyond a single local council area. A wide range of activities often within areas which may perform different main functions, e.g. business quarters.

Town Centres
Often the principal centre or centres in a local council area. In rural areas they are likely to be market towns and other centres of similar size, providing a range of facilities and services.

District Centres
Usually comprise groups of shops, often containing at least one supermarket or superstore and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public facilities, such as a library.

Local Centres
Usually include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaway and laundrette. Large villages may perform the role of local centre.

Small Parades
Usually comprised of less than 10 units, normally retail. It should be noted that given the size of these centres they are not usually covered by the local council plan. However, they are still an important feature within a neighbourhood, so could be included within a neighbourhood plan.

(Source: Association of Convenience Stores)[16]
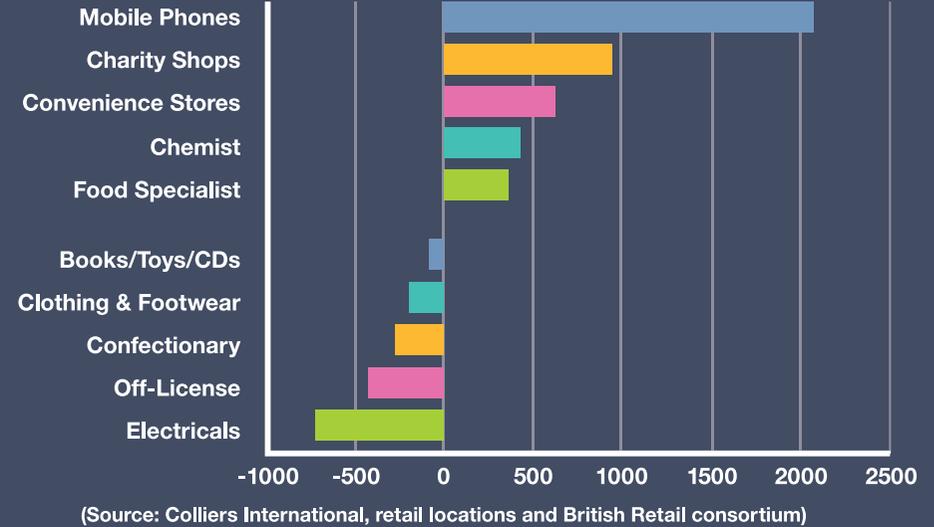
Hierarchy of centre types

A question of (economic) performance?

Town centres across the UK are undergoing major change. Current levels of unemployment (and part-time work) coupled with a stalled economy as fallout of the 2008 credit crunch, have conspired to reduce high street retail sales. The number of vacant retail units continues to grow and currently stands at one in seven. Meanwhile, data from KPMG and the British Retail Consortium shows that consumer spending on the internet continues to increase and shopping malls have seen an increase in visitors of over 30%[17] in spite of the economic downturn.

UK retail sales by channel

£120,897

£95,445

£49,692

£36,996

(Source: Verdict and British Retail Consortium)
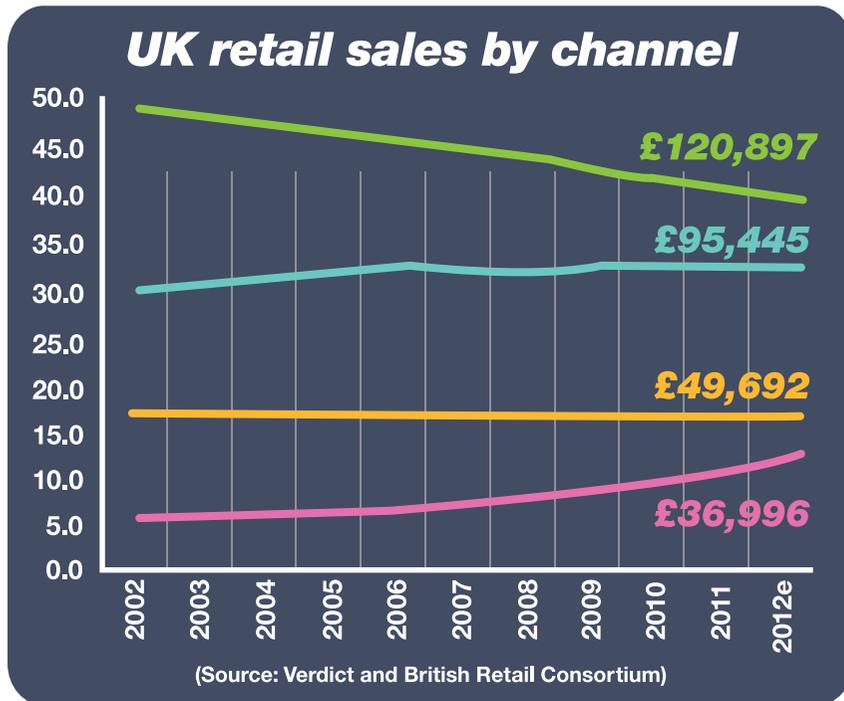
Town Centre   Out-of-Town   Convenience   Non-store Retail

The changing face of the British High Street

Mobile Phones
Charity Shops
Convenience Stores
Chemist
Food Specialist

Books/Toys/CDs
Clothing & Footwear
Confectionary
Off-License
Electricals

-1000 -500 0 500 1000 1500 2000 2500

(Source: Colliers International, retail locations and British Retail consortium)

So why are town centres in the UK 'underperforming'? Perhaps part of the answer may lie in the way we measure and interpret performance. A recent major Government study on high street performance offers a clue:

> " High street/town centre performance is not solely a reflection of retail performance. (...) [though] the vast majority of the data, especially that available for the purposes of providing an overview at the national level, are heavily biased to retail indicators. Data on aspects of high street vitality such as cultural, heritage and leisure uses is very limited.[18] "
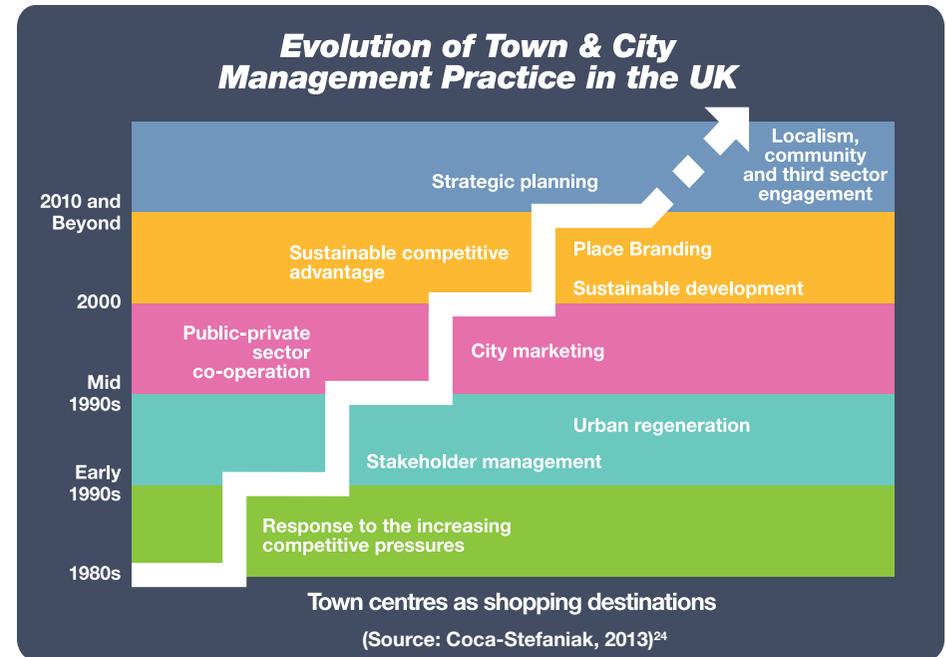
Given that performance often impacts on investment decisions and interventions (by local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and town centre partnerships), it is perhaps not surprising to see that at least part of the reason for the lack of economic performance of many a UK high street may be due to a rather one-dimensional interpretation of the role of the high street. Indeed, recent research studies[19] confirm the need for intensely local and social factors[20] to be taken into account too as part of the overall picture. This becomes even more relevant if place uniqueness[21] is considered as a key element of sustainable advantage for town centres as a strategic response to the standardising effects of globalisation trends[22].

Town centre performance thinking to date has been skewed towards the daytime economy, with little if any attention paid to the evening and night-time economies[23]. In a world where many businesses - and increasingly public services too – operate on a 24-hr basis, this appears to be a gross oversight and a clear gap in our understanding of the way town centres function today.

The balance between town centre offer, customer demand and expectations needs to be addressed too and previous work has largely neglected this. Even so, this balance can evolve quickly over time. This has been epitomised by the words of Jan Ghel, arguably one of Europe's most visionary architects and urbanism experts:

> " *If you asked people twenty years ago why they came into the city, they would have said it was to shop. But if you ask them today, they would say it was because they wanted to go into town.* "

Shopping has become an element of leisure outings rather than the sole purpose of visits to town and city centres, so towns need to provide and measure much more than retail. Not surprisingly, the manner in which our towns and cities are managed has evolved considerably from a purely shopping-centred tactical approach to sophisticated multi-stakeholder strategic planning. This evolution has manifested itself in the creation of a wide range of town centre partnerships that include informal set-ups (e.g. Town Teams) as well as private sector-led partnership-based initiatives such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), where a clear business plan with a strategic vision for the area is commonplace, as in the case of the Better Bankside BID or Camden BID, to mention but two London-based examples. Other places have adopted a variety of approaches which have included city marketing (e.g. Chester), place branding/management (e.g. Plymouth) or regeneration linked to sustainability (e.g. Bristol harbour).

Evolution of Town & City Management Practice in the UK

2010 and Beyond	Strategic planning → Localism, community and third sector engagement
	Sustainable competitive advantage / Place Branding / Sustainable development
2000	Public-private sector co-operation / City marketing
Mid 1990s	
Early 1990s	Stakeholder management / Urban regeneration
1980s	Response to the increasing competitive pressures

Town centres as shopping destinations

(Source: Coca-Stefaniak, 2013)[24]

Town and city centres may often have a good understanding of their current strengths and weaknesses, but this level of understanding does not always manifest itself in a clear strategic positioning to take advantage of opportunities and address threats confidently. These issues are discussed next with particular emphasis on how different perceptions among key stakeholders may play a role in this strategic process.
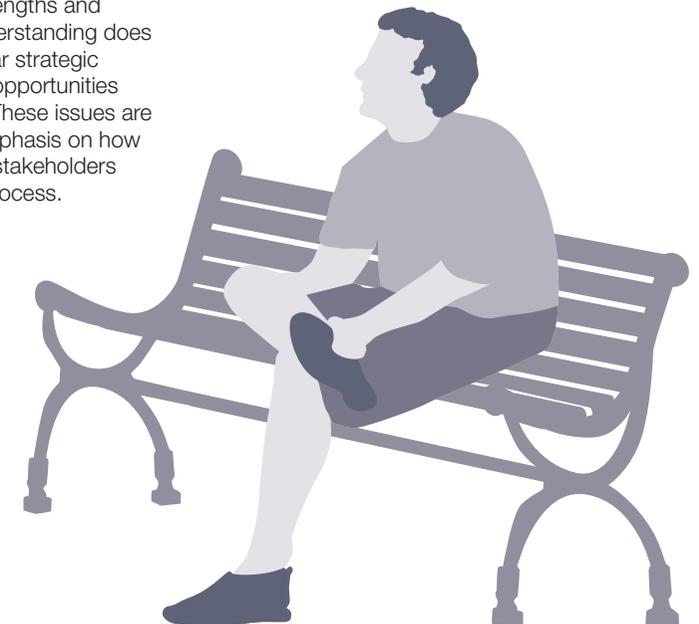
Adopting effective strategies for town centres.

UK practice over the last three decades in local development and urban regeneration suggests that there has been a wide range of approaches to measuring town centre performance. These include more economically-driven measures at one end of the spectrum and socially focused ones at the other[25]. Similarly, entrepreneurship, events, tourism and even retail often fulfil a number of roles that cannot be reduced to economic output alone.

Place branding practice, which often incorporates all of the above sectors, has a similar variety of **equity-based** approaches to measuring success, which can range from pure economic gain to a bigger emphasis on social capital, community place attachment and quality of life.

Town centres, like individual retailers, seek customers who range from loyal local residents to regular visitors from nearby areas, or tourists from other parts of the UK and overseas. This geographical segmentation concept could be referred to as the **strategic approach**.

If the **equity-based** and **strategic approaches** are combined, a much richer picture emerges. Effectively, we obtain a classification system that is just as valid for a single business (including town centre shops) as for entire town and city centres, as well as smaller towns and villages. Unlike previous classification systems, this one deals with town centres not in terms of elements that are difficult to change or influence (e.g. the size of a retail district catchment or planning considerations) but, instead, on what they actually do and how they are perceived by visitors.

Using this approach, the Town Centre Classification Matrix (fig1.) presented here has been developed using two main axes as illustrated below:

- The vertical axis **(strategic focus continuum)** effectively represents the range of choices that town centres make with regards to the type of visitors they aim to attract (e.g. local residents, regional visitors, national visitors and overseas tourists).

- The horizontal axis represents the **equity continuum**, which ranges from economic profit alone at one extreme to longer term social benefits, including social capital elements that include social entrepreneurship at the other.

fig1. town centre classification matrix

Source: Coca-Stefaniak (2013)[26]
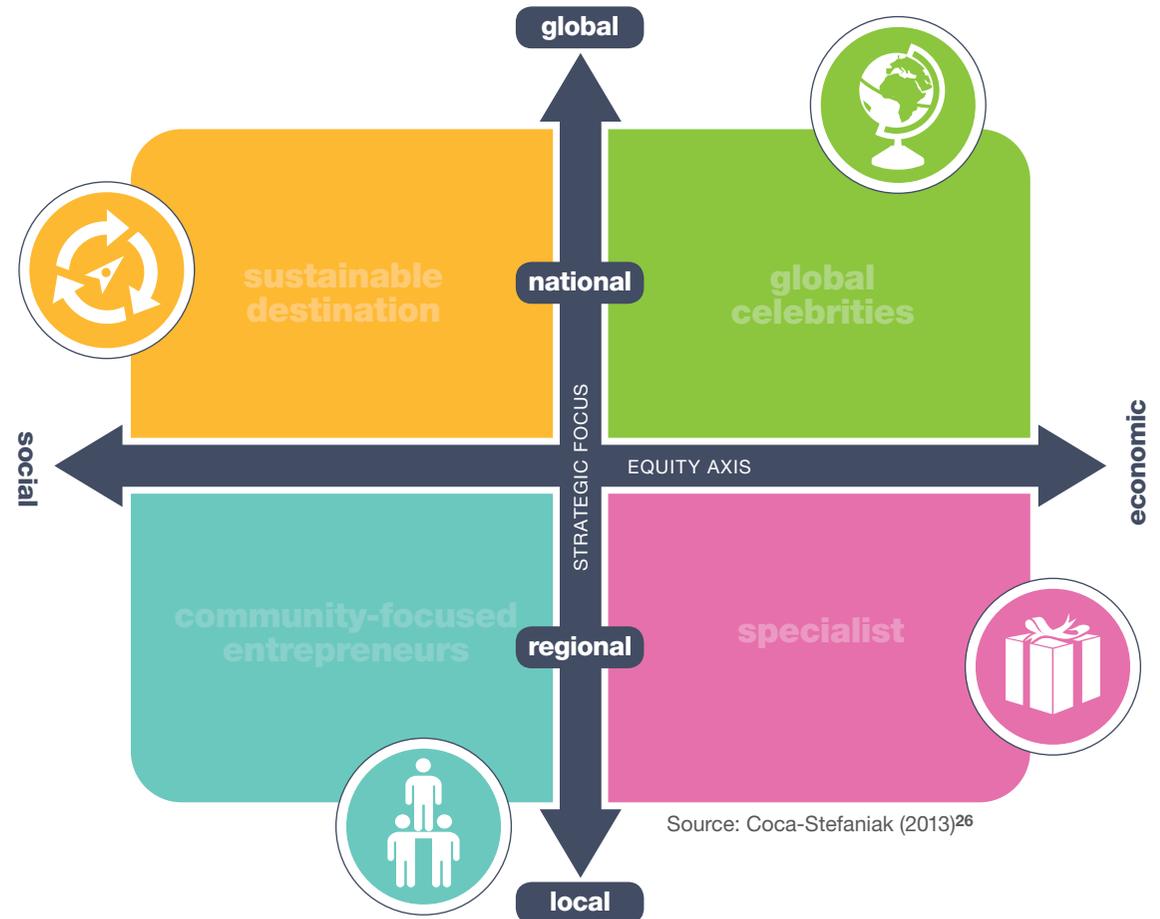
Town centre 'personality' types

The research undertaken for this report has revealed four key town centre 'personality types'. These are outlined below. Field tests carried out with practitioner focus groups showed that many places will straddle more than one of these types. Rather than a personality conflict, this should be interpreted as evidence of local resilience and 'depth of personality'. The town centre 'personality' test developed in this study can be found in Annex A of this report. This test helps users to establish the current strategic positioning of their town centre, which may or may not match its intended positioning. This is dealt with further below.

Strategic intentions versus perceptions

In spite of a town or city centre's best efforts, their image and brand will be ultimately as strong as the perceptions held by its visitors, residents and key local stakeholders. Invariably, people seldom agree, particularly when their personal engagement with their local town centre varies. Whereas some may use their town centre primarily for daytime shopping once a week, others will actually work in or near the town centre and will have much more of a day-to-day relationship with it. There will also be those who tend to favour, primarily, their town centre's culture and leisure offer, or those who prefer to use it to socialise and/or escape from their daily routine by going out to the pub or clubbing. Inevitably, all these levels of engagement may offer very different experiences of what is, superficially, the same place to everyone.

The town centre 'personality' test developed as part of this study captures this diversity of experiences, perceptions and opinions. The more diverse the group of people the test is given to, the more likely their answers will vary, in spite of the fact that they will be all scoring the same town centre. Although, like horoscopes, this test is not scientific, it remains a good starting point to validate people's perceptions against the actual strategic intentions of key decision makers for town centres (including planners, investors, residents and businesses). Effectively, this test, and its associated Town Centre Classification Matrix, represent the first step towards effective strategic positioning in a way that the intended positioning begins to align more closely with the positioning perceived (and ideally agreed) by key stakeholders.

Although this test has been piloted with market towns as well as town and city centres, its potential extends to rural locations, including villages.

In some cases, for instance, town or city centre 'personalities' may be seasonal. For example major festivals, such as the Hay-on-Wye's annual Festival of Literature and the Arts, will transform a small town centre for a few weeks and take it from a 'specialist' to a 'global celebrity', only for it to return to its more day-to-day 'specialist' role afterwards.

Also for larger towns and cities, places should look to divide the town into specific areas, as perceived by those visiting, as areas can change feel between town zones.

Outlined on the next few pages are the four town centre 'personality' types developed in this study as part of the Town Centre Classification Matrix and its associated town centre 'personality' test.

Town centre 'personality' types
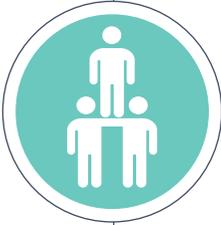
Community-focused entrepreneurs.

Sustainable destinations.

Specialists.

Global celebrities.

Community-focused entrepreneurs.

This type of town centre tends to have a clear focus on the needs of (sometimes ethnically diverse) local communities with modest expendable income levels that may be at or below the national average. These town centres often include a high level of independent (and sometimes ethnic) retailers providing a mix of products and services in conjunction with charity shops and discount stores.

The strengths of this type of town centre may include:
- *a high sense of community spirit*
- *good levels of community engagement in local events*
- *good partnership working*
- *a diverse retail offer for different budgets*
- *overall, a high street that caters well for the budgets and tastes of local residents*

On the other hand, weaknesses may include:
- *a low spend per visitor ratio*
- *higher proportion of charity and betting shops*
- *vacant retail units that may linger for months before an occupant is found*
- *adverse crime and safety perceptions*
- *generally subdued business confidence*

International examples that would fit this category well include specific districts – often with a high density of immigrant population – in Paris, Brussels, Rome, Madrid and Berlin. In the UK, examples would include Brick Lane, Brixton and Deptford in London or Coleford in Gloucestershire.

town centre classification matrix

global

national

STRATEGIC FOCUS

social

EQUITY AXIS

economic

community-focused entrepreneurs

Deptford ■

regional

local
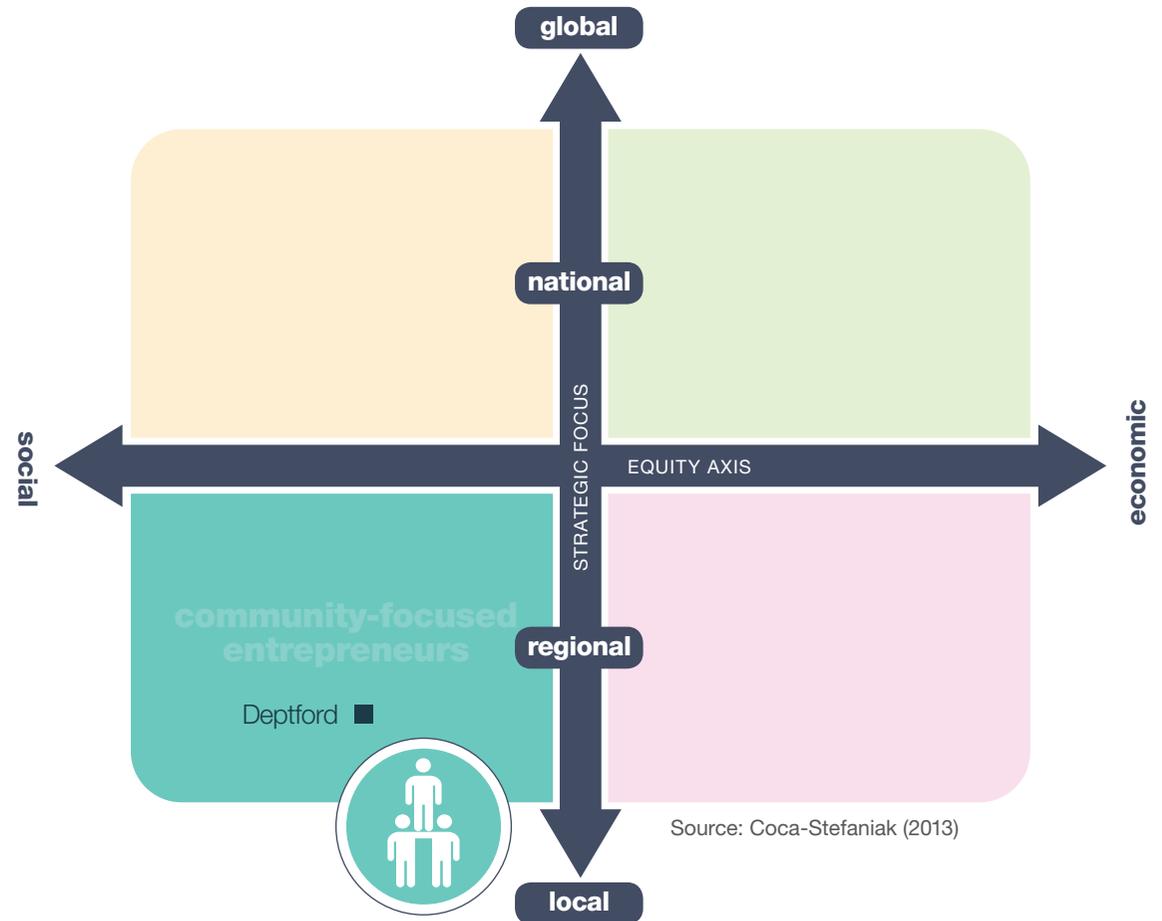
Source: Coca-Stefaniak (2013)

Sustainable destinations.

This type of town or city centre may be linked to a university with an established or growing international reputation. They will tend to attract visitors from all parts of the UK as well as overseas tourists. Independent retailers (sometimes iconic family businesses that have operated in the same area for several generations) often play an important role in these town and city centres, sometimes in a win-win relationship with global anchor retail brands. In many cases, these town and city centres will be growing increasingly mindful of strategic sustainability issues (e.g. waste recycling, noise and air pollution reduction, social capital, etc.) and somewhere on the path towards attracting more responsible culture-focused tourism.

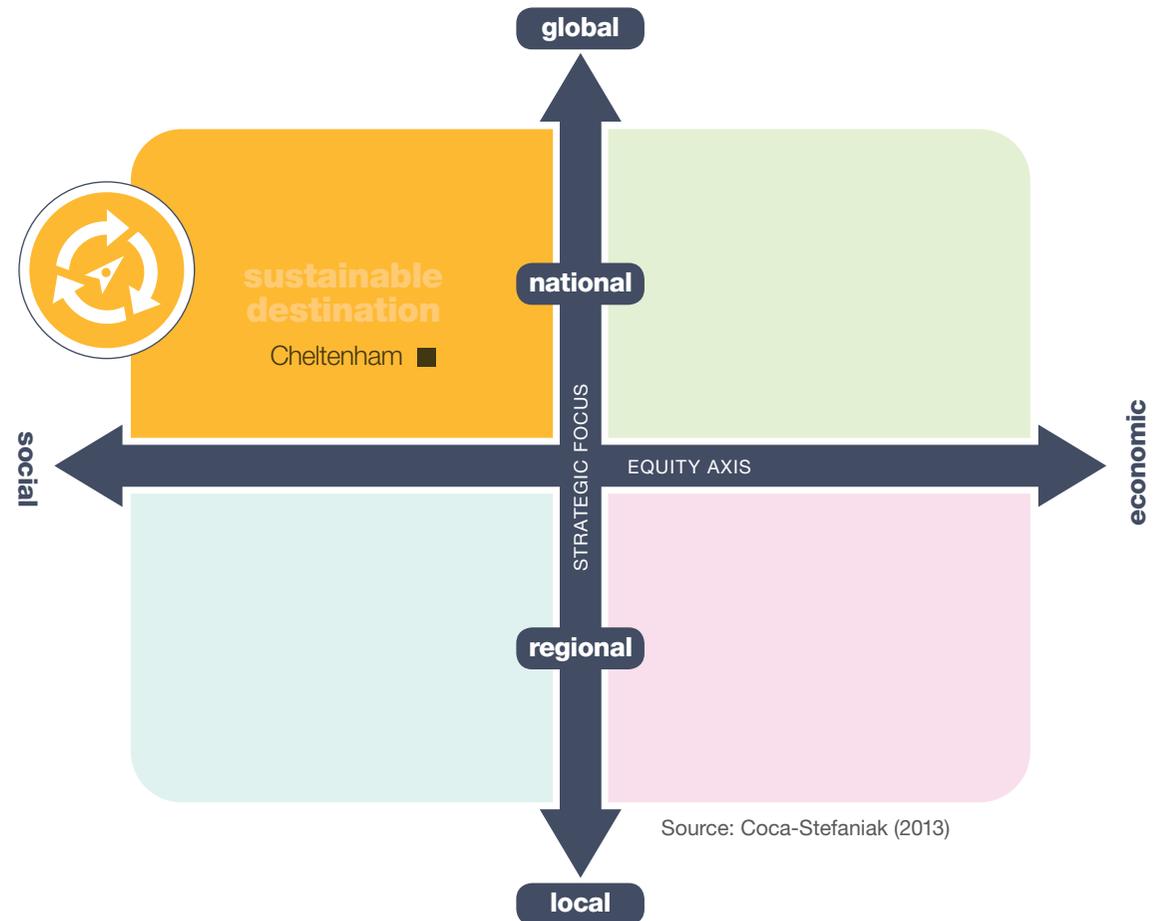Some of the strengths of sustainable destination town and city centres may include:

- *high volumes of visitors*
- *efficient and convenient public transport links*
- *above-average levels of business confidence amongst high street operators*
- *a thriving evening and/or night time economy*
- *diverse and well attended events*
- *considerable experience in adopting a private-public partnership approach to strategic issues affecting the town centre*
- *good leisure offer*
- *a more diverse retail offer that caters for a wider range of budgets*
- *attractive markets*

On the other hand, their limitations may include:

- *a lower spend per visitor ratio*
- *a higher proportion of charity shops in the area*
- *possibly more vacant retail units*
- *higher levels of reported crime, though generally not serious*

International examples that would fit this category well include town and city centres in Florence and Venice (Italy), Lille (France), Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Prague (Czech Republic) and Krakow (Poland). In the UK, York, Cheltenham, Oxford and Hay-on-Wye, among others, would fit this category too.

town centre classification matrix

sustainable destination

Cheltenham ■

global

national

regional

local

social

economic

STRATEGIC FOCUS

EQUITY AXIS

Source: Coca-Stefaniak (2013)

Specialists.

This type of town centre tends to be known for its high degree of retail sophistication, often with an above average number of specialist independent retailers (e.g. delis, continental-style cafes, wine shops, fashion). They also tend to have above-average geographical catchment areas. Often they would not see themselves as global or major national tourism destinations, which may be due to competition from major cities, or limited geographical catchment areas (see definition of this term in Annex C, D, E, F (toolkit) document), though they will tend to have a strong local character of their own.

Their strengths will typically include:
- *high levels of business confidence*
- *good levels of local community spirit*
- *a modest but adequate evening/night time economy in some cases*
- *interesting events geared mainly to local and regional tastes*
- *a good mix of markets*
- *good levels of high street visitor offer and attractiveness*
- *good levels of partnership working to address local issues though not always aware of best practice overseas*
- *good leisure offer*
- *a diverse retail offer though slightly skewed towards people with higher spending power*

On the other hand, some of the weaknesses of specialist town centres may include:
- *some vacant retail units*
- *moderate levels of reported crime*
- *growing issues with car parking*

International examples that would fit this category well include town centres and high streets in Huelva (Spain), Graz (Austria) and Perugia (Italy). In the UK, some (though not all) market towns, such as Northallerton (North Yorkshire) will fit this category. Norwich (Norfolk), Skipton (Yorkshire), Cirencester (Gloucestershire) and Padstow (Cornwall) would also fit this category well.

town centre classification matrix
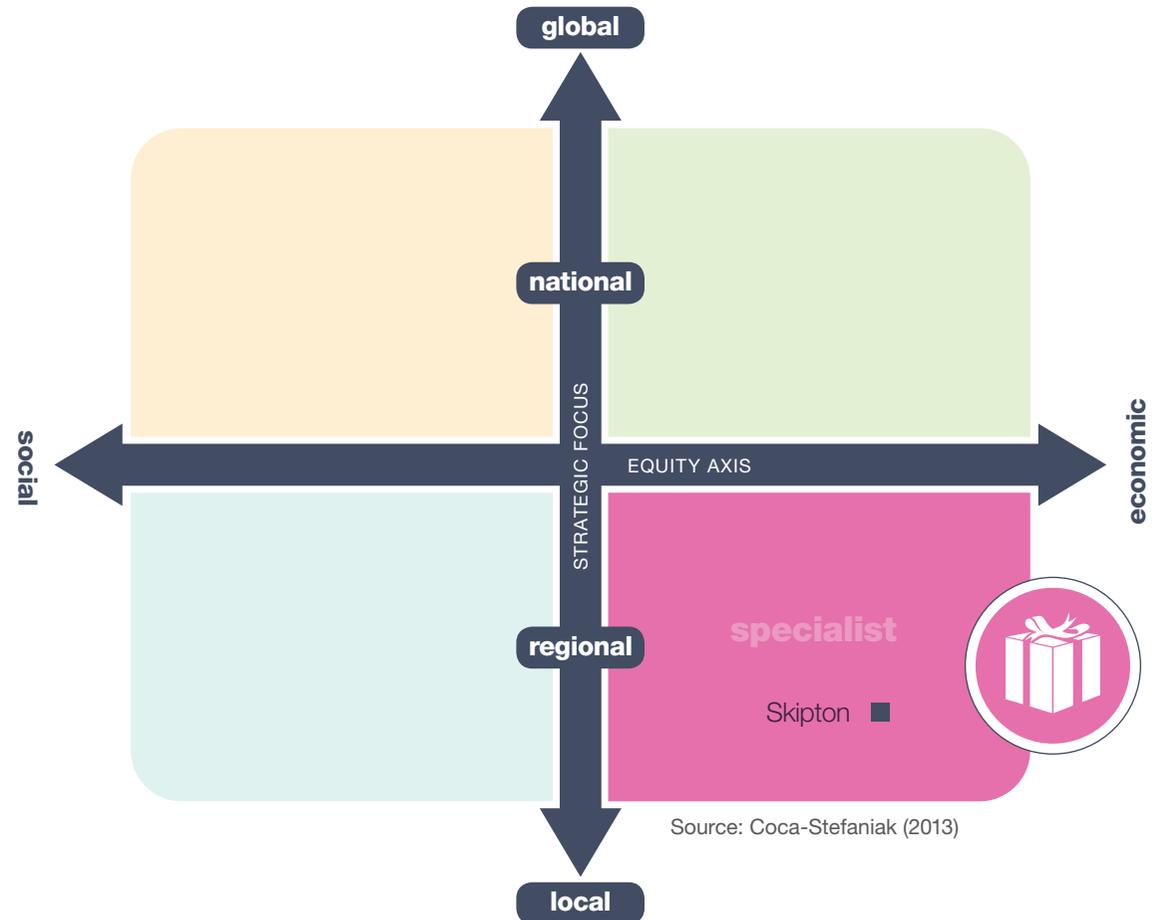
Source: Coca-Stefaniak (2013)

Global celebrities.

This type of town and city centre tends to include mainly globally known players with a higher level of equity emphasis on economic performance with big retail brands as their main pull factor to attract overseas and/or national visitors.

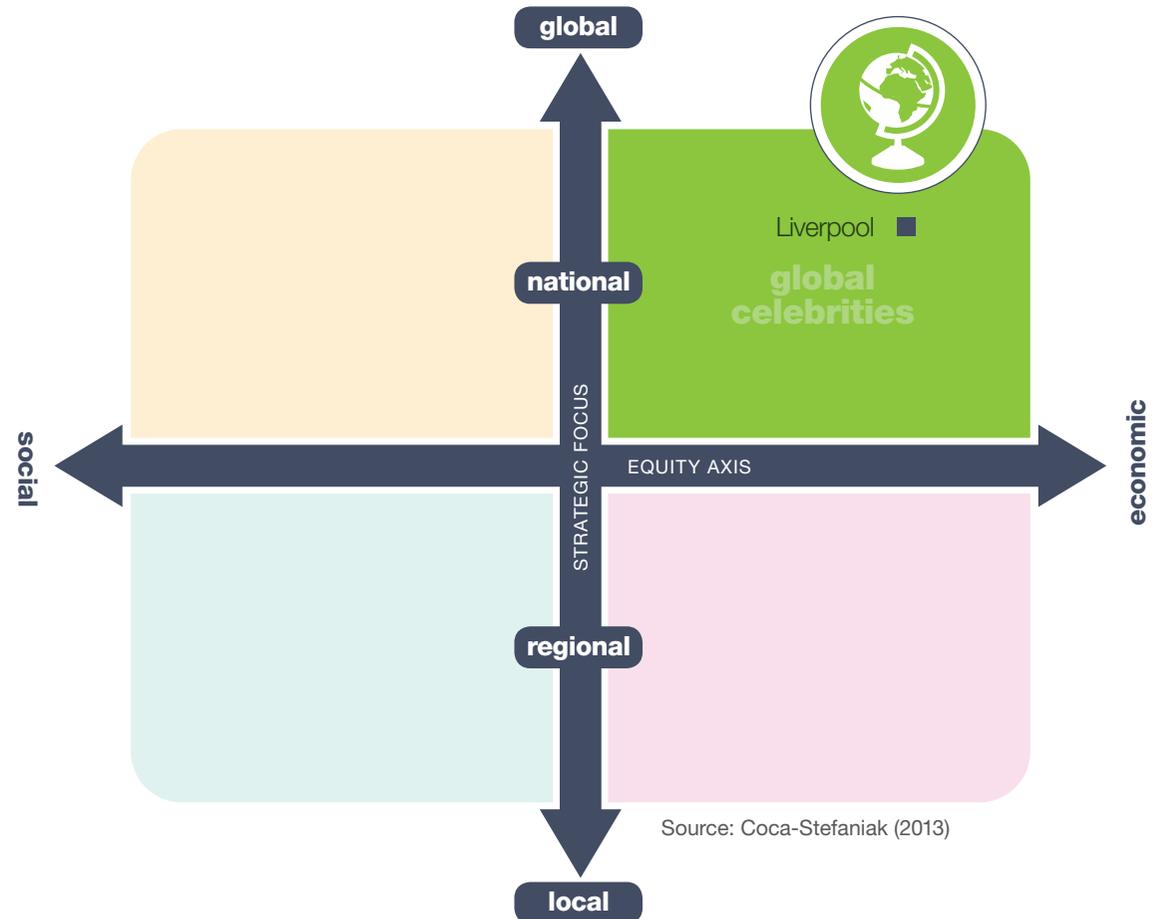Some of the strengths of these towns and centres may include:

- *large yearly volumes of visitors*
- *a buoyant level of business confidence*
- *favourable crime and safety perceptions amongst key stakeholders*
- *high levels of retail sales*

On the other hand, some of their limitations may include:

- *a rather standardised (globalised) retail offer with local produce, local arts and crafts hardly available*
- *weak or relatively non-existent community spirit*
- *a visitor offer that targets specific (and more lucrative) segments of the market with low or non-existent levels of offer for people with more modest levels of expendable income*

International examples that would fit this category well include city centres and major High Streets in Dubai, Hong Kong, Manhattan and Frankfurt. In the UK, Oxford Street and Bond Street in London, Princess Street in Edinburgh, or Liverpool's city centre would fit this category well.
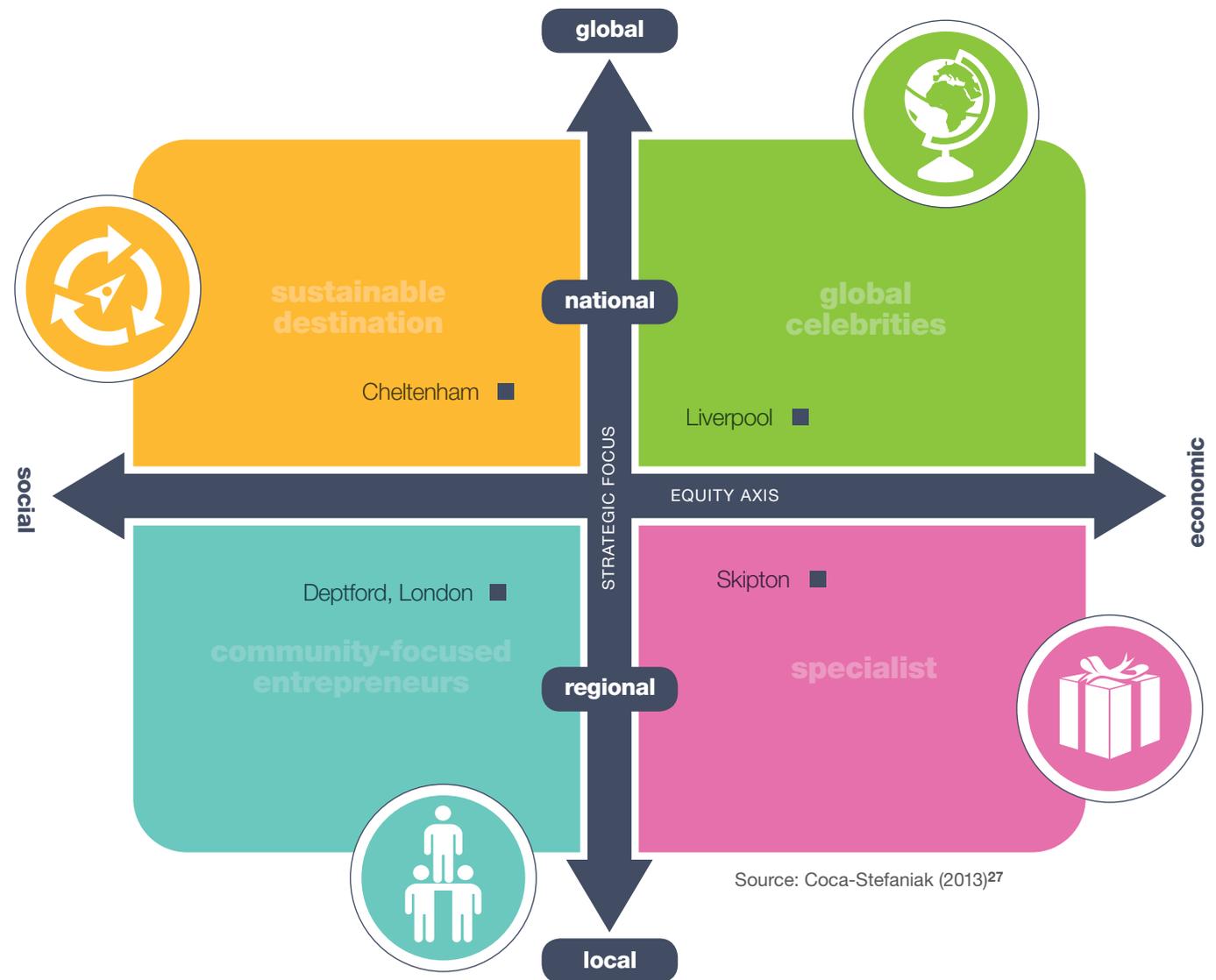
town centre classification matrix

global

national

STRATEGIC FOCUS

social — EQUITY AXIS — economic

Liverpool ■

global celebrities

regional

local

Source: Coca-Stefaniak (2013)

3. exemplar town centre case studies.

The next section outlines a few examples of English town and city centres that fit one of the four categories of the Town Centre Classification Matrix.

For more details on these and other town centre case studies please read **Annex B.**

global

national

STRATEGIC FOCUS

social

EQUITY AXIS

economic

sustainable destination

Cheltenham ■

global celebrities

Liverpool ■

community-focused entrepreneurs

Deptford, London ■

Skipton ■

specialist

regional

local

Source: Coca-Stefaniak (2013)[27]

Deptford.

Deptford high street is a diverse, vibrant high street with a mix of retail units which ranges from ethnic food shops to pound shops and up to art galleries, there is a real mix of a burgeoning, cultural retail scene along side some more traditional and ethnic shops.

This has changed greatly over the last 30 years, since the 1980s, the street market was the main shopping opportunity, and traditional retail shops with the British grocers, butchers etc. It has changed over the last 30 years quite significantly because of the way the different type of people have come into the area. Deptford now has a strong Nigerian, Caribbean and Vietnamese community all who want to have a nice strong market culture and therefore what is sold reflects their tastes.

Over the last 10 years a new wave of artists have moved into the area and they have opened up art galleries, art studios and little pop-up shops which have started to regenerate people to the area as well, so it has changed a significantly.

The redevelopment that is happening is important, a huge development called Convoys Wharf is being built at the end of the high street to bring people into the area. This is a development of retails spaces and residential. There will also be the Thames clipper that will stop at the end of Deptford High Street to bring people in from further afield. Deptford has a good protectory in terms of public perception in South London.

Cheltenham.

Cheltenham is now known as a 'festival town', the biggest festival being the International Literature Festival. Cheltenham's evening economy is extremely important and is growing, partly due to the higher education college turning into a university a few years ago, increasing the number of students coming to the town and providing an important boost to the economy.

Cheltenham has superb parks and gardens right in the middle of the town so residents and visitors can go to the shops and the park without having to out of their way. That's great any time of year, but brilliant in the summer and means people can slow their day down, get some fresh air and enjoy some greenery, so it gives the town an air of calm. Added to that, Cheltenham is the most complete Regency town in the country with some fantastic architecture, which of course is a plus and a minus as there is a need to preserve the look of the town without stopping development, which is a fine line to tread.

The shopping and the café culture added to all that make the town into a great package. It's that mix that makes it such a nice town.

Cheltenham's main strengths are it's strong retail offering in an attractive environment and the fact that there's enough on offer to entice people to stay for day, the evening and longer, to enjoy restaurants, festivals, racing, theatre or just use it as a base to explore the Cotswolds.

Skipton.

Skipton is first and foremost a medieval market town and that's where its heritage lies. It was the main trading centre for all the farming industry in and around the Yorkshire Dales and up until about 20 years ago the main auction markets were held for two or three days a week in the centre of the town, with everything based around trading animals (mainly sheep, which is where the name comes from: Skipton means 'sheep town'). Skipton is now marketed as the gateway to the Yorkshire Dales to attract tourism.

The mixture of retail is important. Skipton has a great mixture of national chains and local shops, so is not too reliant on national chains. Fortunately, that means that when problems occur, such as when Woolworths left the high street a few years ago, it wasn't too difficult to find local businesses to replace them. Because there's not an over-reliance on national brands, if anything happens from a national economy point of view, like HMV losing high street stores recently, it doesn't have as big an impact on Skipton, because of the high proportion of independent retailers.

Whereas most places have a weekly market, Skipton's very unique market takes place four days a week. An outdoor market, it takes place on the cobbles on the high street, in the town centre, set up and taken down each day.

Skipton also lays claim to one of the best preserved medieval castles in the country. There are a number of historical aspects to the town which is halfway down the Leeds and Liverpool canal and has lots of little alleyways off the high street, making it a great place to explore, where people can find something different each time they visit.

Liverpool.

Liverpool was a much different place 30 years ago: quite depressed with high unemployment, militant politics and a lot of social unrest, which led to businesses walking away from the city. It has developed dramatically through a steady change in emphasis, with businesses, private and public sector beginning to work together. Over about 20 years Liverpool became more business friendly and more welcoming to new businesses. The transition took a long time but has culminated in a complete business-friendly network, with the city council, businesses, private sector, local transport, the police all much more focussed on helping to make the city better and organisations like the business improvement district put in place.

Liverpool has a clean, green, safe, animated city centre, which is especially important for the night-time economy. A new city centre police station, funded by the private sector, helps to maintain that. There's a lot going on, including a great choice of high standard restaurants. There is now a cruise liner terminal at the riverfront, with an immigration area and around 45 large cruise ships docking each year.

There are more listed buildings than any town or city outside London, making the city a great place just to walk around and enjoy.

Over 60% of visitors now use public transport, the highest number outside London - the city is easily accessible by road, train, bus and underground, helping to keep the city clean and smart. Liverpool One has a huge underground car park and there are a number of other car parks in the city and efforts are being made to ensure parking isn't too expensive, but public transport is now clean, reliable and well priced, making it an attractive option.

4. national performance framework for town centres.

Retail performance and the broader socio-economic performance of our town centres is a field of knowledge that has attracted much attention over the last two decades. There have been recent efforts in Ireland to create a performance framework for high streets and town centres[28]; no single recognised national framework exists in the UK. This situation was identified two years ago in what remains one of the most influential studies in this field today – the Genecon and UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills report "Understanding high street performance"[29].

Standard practice in disciplines such as tourism and events shows a considerable variety of tried and tested monitoring and evaluation (and ultimately performance) frameworks. The London 2012 Olympic Games evaluation framework[30] is perhaps one of the most high profile recent examples with a clear focus on legacy-based performance rather than mere monitoring and evaluation.

It is perhaps therefore surprising that, given the central role that town centres play in tourism and events - often as venues and at the very least as transport hubs - there is no unified framework to address the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of town and city centres in the UK.

In international development, one of the most recent and innovative frameworks of place performance is the United Nations UN-HABITAT 'wheel of urban prosperity' framework[31]. This framework contains a set of indicators tested extensively in various towns and cities around the world, which included leading as well as emerging economies.
From the outset, and following on from consultations with key stakeholders in the public and private sectors[32], it became evident that a national town centre performance framework should fulfil the following criteria:

- *Easy to communicate*
- *Highly visual*
- *Grounded in practice-based published literature*
- *Flexible*
- *Robust*

In effect, the national town centre performance framework developed as part of this study recognises the fact that, independently of their intended strategic positioning, the vast majority of centres will be subject to global, regional, national and local socio-economic trends that will ultimately affect consumer behaviour and business, regardless of the size of the location. Similarly, the coordinated response that most places will develop to address these trends will emerge from some form of localised place management, regardless of how it is implemented in practice[33]. Although a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of place management models is clearly beyond the scope of this study, there appears to be growing (though still contested) evidence that actively managed centres tend to perform better than those that are not managed at all[34]. Therefore, 'effective place management' has been put at the centre of the framework. Around it, in the form of wheel spokes counteracting the weight of global-local trends, are the following indicator themes:

People and footfall
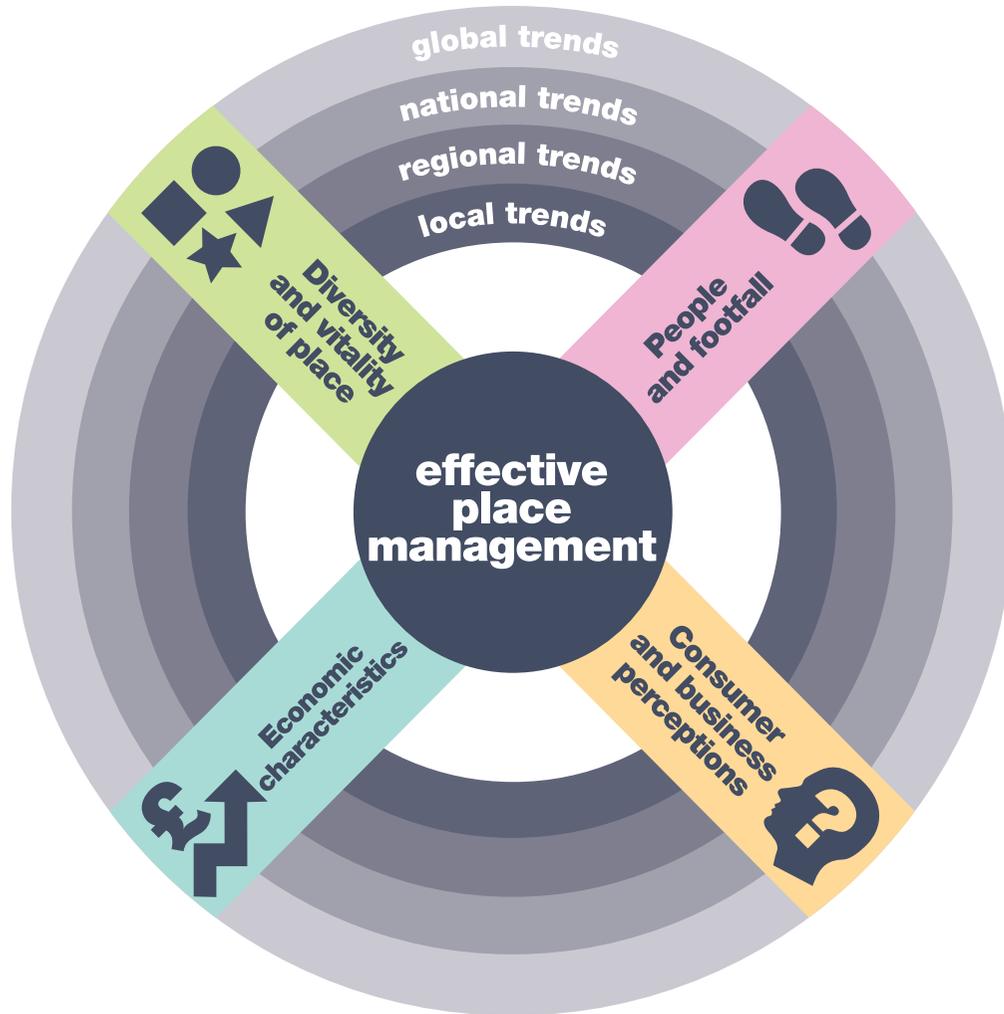
Diversity and vitality of place

Consumer and business perceptions

Economic characteristics

global trends

national trends

regional trends

local trends

Diversity
and vitality
of place

People
and footfall

effective
place
management

Economic
characteristics

Consumer
and business
perceptions

Source: Coca-Stefaniak (2013)

The performance themes proposed are anchored firmly in the recommendations of the "Understanding high street performance" report published by Genecon and the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and link to recent Government thinking about retail and the role of retail in town and city centres[35].

The next section of this report develops this national framework further to propose an indicator-based Barometer Toolkit for the evaluation of the performance of town and city centres at all levels, including single streets, small locations and larger city centres.

This Town Centre Performance Barometer Toolkit represents the second step in the effective strategic positioning of a town centre as it allows for a monitoring and evaluation system to be put in place to check on progress towards the intended (and agreed) strategic vision for that town centre. The first step, the Town Centre 'Personality' Test, is a tool to help identify the current position of the town, and the strategic positioning local place makers feel the town can and should strive to achieve. The Barometer Toolkit is aimed at place management partnerships (this could be a Town Team, or any other collective organisation working to drive positive change in their town) and key decision makers at local level, but is not intended to be used as a benchmarking exercise or a mechanism for central government or Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to apportion funding for interventions.

5. town centre performance toolkit.

Introduction.

The use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor the performance of town and city centres in the UK and overseas is nothing new to town centre managers, local economic development officers and regeneration professionals. In 2001, a study carried out by researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University[36] found that car park usage, footfall, vacant properties, retail sales and various types of crime were used regularly by town centre management partnerships as measures of performance.

More recently, many of the indicators suggested in 2005 by Government policy for the monitoring of high street and town centre performance (e.g. PPS6) have been adopted since by a number of commercial organisations*, local authorities[37] and public-private town centre management partnerships.

The indicator-based toolkit presented here builds on this previous field of experience using themes, indicators and a system compatible with other similar town centre health checks. However, unlike some of its predecessors, the Town Centre Performance Barometer Toolkit presented here offers a number of innovative elements that make it unique, namely:

It is ground breaking. Effectively, this barometer tool kit finally demystifies town centre key performance indicators (KPIs) by explaining clearly in each case what each indicator does, why it is important, how to collect data for it without prior knowledge of research methods or statistics, and how to get even more from each indicator using additional research.

It is compatible. The national town centre performance framework and its associated barometer toolkit have been developed in such a way that they are compatible with the use of indicators from other toolkits (commercial and in-house).

It is flexible. This barometer toolkit gives users the option of collecting their own indicator data for a single street, town or city centre using methodologies designed and field tested specifically for this toolkit.
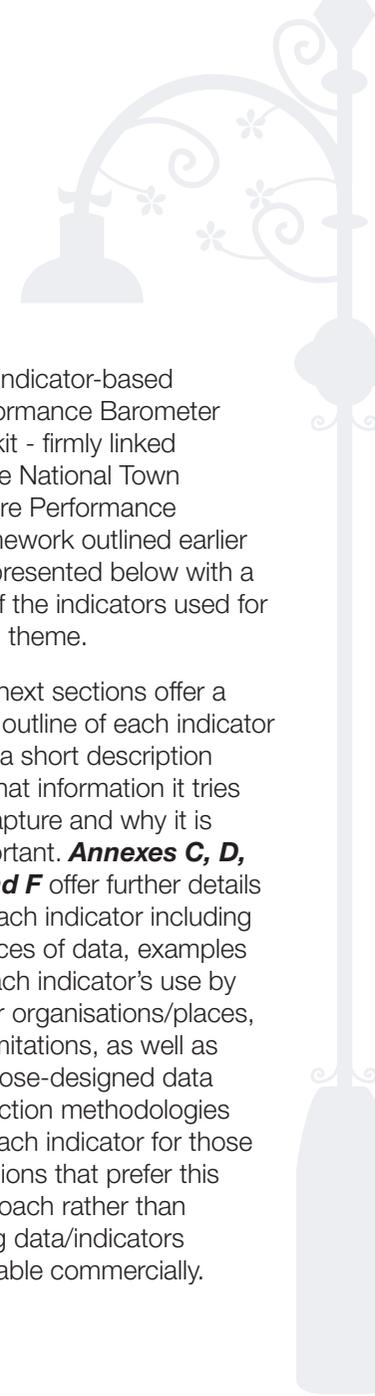
It is strategic. The barometer toolkit presented here links directly to the development of clear town centre strategy formulation and the impact of implementing strategy on performance. It does this through the Town Centre Classification Matrix and the Town Centre 'Personality' Test, both of which were designed and field tested in parallel with this performance Barometer Toolkit.

It contrasts perception with facts. There is a deliberate mix of fact and perception-based indicators in this performance barometer toolkit. Some of these have been built in as validation checks for the same parameter (e.g. crime), where reality and perception may be quite different (e.g. reported crime versus crime and safety perception indicators).

It avoids benchmarking. For each indicator every effort has been made for the data collected to be meaningful by combining descriptive and number-based analysis. The purpose of this is to encourage users to investigate the specific performance measures of each indicator for their place and avoid making solely number-based comparisons (e.g. benchmarking) with other town and city centres that exist and work in a completely different context. The importance of this issue for the effective management of places emerged from a series of focus group consultations with practitioners in local economic development, place management and regeneration.

It is free and optional. Everything in the design of this barometer, from the national framework to the indicators themselves, has been thought out so as to bring state of the art knowledge and practice in this field to local communities, town centre businesses and other key local stakeholders. Similarly, the Barometer Toolkit has been designed in such a way that, aside from the investment of people's time, no other financial resources may be necessary to apply it to town centres across the country. More importantly, the barometer toolkit is not intended to be used by central government or any other agency (including Local Enterprise Partnerships) as a mechanism for awarding funding to specific locations that may be deemed to be underperforming.

the indicator-based performance toolkit:

national framework theme	indicators
People and footfall	Footfall
	Geographical catchment
	Access
	Car Parking
	Community spirit
Diversity and vitality of place	Retail offer
	Culture and leisure offer
	Events
	Reported crime
	Markets
Consumer and business perceptions	Business confidence
	Town centre visitor satisfaction with retail offer
	Visitor experience satisfaction
	Attractiveness
	Crime and safety perception
Economic characteristics	Retail sales
	Partnership working
	Charity shops
	Vacant retail units
	Evening/night time economy

The indicator-based Performance Barometer Toolkit - firmly linked to the National Town Centre Performance Framework outlined earlier - is presented below with a list of the indicators used for each theme.

The next sections offer a brief outline of each indicator with a short description of what information it tries to capture and why it is important. ***Annexes C, D, E and F*** offer further details on each indicator including sources of data, examples of each indicator's use by other organisations/places, its limitations, as well as purpose-designed data collection methodologies for each indicator for those locations that prefer this approach rather than using data/indicators available commercially.

national framework theme: people and footfall

This theme groups five key performance indicators:

- *Footfall*
- *Geographical catchment*
- *Access*
- *Car parking*
- *Community spirit*

The overall aim in this theme is to provide an assessment of who comes to visit the town centre, what their socio-economic background is likely to be, how close they feel to the people around them in terms of community cohesion and how they travel to the town centre. The town centre's car parking capacity (in or around the town centre) is also included to account for the fact that a large proportion of visitors to many town centres still travel to them using their own means of private transport in a similar way to how they would visit out-of-town shopping malls. This indicator also allows users to monitor the impact of energy prices and other trends on transport-related customer behaviour.

Footfall.

This indicator refers to the number of people walking up and down a given town centre (or single street) regardless of their reasons for doing so. Typical reasons may include shopping, a pleasant stroll, going to work or college, to the cinema or for a meal, accessing public services, visiting friends or simply passing through.

Footfall is often linked to the level of attractiveness of a location and its ability to satisfy customer and visitor needs and expectations successfully.

Geographical catchment.

This indicator refers to the places (postcodes in this case) that people have travelled from to visit the town centre.

A town centre doesn't just serve those who live and work directly in it. It tends to attract people from neighbouring areas and often from further afield. For a town centre to remain resilient in its offer of products and services, it needs to have a good understanding not only of its visitors' preferences but also where they live, which is likely to be related to a number of other socio-economic variables (e.g. income, education). A thorough understanding of this indicator will help a town centre to ensure it has the right retail, service and leisure offer, signage, transport infrastructure and that, ultimately, it caters for the needs and aspirations of its visitors including local residents visiting 'their' town centre.

Access.

This indicator refers to the mode(s) of transport used by visitors and local residents to reach the town centre.

A good understanding of how people access a town centre can help urban planners and key decision makers with investment decisions. Similarly, businesses in a town centre will be interested in this information in order to establish the potential demand for added value offers to customers (e.g. free home delivery or refunding bus fares or parking charges if they spend over a threshold). In some cases, decisions by existing and potential visitors to come to a town centre may also be influenced by their awareness of access options, which may or may not tally with available modes of transport actually available, which suggests there is a need for marketing and communications.

Car Parking.

This indicator refers to the total car parking capacity (public and private) and use in an around the town centre.

For many people, the possibility of driving into town and parking their car in a safe car park remains a considerable element of convenience-based attractiveness as it grants them a higher sense of perceived comfort and independence. Many retailers and high street businesses would tend to agree with this and, in some cases, would prefer for their customers to be able to park near their shop or outlet for ease of access. The final value of this indicator includes deliberately park-and-ride car parking spaces as this is an option sometimes favoured by visitors who are keen to avoid or reduce their impact on traffic congestion and air pollution in town centres.

Measuring and monitoring the level of car park usage, along with footfall and retail sales contributes to a dynamic picture of activity levels in the town centre. Over time, this data can provide the basis of a comparison between actual versus perceived variances of activity and the impact of initiatives like events, special offers and the arrival or departure of high profile businesses (e.g. closure of Woolworths or the opening of a Primark). When looked at alongside "geographical catchment" it becomes possible to see what draws people in from further afield.

Community spirit.

This indicator attempts to capture local perception and experience of the strength of the bonds that keep the community together in and around the town centre.

Community spirit is closely associated to various elements of social cohesion and, in some cases, a sense of pride of place and even customer loyalty. Stronger community bonds can be instrumental in a town centre's ability to address and surpass resident and visitors' needs and expectations by providing genuine local ambassadors for the high street in the form of the area's local residents themselves. This sentiment can be fundamental to the success of projects and interventions linked to concepts such as localism, consumer loyalty and the Big Society. Community spirit is also a key element of quality of life. Evidence suggests that people who feel part of their place are happier and more willing to get involved in sharing their skills to make things happen locally. This can create a positive spiral of activity, distinctiveness and satisfaction.

national framework theme: diversity and vitality of place

This theme groups five key performance indicators:

- *Retail offer*
- *Culture and leisure offer*
- *Events*
- *Reported crime*
- *Markets*

The overall aim in this theme is to provide an assessment of the actual offer of the town centre and its diversity taking a holistic approach that includes its daytime, evening and night-time economies. This holistic approach does not differentiate here between the public and private sectors as it is interpreted that both contribute to the provision of services, products and an overall experience for town centre visitors to enjoy and keep coming back to. However, this theme does not monitor consumer demand, expectations or their perceptions of the offer provided by the town centre which is covered by the next barometer theme.

Retail offer.

This indicator keeps track of the range and variety of retail goods and services offered in the town centre, measured as the change in the number of businesses in each category over a 12-month period.

In order to remain competitive, town centres need to ensure they provide a level of offer that matches the demand of their current (or intended) visitors and consumers. This indicator is often linked to footfall and levels of business as well as visitor satisfaction. It can also be used (in conjunction with other indicators) to monitor the balance and relationship between the area's day-time and night-time/evening economies. In order to achieve that, this indicator takes a wide interpretation of retail offer that includes products (e.g. clothes, food) as well as services (e.g. bank branches, restaurants, cafes). This indicator helps to identify gaps in the retail offer that could be targeted for inward investment or start-up support and is information that potential providers will find valuable. This indicator also provides its users with the means to monitor whether their town centre is becoming too dominated by a single type of retail offer (e.g. pound shops, charity shops, pubs/bars).

Outlets with an alcohol license are considered to be "retail" businesses in this indicator. The retail service element of this indicator deliberately ignores leisure elements without a license for the sale of alcohol, as these are dealt with in another indicator (culture and leisure).

Culture and leisure offer.

This indicator captures the variety of leisure-related services offered in the town centre, including publicly supported services such as swimming pools and theatres.

Interaction with other people, cultural activities and a bit of enjoyment not related to a 'to do/buy' list are some of the many reasons why people come to town centres. This indicator captures this characteristic of town centre activity. In fact, the culture and leisure offer can be monitored to establish the extent to which people use a town centre in a functional sense only (e.g. just to shop) or in a wider context (e.g. spend time people watching or going to the cinema).

As in the case of the "retail offer" indicator, there may be a clear distinction here between the day-time, evening and high-time, which merits investigation.

This indicator deliberately targets non-alcohol leisure offer as outlets with an alcohol license were counted in the "retail offer" indicator. To some extent, this indicator will allow you to establish how well your town centre caters for non-alcohol related leisure activities, which may be preferred by certain segments of society, including families and pensioners.

Events.

This indicator keeps track of the number of events held in the town centre public realm, measured using local authority's data of event licenses awarded over a 12-month period and those held in town centre venues that have a significant impact on footfall.

Events and festivals are a major reason for people to come to town centres. A diverse event offer can be a major source of attraction for visitors as well as local residents, particularly if these events take place throughout the year and are aimed at different audiences (e.g. cultural tourists, business tourists, young people, children, families, ethnic minorities). Events can make a significant contribution to the local economy and foster a stronger sense of community among residents, pride of place, and inclusiveness. Typically, events may range from small carnivals or fairs to major cultural festivals, conferences, or Light Nights[38] that invite residents and visitors to experience their town centre at night through a diverse offer of comedy, magic, music and other performances.

Reported crime.

This indicator monitors the number of reported incidents of crimes in a range of categories in the town centre.

In some cases, fear of crime can act as a deterrent for people not to visit a town centre, particularly in the evenings and at night. Yet, as powerful as perceptions can be in influencing people's behaviour, they are not always directly related to reality. This indicator will allow its users to contrast these perceptions (captured in the "crime and safety perceptions" indicator) with actual reported crime statistics. This can give town centre champions a powerful tool to dispel fears and change perceptions.

Markets.

This indicator monitors the existence of regular markets in the town centre.

Markets, like events, can be a major motivating factor for people to come to a town centre. The presence of a regular (albeit temporary) traditional market can add diversity to the retail offer of a town centre and can act as a catalyst for other more specialist markets to come to the area, including farmers' markets, artisan markets, continental markets, Christmas markets, night markets, etc. All this can contribute to the area's diversity of offer, satisfy a wider range of needs and attract local residents as well as visitors from a growing catchment area.
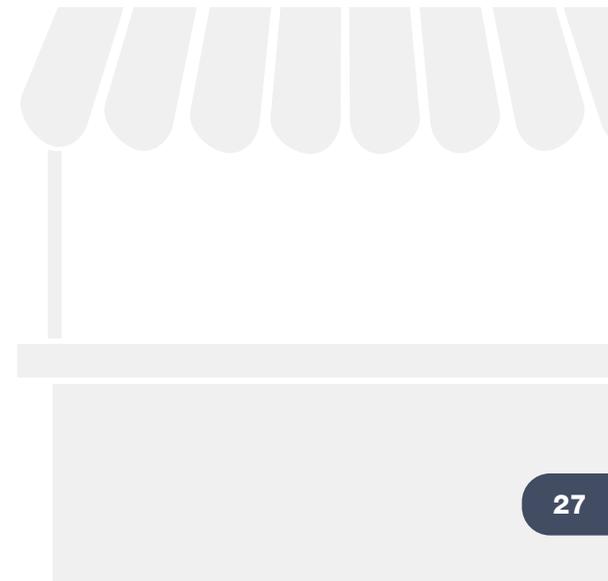
national framework theme: consumer and business perceptions

This theme groups five key performance indicators:
- *Business confidence*
- *Town centre visitor satisfaction with retail offer*
- *Visitor experience satisfaction*
- *Attractiveness*
- *Crime and safety perception*

The overall aim in this theme is to provide users with a glimpse into an issue that can make or break a town centre on its own, and can be one of the most challenging things to change – perceptions. This theme effectively tests the extent to which the town centre's overall offer - in a holistic sense, anyway - satisfies the expectations, wants and needs of its stakeholders, focusing primarily on businesses, visitors and local residents. If, in spite of a town centre's best efforts to match this demand, perceptions remain negative, the indicators presented in this theme will allow users to explore specific issues further. By gaining a better understanding of these perceptions, strategies for changing them for the better can be developed in partnership with stakeholders. Through this process, the developing of a relationship with businesses, visitors and residents can be grounded in reality, shared fate, and mutual trust.

Business confidence.

This indicator monitors changes in the level of business confidence among businesses operating in the town centre.

Business confidence can be as much about perceptions and fear of future developments in the economy as actual turnover and profit margins. Business confidence has been measured in the past on the basis of whether business turnover (sales) was likely to increase or decrease. The perception of business confidence captured by this indicator focuses on expected profitability (not turnover) over the next 12 months.

Town centre visitor satisfaction with retail offer.

This indicator keeps track of changes in visitors' satisfaction levels with their town centre retail and services offered, but not public services.

Visitor in this context include local residents and their satisfaction with the overall retail offer available on a high street as well as other services (e.g. cafes, banks, restaurants) not provided by the public sector. This is a key measure of how well a high street meets consumer demand and a key area of strategic importance to high street performance. This indicator can reveal the 'leakage' of local shopping to other locations, although not with any great depth, which would require more sophisticated market research.

Visitor experience satisfaction.

This indicator complements the "town centre visitor offer" indicator by monitoring visitors' satisfaction with the town centre experience but not specifically with retail offer.

Even if visitors and local residents are satisfied with the range of goods and services available in the town centre's retail, cultural and leisure offer, their experience when visiting involves a much broader range of factors. In order to encourage people to linger longer, spend more and return they need to have an overall positive experience. Overall cleanliness, signage, public toilet arrangements, good lighting after dark, and ease of movement around the public realm amongst other factors have both a direct and subliminal impact on how a visitor feels about a place. This indicator helps to monitor satisfaction levels with these services.
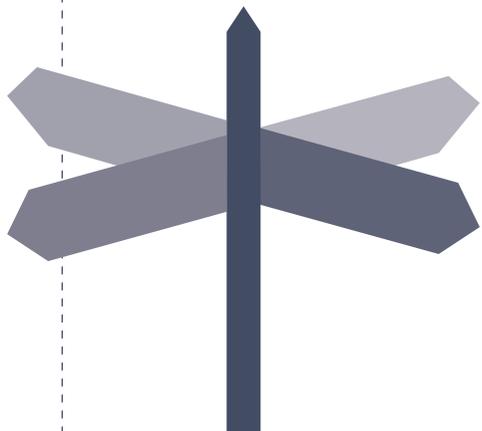
Attractiveness.

This indicator monitors visitors' perceptions of the town centre's overall level of place attractiveness taking a holistic view of the town centre as a place, which includes retail but is not limited to it.

Attractiveness can be a very subjective perception. Other indicators (e.g. "high street visitor offer" and "visitor satisfaction") suggested here attempt to measure more functional aspects of the high street. Instead, this indicator attempts to establish how much people actually like the town centre as a place to spend time.

Crime and safety perception.

This indicator monitors changes in businesses' and visitors' perception of crime and safety in the town centre.

The link between perception and reality is not always a straightforward one to assess. In some areas, reported crime may be low and yet public perception really negative, particularly among people who are not local to that area. It is not uncommon for a place to have a reputation as dangerous or violent, based on a high profile incident or period a good few years ago, which is no longer relevant but remains in the collective 'psyche'. When used in conjunction with the "reported crime" indicator outlined above, this indicator provides a meaningful comparison of facts versus sentiment.

national framework theme: *economic characteristics*

This theme groups five key performance indicators:

- *Retail sales*
- *Partnership working*
- *Charity shops*
- *Vacant retail units*
- *Evening/night time economy*

The overall aim in this theme is to provide users with an assessment of static and dynamic elements linked to the economic performance of a town centre. Some of the more 'static' elements, which in turn may influence perceptions, too, will include changes in the number of charity shops or vacant retail units. On the other hand, more 'dynamic' elements such as evidence of partnership working or active management of the evening economy offer insights into the town centre's willingness to pull together and adopt a purposeful way forward to make it a more sustainably prosperous place regardless of the level of resources at its disposal.

Retail sales.

This indicator tracks changes in retail sales in the town centre taking the sum of all the businesses willing to volunteer this data.

A town centre may be very successful at attracting visitors and local residents. However, ultimately, if it is to survive financially, it needs to translate footfall into actual consumer spending. Having established the number of people visiting a town centre using the "footfall" indicator, this indicator closes the loop by establishing consumer spending in the same locations where "footfall" was measured.
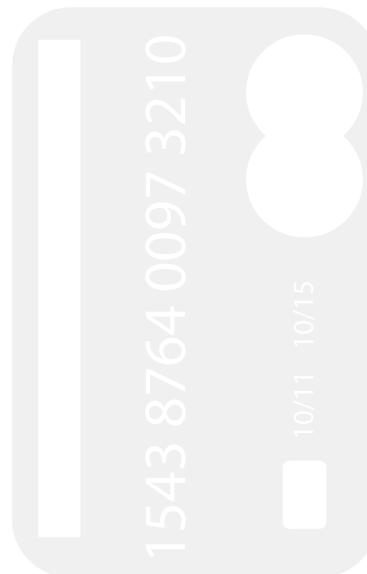
Partnership working.

This indicator monitors evidence of a partnership approach to developing and managing the town centre at a number of levels that include the daytime, evening and night-time economies.

The management and development of town centres does not rely solely on the resources of local authorities. A large array of partnership formats exists, which range from informal local partnerships of retailers and concerned citizens, to sophisticated private sector-led partnerships including Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). In fact, working in partnership with other organisations often allows local authorities and public service providers to deliver their services more effectively and to achieve more robust strategic decision-making. Equally, for businesses operating in the town centre, their trading environment does not stop at their front door – the conditions in and around the town centre have a direct impact on their business and their staff. So, the town centre has a direct impact on both their business and their staff. As a result of this, both business and public sector organisations have a vested interest in working with each other and other local stakeholders including residents and third sector enterprises. This indicator allows users to monitor the extent to which partnership working has been implemented in a town centre to improve its performance.

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Charity shops.

This indicator monitors yearly changes in the number of charity shops in a town centre.

Over the last fifteen years, the proliferation of charity shops in town centres may have been interpreted in certain circles as a sign of decline. On the other hand, charity shops fill an important gap in the retail offer of any town centre, not just in towns and cities with more modest income catchment areas and/or ageing demographics. Charity shops provide a valuable re-use and re-cycling function reducing the volume of waste going to landfill and bring in valuable income for worthy causes. Regardless of how the existence of charity shops is interpreted, their growth or decline impacts on perceptions and forms an important element in the monitoring of the economic performance of any town centre. This indicator alone can act as a barometer for the impact of strategic decisions on the daytime economy of a town centre.

Vacant retail units.

This indicator monitors changes in a town centre's vacant retail units.

An increase in vacant retail units in town centres has traditionally been linked to economic decline both locally and nationally. On the other hand, this could also be interpreted as a temporary opportunity for the town centre to re-balance strategically its visitor offer, and a chance for culture and leisure-related outlets and community services to gain more of a foothold in the town centre. Regardless of how vacant retail units are interpreted, their growth or decline forms an important element in the monitoring of the economic performance of any town centre.

Evening/night time economy.

This indicator monitors evidence of active management of the evening and night time economies in the town centre.

The majority of town and city centres (or at least parts of them) do not go to sleep after the last shop closes for the day. They often have evening and night time economies too, which may vary in size and character from one location to another. In some areas, this part of the economy forms a crucial part of the service offer. In many cases, the town centre attracts a completely different demographic of customer with different needs and expectations 'after dark' to those who visit the high street during day time. It is also worth distinguishing between the evening consumer (5-8 pm often referred to as the 'shoulder period') and late night, which again can have quite different demographics. Evidence is building to support the collective and active management of town centres after dark to increase visitor confidence, improve perceptions, prevent crime and disorder, and provide a healthy trading environment for a range of businesses and providers who operate at night. This indicator enables users to monitor how effectively the evening and night time economies are managed (if they are managed at all) in a town centre.

6. concluding remarks.

This study has outlined some of the challenges faced by the high street based retail sector and its wider town centre environment in the UK adopting a holistic approach. Unlike previous studies of this nature, this report adopts a 24-hr approach to the performance and prosperity of locations that brings the day time, evening and night time economies under the same umbrella with a wider definition of retail that includes leisure, public facilities and other services offered by high streets and their surrounding areas.

The state-of-the-art strategic tools developed as part of this study have been tested primarily in town and city centres of varying sizes, including market towns and large cities. However, their scope for use extends to events, villages, rural environments as well as townships engaged in international development projects, though the concept would need to undergo pilot testing first in each of these contexts.

This study has analysed town centres largely from a static point of view in terms of their built environment. In other words, the overarching assumption for the analysis was that high streets and town centres will not change dramatically in their physical appearance, design and facilities in the short and medium term. This is an area that merits further study in line with current thinking, which argues that thoughtful sustainable urban design can have a positive influence on the performance of town centres[39]. In line with this, the role of effective place management as part of the national framework presented in this study should play a more active role in the strategic spatial design and planning of town centres and their surrounding areas to ensure that elements with a potential effect on the prosperity of nearby town centres and high streets are taken into account at the early planning stages.

In their current format, the barometer toolkit and the national town centre performance evaluation framework it is grounded in can be linked directly to a number of tools available online, including the Association of Town and City Management's "A 100 ways to help the high street"[40], which offers practical advice and training to help places become the best they can be.

An integrated online solution that merges the strategic tools outlined here with other online solutions (available free of charge or otherwise) would increase the availability and widespread use of the barometer toolkit, the town centre 'personality' test and its associated classification matrix.

Similarly, further field testing and development of the barometer toolkit would allow users to explore parallel uses of this tool in conjunction with the national town centre performance evaluation framework. One such approach would include the development of weightings for each indicator based on extensive field research, which would allow for indexes to be developed for each theme of the barometer toolkit. Another option would involve the development of a balanced score card system using the national town centre performance evaluation framework, which would allow locations to monitor their progress towards their strategic objectives adopting an intensely local approach to the national framework and moving away from simplistic benchmarking practices.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of key decision makers - including residents and local businesses - to adopt these strategic tools proactively and unleash the true potential of market towns, town and city centres and other similar centres. This study has adopted a ground-breaking approach by demystifying performance indicators and providing methodologies that anyone can follow without prior knowledge of market research or statistics. This empowering approach should now be taken advantage of by communities across the country that want to retain town centres and high streets as the beating hearts of their locations and places where people like to come back to and stay in.

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