

25 'Vital and Viable' Priorities

Networks and Partnerships with Council



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.

Networks and Partnerships with Council

Factors included in Networks and Partnerships

Networking; partnerships; community leadership; retail tenant trust; tenant/manager relations; strategic alliances; centre empowerment; stakeholder power; engagement

Ranking

Networks and Partnerships	Rank	Score	Descriptor
Influence	20 th out of 25	3.68 out of 5	Influential
Control	10 th out of 25	3.52 out of 4	Potentially controllable
25 Priorities	13 th out of 25	12.95	High priority

Description/Definition

The presence of strong networks and effective formal or informal partnerships is particularly relevant in contemporary urban and/or local governance settings. The new mantra of ‘networked’ or ‘joined-up’ approaches with multiple actors involved in place management, planning, and policy processes (Henderson, 2016) necessitates trust and communication between all place stakeholder groups in order to forge collaborations that can positively influence the high street.

Why does it matter? (Influence)

The restructuring of governance mechanisms into networked forms that lead towards collaborative, supra-local arrangements, the shift towards multidisciplinary management teams that aim to tackle siloed forms of place governance, and the turn to more localised forms of stakeholder participation and engagement are important prerequisites towards a networked-relational place management approach in towns and cities (Ntounis, Medway and Parker, 2020). This suggests an interdependency between local institutions and networks of ‘partners’ and communities in the formulation and implementation of a place vision and place management strategies for high street regeneration, renewal and transformation, which will vary considerably in different localities, despite being influenced by the same global circumstances (Parés et al., 2014).

Ultimately, place management organisations need to facilitate collaborative initiatives that help building diverse strategic alliances. This is subject to place management bodies’ organising capacity, which is defined as “the ability to enlist all actors involved and, with their help, to generate new ideas and to develop and implement a policy designed to respond to fundamental developments and create conditions for sustainable development” (van den Berg and Braun, 1999: 995). As such, successful place management organisations rarely stem solely from the top-down, but are the product of stakeholder networks and partnerships (Hanna and Rowley, 2011). This participatory turn relies on competent collaborative leadership that ensures that the correct people (e.g. the local community) will have a say in the regeneration of their high street, thus also fostering social capital (Hemphill et al., 2006). Strong networking and high level of engagement is not only influential at the broad high street level, but also in specific retail environments within the high street (e.g. markets, shopping centres), where a high level of trust and effective communication is needed between retailers, traders and managers in order to facilitate cooperation and holistically fuse everyone’s interests and competencies in the overall image and brand of the centre (Roberts et al., 2010).

What can you do about it? (Control)

It is important for the leading place management body (from the local council, BID, LEP or town team) to navigate through the complex networks of place stakeholders and ensure that all existing organisations, partnerships and town groups with a responsibility for the centre are identified and monitored on a regular basis. As Le Feuvre et al. (2016: 56) point out, “the major point of centrality for stakeholders in urban partnerships is the partnership itself”, meaning that it is at everyone’s long-term interest, regardless of their differing agendas, mindsets and *modus operandi*, to work collaboratively and organise in a way that nurtures knowledge exchange and subsequently maximises the chance of positive outcomes. As high streets are in a particularly vulnerable strategic position due to long-term pressures in their socio-economic fabric, the creation of strong partnerships and strategic alliances can potentially benefit all high street stakeholders, provided that a commitment to engage in the processes of communication, trust building, and knowledge exchange is secured.

Networks and Partnerships and COVID-19

Following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to re-engage partners to develop an inclusive response to tackle the crisis. Partnerships which include a broad range of representatives (residents, faith groups, businesses, delivery bodies and charities) are able to act in an eco-systemic way, allowing rapid distribution, communication and involvement of volunteers and stakeholders. Engaging these partnerships early will enable greater collaborative planning capability in the recovery phases.

To ensure public places are safe to visit will require a greater physical presence on the streets for cleaning and stewarding. You should coordinate between existing management organisations to identify how this best can be done. It may also require community volunteers to assist with this. In the pre-recovery stage, networks and partnerships are built in preparation for delivering a coordinated recovery. These should include a broad range of delivery partners, local stakeholders and volunteers. Leaders should work collaboratively and strategically, and previous power dynamics and local conflicts should be set aside in the pursuit of the survival of the town centre.

The recovery stage will also provide an opportunity to discuss the long-term transformation vision with the help of experts and locals. Workshops, e-learning and engagement can contribute to this exercise. Diversify networks and partnerships to ensure wide representation and involvement. Include a social element to partnerships. They are strengthened where the individuals involved feel a sense of belonging beyond the task at hand. Thank volunteers publicly and often.

In the transformation stage, a variety of methods of communication and engagement should be in place, and will involve different people in the life of the centre, including developing the plan for its future. Networks should be strong and links between volunteers/members are social as well as professional, so that the whole community will be invested in the long-term vision of the place. Finally, local residents, business people, employees and other stakeholders are listened to and there is an agreed public forum for them to be heard and ideas to be shared.

See also

Vision and Strategy; Place Management; Redevelopment Plans

References

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