

COVID-19 Recovery: Best Practice Guide



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About the High Streets Task Force

The High Streets Task Force is an alliance of placemaking experts. Commissioned in 2019 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Task Force provides the encouragement, tools, skills and training that communities and local government need to transform their high streets.

www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk

About the Institute of Place Management

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

www.placemanagement.org

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Contents

Introduction	3
1. Activity.....	4
2. Retail offer	4
3. Experience.....	4
4. Vision and strategy	5
5. Appearance	5
6. Place management	6
7. Necessities	7
8. Anchors.....	7
9. Non-Retail offer	7
10. Merchandise.....	8
11. Walking.....	8
12. Place marketing.....	9
13. Networks and partnerships	10
14. Attractiveness	10
15. Markets.....	11
16. Recreational space.....	11
17. Barriers to new entrants	12
18. Safety and security	13
19. Liveable.....	13
20. Adaptability.....	14
21. Accessible.....	15
22. Innovation.....	16

Introduction

This Best Practice Guide looks at actions being taken in town and city centres across the country to support COVID-19 recovery. It highlights examples but only includes those that the High Streets Task Force has become aware of. The Task Force plans to update the guide during the next few months and would welcome suggestions and examples. Many of the examples in this document may be applicable to your town, city or neighbourhood, but every place has different resources, political landscapes, economies and people: what works for one high street may not work for another.

This guide is designed around the [25 Vital and Viable Priorities Framework](#) that identifies action areas that are most significant for long term success.

The guide includes some references to commercial suppliers where they are working with local place management partnerships. The Task Force is not endorsing any such company named but reporting on the local arrangement. There may be other suppliers offering similar products or services and in all cases you should make your own inquiries.

N.B. This guidance has been created by independent experts on behalf of the High Streets Task Force. It is not intended as Government guidance and we have not sought approval for it to be so.

1. Activity

How can activity levels in the town provide reassurance during the recovery phase? What sort of activity is needed now?

Croydon BID has worked with a number of different departments in the London Borough of Croydon to develop reopening plans and has recruited volunteers with Croydon Voluntary Action to help provide on-street advice and support to businesses and customers, as well as preparing the centre with deep cleans. The BID has also developed good [information pages](#) for Croydon businesses to prepare them for the reopening. A [summary](#) is available on their website.

2. Retail offer

Town centres these days are not necessarily just about retail, but shopping needs to reinvent and update to stay relevant. How is this being done?

Place management partnerships are using a range of place-based tech platforms to develop the online promotional capabilities of independent shops. There are a number of these now existing, but amongst those adopted more widely are:

- *Sheffield, Kendal, Northallerton and Saltaire* are among a range of places in the UK that have signed up to [ShopAppy](#), which takes the high street online, and enables the customer to order from a range of shops in a town centre, with click and collect or delivery options. The service is supported with a podcast for the public and place managers and support for BIDs, Chambers of Commerce and Local Authorities to get businesses onboard.
- *Welwyn Garden City, Lanark and Ulverston* BIDs among 23 locations that have signed up with [LoyalFree](#). The app includes tourist information and local trails, competition functions and allows for monitoring footfall data.
- *Barnard Castle* is one of a number of places in the North East that has signed up to [ROAMLocal](#), an app developed by the [#savethehighstreet](#) campaign. Many of its features are aimed at the shopper in addition to the business and include customer reviews, shopping plans and a 'find my friends' function.

3. Experience

How do place managers present the correct visitor experience, and how does this change as recovery progresses?

Falmouth's positive engagement plan focuses on delivering the best possible experience – both for customers returning to the town and for businesses that are reopening amid considerable uncertainty. Alongside the physical measures – decals, public sanitising stations, signage – that have become ubiquitous in the UK's towns and cities, the [engagement plan](#) focuses on positive messaging and town dressing to welcome customers and visitors back to Falmouth.

4. Vision and strategy

All places need a collective vision - without one, stakeholders work in different directions towards different goals. How can the recovery be used as an opportunity to review and rewrite the local vision?

- *Bath* – Using the High Streets Task Force Recovery Framework, Visit Bath, Bath BID and Bath and North East Somerset Council have worked in partnership to develop a detailed plan for the recovery, which includes street by street physical measures, communications plan and more medium-term visioning to reimagine Bath for the future. The plan involves a range of stakeholders and this has provided the process with the buy-in it needs to be successful.
- *Louth* – Building on the IPM Vital and Viable workshops East Lindsey District Council held for the Lincolnshire towns of Louth, Horncastle, Spilsby, Alford and Mablethorpe, the council has continued the town hall meetings to help develop the vision for the recovery in an example of collaborative best practice. Lydia Rusling, Head of Economic Development at the Council describes the journey in a recent High Streets Task Force [Webinar](#).

5. Appearance

How does the way the town centre looks help to reinforce reassuring messages to returning visitors? How can place managers think about how to use the other senses, all of which play a part in delivering messages about how well a place is looked after?

- *BID Leamington* worked with the District Council to react quickly to the need for a consistent approach to social distancing. In contrast to other places where measures were highways-led, and used barriers and uninviting road closures to enforce social distancing, Leamington worked with [City Dressing](#) to develop a welcoming brand using images of flowers for floor decals and a range of signage with welcoming messages. Engineering firm Arup has also rolled out a modular '[parklet](#)' product which utilises reclaimed parking spaces for attractive, planted seating areas for hospitality businesses. These have been utilised in a number of places in the UK, including for the [Liverpool Without Walls](#) project.
- *The Fitzrovia Partnership* in London quickly determined that safety messages are key to ensuring that shoppers are confident in returning. This led to a change of cleaning schedules and materials to ensure cleansing was visible and the cleaning product used was virucidal and had a reassuring fragrance. [View](#) the Fitzrovia recovery plan.
- In the infographic overleaf, Dr Julie Grail of The BIDs Business reminds us how place perception involves all the senses, and how this might figure in our preparations for reopening:

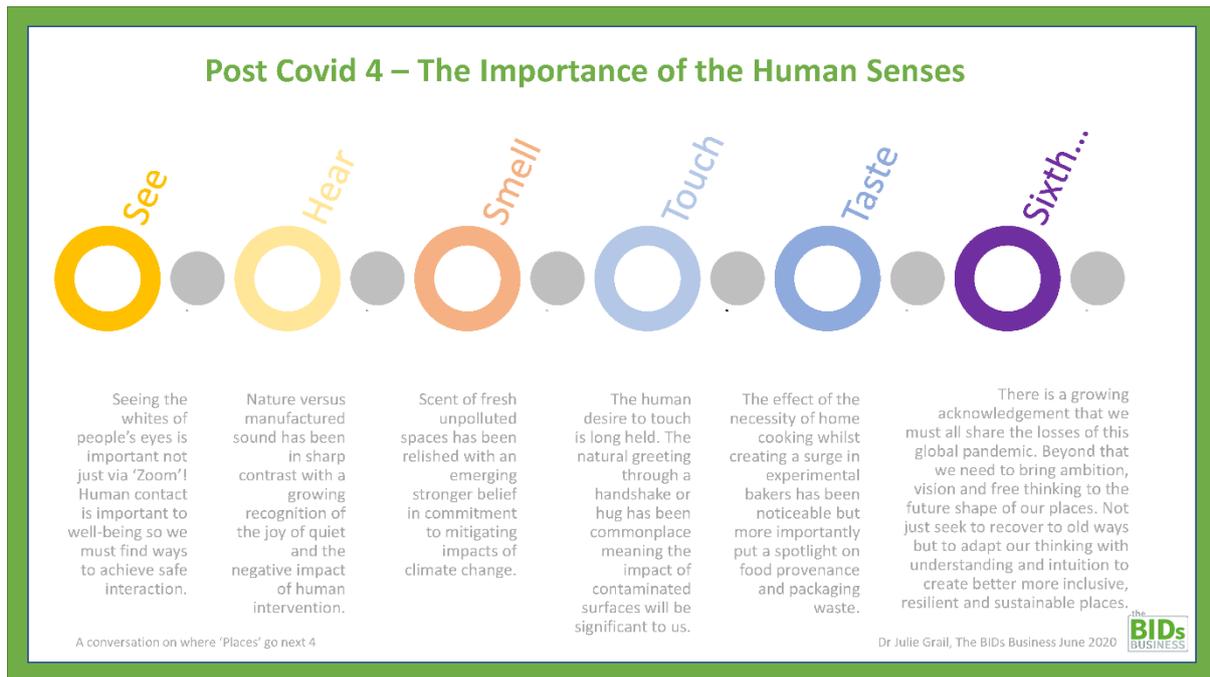


Figure 1: The Importance of the Human Senses (Dr. Julie Grail)

6. Place management

What governance arrangements are places putting in place to plan and deliver in these unique circumstances?

- **Salisbury** – Building on the governance arrangements established to plan for the crisis and recovery stages of the Skripal affair, Salisbury BID, city and county councils, the police and a range of other stakeholders formed an emergency cabinet to plan and implement the recovery. This cooperation and mature communications networks enabled the County to develop an Experimental Traffic Order to plan street closures to reimagine Salisbury for the recovery of the town's hospitality sector, in the [People Friendly Streets Salisbury](#) project, which is now underway.
- **Worcester** – The City Council has worked closely with the BID, DMO function, landowners and other representatives in the city to coordinate its ongoing success. This structure enabled the swift recovery planning work that is described by Tourism and City Centre manager Helen Mole in this High Streets Task Force [webinar](#).

7. Necessities

Car parking, public toilets and other facilities can be important features for the functionality of town centres. How these are being used is changing in the recovery.

Many towns have had to make changes for safety purposes, so shoppers are not returning to the town they knew. “Welcome Back” videos have been used to make clear changes to car parking, toilet availability, one-way systems and queuing. Two very different examples are [Watford](#) and [Solihull BID](#).

8. Anchors

Anchors are the key drivers of footfall in your town centre and can include retail and non-retail attractions. How can these be protected or transformed?

- *Oxford City Council* is working with the landowners of iconic department store *Boswells* to repurpose it as a hotel, in an indication of the continuing shift from retail to leisure or hospitality uses. The involvement of the council is key to ensuring the new use meets the wider [vision](#) for the city.
- John Lewis and House of Fraser are also repurposing some of their unviable stores, and Chapman Taylor has released a [report](#) which investigates CACI data, examples of repurposed department stores and possible uses.
- In 2020, some places including *Bristol* and *London* have benefited from the development of new, Covid-friendly anchors, including in the form of drive in [cinemas](#) and [concerts](#).

9. Non-Retail offer

Many local economies are reliant on a range of other draws, including leisure, culture and hospitality. How are these sectors working together to aid recovery?

- The attractions of the *South Bank, London*, led by Merlin Entertainments (operator of the London Eye, SEALIFE London Aquarium and Shrek Experience), and with the support of the South Bank Employers’ Group and South Bank BID have launched the [SOS London Campaign](#). The campaign has now involved over 10,000 London attractions, restaurants and other businesses that rely on tourism, calling on the Government to invest in domestic and overseas visitor campaigns, plus a further year’s extension to the business rates exemption for tourism businesses.
- Similarly, *Croydon BID* developed and launched the national [Raise the Bar Campaign](#), which seeks an increase to the rateable value threshold from £51,000 to £150,000, to allow more

retail, hospitality and leisure businesses to benefit from the £25,000 government's Coronavirus business support grant.

- Set designers support group Scene Change has [wrapped theatres](#) in *Manchester, Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff* and *London* to highlight the threat to theatres, their employees and suppliers.



Above: National Theatre, London (Copyright: London Evening Standard)

10. Merchandise

How can merchandise be used to engender a sense of local pride and support?

WeAreWaterloo, Wood Green, Luton BID and a number of others have developed a range of branded materials which they supply to levy paying businesses, including hand sanitiser, social distancing decals, PPE and antibacterial spray. These 'welcome back packs' have saved businesses money, provided rapid support and provided a consistent message which champions the place. [View](#) an example from Luton.

11. Walking

Walking in towns and cities is environmentally sustainable and better for the economy. Many places are using Covid-19 to pedestrianise parts of their centres. What examples are there?

Transport for London's [Streetspace](#) plan has been drawn up to rebalance modes of transport to allow for greater access to pedestrians and cyclists during the recovery phase, and reducing the need to travel by public transport. The effects of these measures (e.g. on traffic levels, air quality, modal

shift and public feedback) will be monitored to assess whether they should become permanent in 2021-2.

12. Place marketing

Marketing and promotion are key parts of the recovery - visitors to the town centre need to know what to expect, what's on offer, what's changed and how they are being protected.

- *Bristol's* Destination Management Organisation, Visit Bristol, presented to the BID Foundation on their strategy for promoting domestic tourism and encouraging the return of overseas visitors. This is a well thought out marketing strategy which capitalises on the strong partnerships in Bristol and uses these to drive forward hospitality-friendly measures. You can [watch the presentation online](#).
- The [Welcome Back Manchester](#) campaign developed by *Manchester City Council* with the support of the Heart of Manchester BID is a highly effective vehicle for the message. The eye-catching assets are downloadable and can be used by businesses as well as the usual council partners. They have already been used in large format, including on the sides of buildings.



Above: Welcome Back Manchester campaign (Manchester City Council and Heart of Manchester BID)

13. Networks and partnerships

Covid-19 has led to the development of wider place-based partnerships than ever before.

- Scottish BIDs and Community Improvement Districts are part of the [Scotland's Improvement Districts](#) network, which are united with towns under the [Scotland's Towns Partnership](#). This provides a very effective network which encourages systemic place-based development. This partnership has been instrumental in arranging financial support for places, including through the Scottish Government's Covid-19 BIDs Resilience Fund. *Go Forth Stirling BID* has developed an [extensive programme of support](#) with the help of the partnership, which includes forming of a local task force to deliver PPE supply, training, a virtual high street and an effective 'shop local' campaign.
- The *St Helens* [case study](#) on the High Streets Task Force Resources site describes how the Metropolitan Borough of St Helens used the [HSTF Covid Recovery Framework](#) to consolidate and build on networks to plan for the recovery. A tactical group was set up with a view to broadening the reach of the plan, and businesses and residents were involved in developing and delivering it. The *Norwich BID* and *Team London Bridge* were also early adopters of the framework.

14. Attractiveness

What attracts investment and interest in places? What is distinctive that can be capitalised upon to encourage new businesses to establish, new customers to visit and new settlers to put down roots?

- The Government's Reopening High Streets Safely Fund recognised and supported the need to stress the safety message, as a means to encourage consumer confidence. Campaigns that have reinforced this safety focus include *Cornwall Council*, which ran webinars for hospitality and retail business owners prior to reopening to help them interpret government guidance. This was followed up with a reassuring presence in town centres to direct members of the public and work with businesses, a recovery guide and a message of thanks to businesses for their hard work in preparation. Cornwall is now planning its campaign to shift the message to welcoming back the UK domestic tourism market. Some details are [here](#).

Right: St Ives, Cornwall



15. Markets

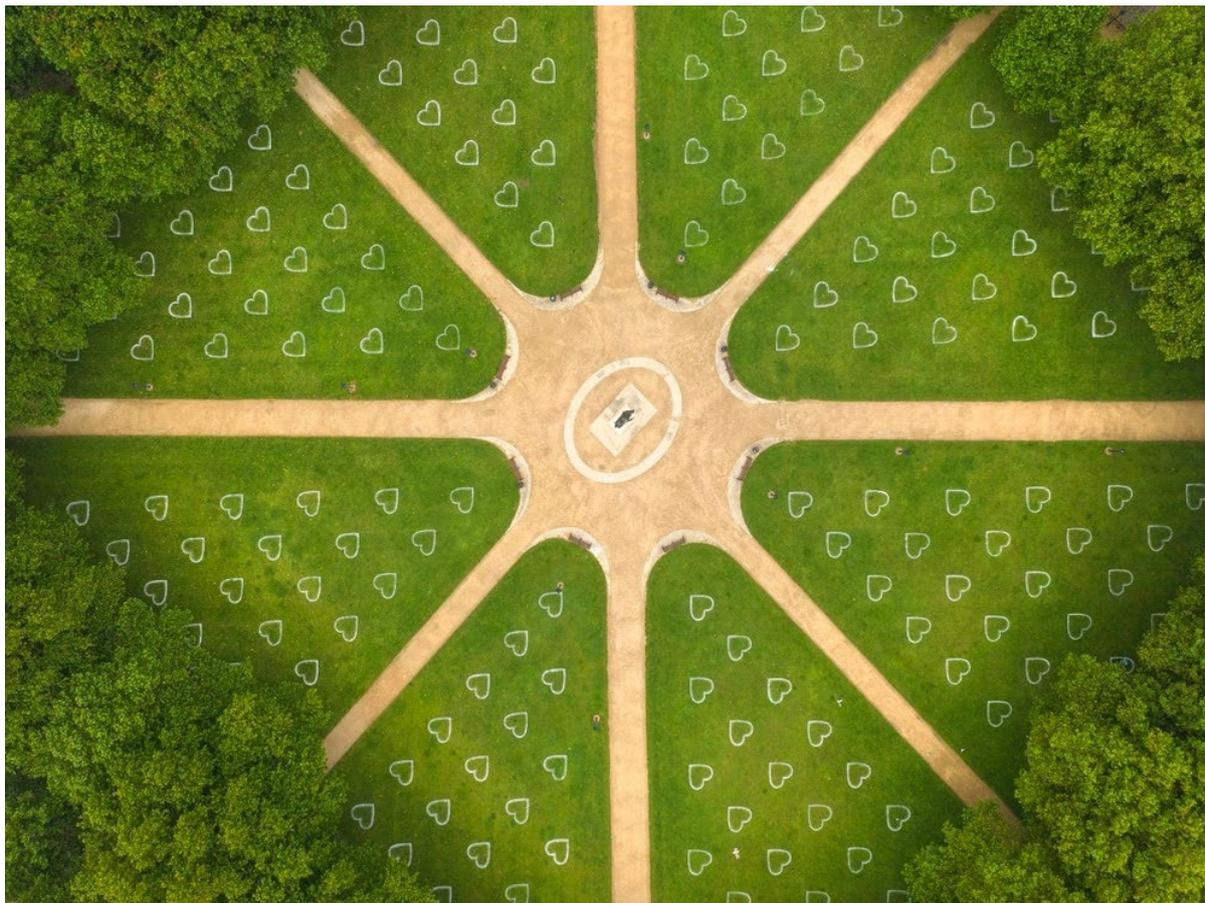
What part have markets played in keeping places animated and people supplied with goods during the pandemic? How will markets change in the age of social distancing?

- Where many town centre markets closed immediately as lockdown was announced, Mole Valley District Council ensured that their [Friday Market](#) in *Dorking*, Surrey remained open throughout the period. This market supplies essential goods for low income families and the Council determined that the market should remain open as 'essential retail', with some deft redesign to ensure social distancing was maintained.
- In response to the decision of many local authorities to close their markets, Dutch studio Shift developed a [street market design](#) to enable social distancing in a town square setting. Shift has also proposed the idea of a dispersed market, in which stalls are dotted across the town centre to enable greater access and social distancing. The National Association of British Market Authorities has also produced [member resources](#) for places aiming to reintroduce their market into the public realm.
- The *London Borough of Barnet's* innovative and joined up approach to reopening uses street trading licences as a way of extending trading and service space for hospitality businesses. Developed in conjunction with highways, this has allowed rapid plans for street reconfiguration to develop where they are needed. Details of the scheme are [here](#).

16. Recreational space

Functional places need space for rest and relaxation and such spaces have become more important during the lockdown. As we emerge into the recovery phase, how have we changed in the way we use such spaces?

- The Institute for Place Management has developed guidance for the High Streets Task Force which enables place managers to [assess open space](#) for capacity and plan accordingly.
- Some innovation has also been seen in parks, with a *Bristol* partnership of the City Centre BID, Visit Bristol and Bristol City Council painting [hearts](#) on the grass to encourage social distancing. The hearts motif ties in with Bristol's 'Heart of the City' campaign to encourage domestic tourism.



Above: Queen's Square, Bristol. (Copyright Express and Star)

17. Barriers to new entrants

What prevents new businesses from opening up in a town centre, and what are place managers doing to address these barriers?

Oswestry - Shropshire County Council, Oswestry Town Council and Oswestry BID have worked together to repurpose a Heritage England Grant and Town Council funds to aid recovery in the town. A masterplan and movement strategy will be followed with a comprehensive strategy to improve and reuse vacant units in Oswestry for workspace, retail and restaurants, with residential conversions above. The [strategy](#) builds on the Oswestry Town Plan 2020 and uses the networks built during the plan development phase to deliver the strategy inclusively, with the help of young people the Civic society, community groups, businesses and residents.

18. Safety and security

Recovery presents a range of new challenges for place managers, including questions of public health, protecting vulnerable people, addressing retail crime in reconfigured stores and reducing the threat of terrorism in streets with tables and chairs outside. What is being done?

Ahead of the reopening of many hospitality businesses on 4 July 2020, police partnerships and pubwatch schemes have been very effective in planning.

- *Croydon BID* and the *London Borough of Croydon* worked in partnership with Voluntary Action Croydon to recruit uniformed and trained volunteers to act as ambassadors for the town centre reopening. Using the 'Gamesmakers' model employed successfully for the London 2012 Olympics, the [Croydon Champions Volunteer Scheme](#) was predicated on instilling a sense of civic pride in both the volunteers, as visible champions of Croydon, and the returning visitors, many of whom were in need of reassurance. In addition, the volunteers liaised with store security teams as extra eyes and ears to reduce instances of shoplifting.
- BIDs responded to the "Super" Saturday in a number of ways. In *Plymouth*, PARC Rangers assisted businesses and police with [high visibility patrols](#) with extra resources to ensure that the night out was a safe experience for all.
- [Successful Sutton BID](#) organised a Zoom briefing for their NTE which brought the council and police together to advise on strategies for re-opening and visited each venue that reopened to ensure that their radio equipment and DISC access were in place to support them in ensuring that all were prepared should the worse happen although the reopening has passed off without any issues.

19. Liveable

Some centres are transforming from mono-functional places focused on shopping, to more multi-functional places, which reflect a wider range of uses, including office services and residences. How does Covid age contribute to this shift?

As the effects of Covid-19 are still being felt, definitive long-term demand patterns are yet to emerge. However, some places are embracing new patterns of working through the development of [local workhubs](#).

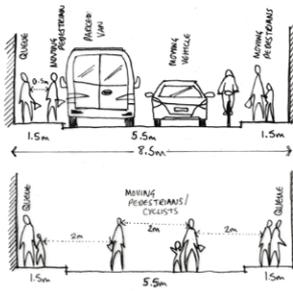
20. Adaptability

The ability of places to adapt to changing circumstances is a factor in their long term vitality and viability - more so now than ever before. Places will need to be physically redesigned and strategically adaptable to recover well from coronavirus. What plans are being made?

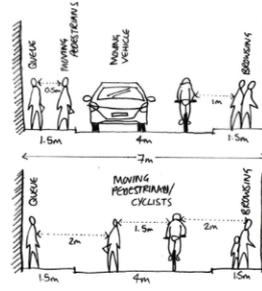
- Engineering firm Arup provided a delivery plan for implementation by *Cardiff Council* and the BID which carefully incorporates the need for reopening of hospitality businesses. With a concentration of bars in a small area of the City, the redesign has had to be sensitive to the movements of pedestrians but has also developed a flexible licensing regime. The [plan](#) involved extensive consultation with businesses and a media and comms campaign.
- *Nottinghamshire County Council* are offering hospitality businesses free pavement licences until September alongside a good practice [design guide](#).
- The [reopening plan](#) covering several districts of *Westminster* including Soho and Piccadilly has been developed in full consultation with BIDs, which have acted as a conduit for business concerns. The typology of measures has been applied street-by-street, while clear information on how to use TENs in lieu of new licencing legislation has encouraged a large number of businesses to reopen.
- The *Liverpool BID Company* has been instrumental in designing and delivering a major reconfiguration of the city centre to accommodate tables and chairs, alongside partners, the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and the City Council. The [Liverpool Without Walls](#) project will invest £450,000 to the scheme, which will be spent on providing new licences at no cost to businesses, and grants to businesses to purchase new street furniture and planters to delineate space. Hospitality sector businesses are able to operate outside using the Liverpool BID Company's city-wide licence, with the BID coordinating permissions, insurance etc
- A joined-up approach based on the [High Streets Task Force Recovery Framework](#) has enabled the *Bath BID* and *Bath and North East Somerset Council* to pool resources to plan for the reopening. Street-by-street designs have been developed setting out exactly what changes will take place, and for the reopening, on-street support was jointly coordinated to manage the [reopening](#).

Streets safe for social distancing

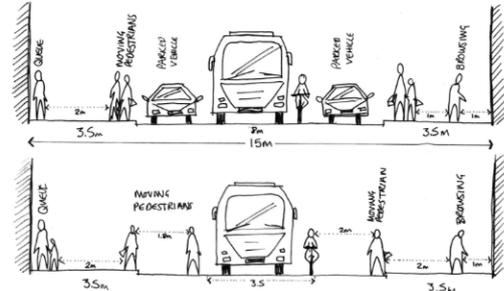
- Footway widening & parking suspensions
- Street access restrictions (10 am to 6 pm)
- Automated crossing points
- Safe queuing layouts
- Equality impact assessment



Westgate St



Upper Borough Walls



Milsom Street

21. Accessible

With many reticent to use public transport during the return from lockdown, the challenge for placemakers is to increase accessibility, without encouraging a return to polluting private vehicles.

- Transport planning has transformed during the time of coronavirus, with traditional forms of mass transit unsustainable and surviving only with government help. There is [some evidence](#) to link coronavirus symptoms with air quality and where air quality has improved during lockdown, concerted planning is necessary to reduce the return to vehicles and capitalise on modal shift onto sustainable forms of transport seen during lockdown. The legalisation and rollout of [electric scooters](#) has been supported by the UK Government and these will be seen in a number of cities in the coming months.
- A number of towns and cities are also taking the opportunity to pedestrianise sections of the centre, including [Salisbury](#), [Bristol](#) and [Manchester](#), to encourage walking and discourage car use, and the [#bikeisbest](#) campaign has been effective in encouraging new take-up of cycling in cities.

22. Innovation

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to recovery and transformation, but we can learn lessons from other places as they innovate.

- A number of stores are experimenting with new technology which totals purchases in basket and charges the customer using contactless payment. This reduces the need for contact at tills and could herald the further [automation of retail](#).
- The *Greater London Authority* has released a guide to [Adaptive High Streets](#). The guide investigates the innovations in high street transformation covering technology, governance, adaptive retail and streetscapes design, all of which are applicable in the covid-19 recovery phase.
- *Swansea BID* has released its own secure app, [evePASS](#), which is provided to hospitality businesses in the city to enable them to check-in patrons and fulfil their track and trace obligations.