

25 'Vital and Viable' Priorities

# Appearance



## What are the 25 vital and viable priorities?

Research from the Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University has identified the Top 25 priorities that can influence high street vitality and viability.

The framework was created by experts from a range of disciplines and other stakeholders to foster cross-disciplinary knowledge and broadening real-world understanding of the changing nature of the high street.

The 25 priorities are practically orientated and, given their ability to be controlled or influenced at a town level, are fairly internally focussed. For each of the priorities you will find an introduction to evidence that describes the priority, suggests what it covers, discusses how it might be implemented and the level of control associated with it.

Additionally, you will find suggestions of what the priority could mean for implementation during the COVID-19 recovery stage.

## Appearance

### Factors included in Appearance

Visual appearance; cleanliness; ground floor frontages.

### Ranking

Appearance	Rank	Score	Descriptor
Influence	13 <sup>rd</sup> out of 25	4 out of 5	Highly Influential
Control	3 <sup>rd</sup> out of 25	3.68 out of 4	Potentially controllable
25 Priorities	5 <sup>th</sup> out of 25	14.64	Very high priority

### Description/Definition

Appearance refers to the quality of the public realm and aesthetics of a place. It involves cleanliness, but also other aspects that can translate into positive (or negative) experiences such as lighting, green elements (e.g. trees or flower baskets or beds), congruent landscape (in harmony with the vision and identity of the town), and management of unused spaces.

Appearance is related to customer or citizens satisfaction and perceptions of safety, and it is in turn linked to footfall levels and economic activity.

### Why does it matter? (Influence)

The physical appearance of a location, as determined by the visual aesthetic, quality of the public realm, storefront and building appearance, cleanliness, lighting, and floral displays, is an important

visual cue which visitors use to judge (often subconsciously) how appealing a centre is (Powe and Hart, 2008).

Store appearance is also used as a cue by customers to infer store service quality, which in turn impacts 'dwell time' and propensity to purchase (De Nisco and Warnaby, 2013). Unfortunately, factors such as litter have a negative impact upon how people perceive space – not only does litter reduce people's positive attitudes towards places, it also makes them think that crime is more prevalent (Medway, Parker, and Roper, 2016). Indeed, run-down and unattractive centres are often avoided by potential customers (Wrigley and Lambiri, 2015).

## What can you do about it? (Control)

Improving the appearance of a centre can be tackled by starting with the basics, such as clearing up litter or removing graffiti. A cleaner centre should, in turn, be perceived as a safer centre and drive footfall.

Temporary displays of flowers or lighting, for example, are fairly easy to implement. Large scale public realm improvements are more complicated, possibly needing planning permission, and are likely to reduce footfall whilst work is undertaken. How private landowners maintain their property is another key factor impacting on the appearance of a centre, and although place managers might have less control over this, data and research can encourage investment in maintenance and upgrades, for example, looking at experience in other towns with regard to enlivening vacant property (e.g. pop-up stores, temporary community exhibitions).

Some groups of centre users (e.g. school children and bar/club-goers) drop more litter; so provide higher resources in response. It is also worth looking at regular maintenance reviews to ensure paving, street furniture, and lighting contribute to an appealing environment.

## Appearance and COVID-19

Appearance (and cleanliness) is key in the response of high streets to COVID-19. This factor will be translated into perceived safety, and consequently, reflected in footfall levels. Measures that can improve appearance include:

- Working with businesses to redecorate shop fronts, improve lighting and planting;
- Revising cleansing contracts to focus on commercial areas and reduce the threat of fomite (object to person) transmission, auditing areas that might be touched and include them in regular virucidal cleaning regime;
- Implement a regular litter pick and sprucing up team with volunteers;
- Ensuring people know you have regular cleaning regimes, using signs or some other comms to tell people;
- Developing a consistent visual brand for physical measures introduced to manage pedestrian flow, such as banners, barriers, floor decals and public PPE;
- Using only what is necessary as objects take up valuable space and are also a risk of transmission of the virus;
- Giving local people more agency in the development and maintenance of their place, with training in tactical urbanism, underused or neglected spaces given over for gardening and volunteer teams potentially including local residents, meetup groups, the street population and shopkeepers empowered and incentivised to help maintain cleanliness.

## See also

Experience; Attractiveness; Walking, Place-marketing; Safety

## References

De Nisco, A. and Warnaby, G. (2013), "Shopping in downtown: The effect of urban environment on service quality perception and behavioural intentions", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 41 No. 9, pp. 654-670. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-05-2013-0106>

Medway, D. Parker, C. and Roper, S. (2016). Litter, gender and brand: The anticipation of incivilities and perceptions of crime prevalence. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. 45:135-144. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2015.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2015.12.002)

Powe, N. and Hart, T. (2008), "Market towns: understanding and maintaining functionality", *Town Planning Review*, Vol. 79 No. 4, pp. 347-370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697450903020742>

Wrigley, N. & Lambiri, D. (2015). *British High Streets: from Crisis to Recovery? A Comprehensive Review of the Evidence*. Southampton; 2015. Available from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30341672.pdf>