

# 2022 - 2023 Annual Report



**HIGH  
STREETS  
TASK  
FORCE**

# Executive Summary

The High Streets Task Force continued to deliver support to communities and local authorities across England in 2022-23.

A range of local funding is available to places, from the Levelling Up Fund to Town Deals and Shared Prosperity Fund allocations. However, making best use of these opportunities and delivering long-term change on high streets continues to be a complex challenge requiring a range of expertise and partnership working to unlock progress.

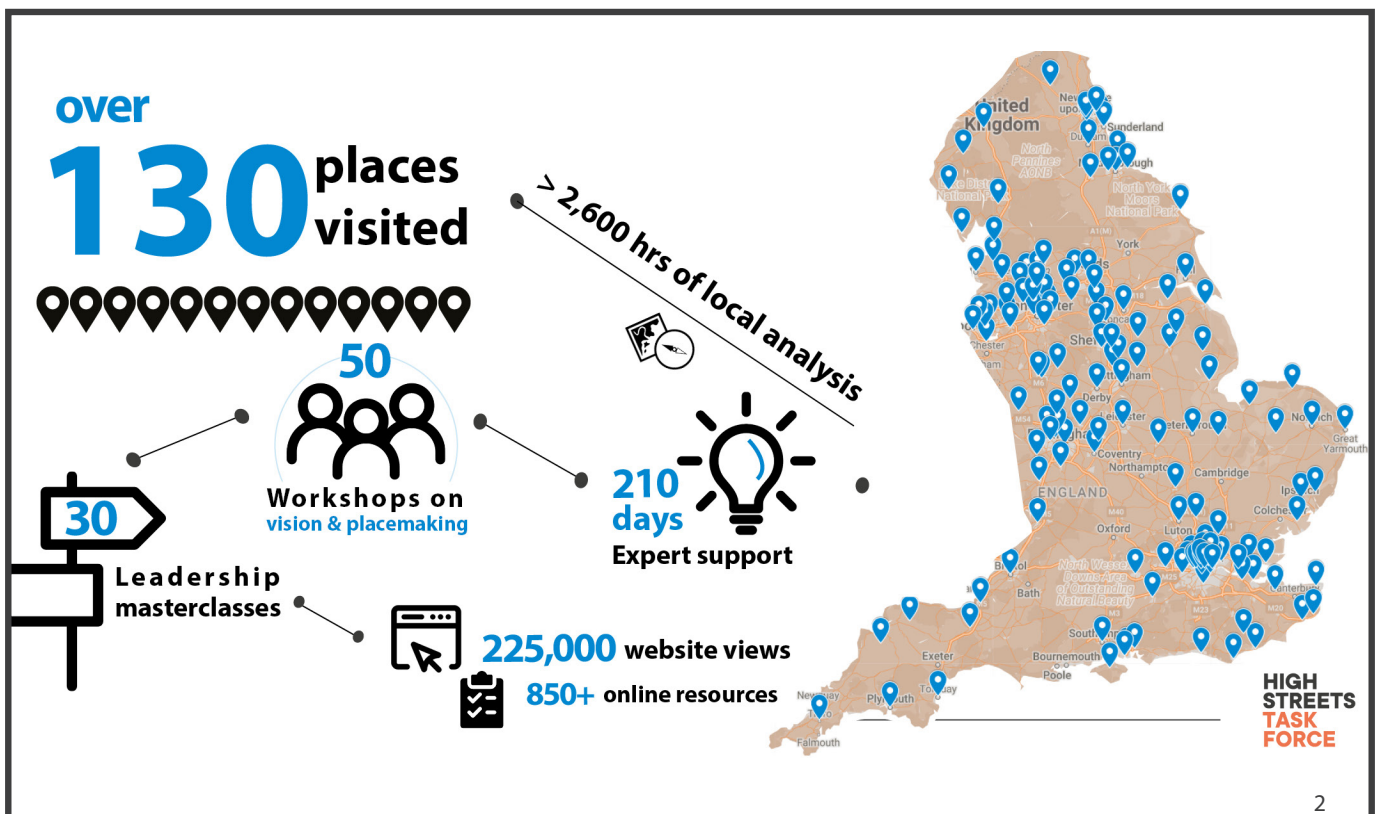
- > **40% of places visited by the Task Force need to develop local capacity via partnership building**, or risk losing future opportunities for change.
- > **Place marketing and branding is the next highest priority (17% of places)**, in order to change local perceptions and drive footfall.
- > **Patterns of high street use remain consistent with pre-pandemic, but footfall volumes are down 17%** - it's also too early to make long-term predictions without more data.
- > **Task Force support remains popular with 92% satisfaction rating.**

Places that have embedded Task Force advice and strategies - using its role as a 'critical friend' - have been successful in winning new funding and are delivering both high street activation and longer term planning and visioning work that is starting to produce transformative impact.

Three focused case studies are included throughout this annual report, and more are accessible via [highstreetstaskforce.org.uk](https://highstreetstaskforce.org.uk). As a long-term programme focused on culture change and building skills for decision making in towns and cities, the Task Force is now seeing these impacts emerge alongside the strong welcome which its programme has had from its end users and other stakeholders.

- Leading in partnership in Ashton-in-Makerfield (p.10)
- Convening the community in Whitechapel (p.15)
- Inclusive place shaping in West Bromwich (p.18)

It is encouraging to see an increased focus on building partnerships to deliver change that is defined by local communities. Historically, the neglect of this fundamental social infrastructure has played its part in a patchy national picture of high street success.





# Foreword

Mark Robinson

Chair, High Streets Task Force

138 high streets visited. Nearly 3,000 hours of local analysis. Over 210 days of expert advisory support. More than 80 workshops. 250,000 visits to 850 (and growing) online resources.

This is the story so far in numbers. Over the last 12 months, the High Streets Task Force has delivered following the early disruptions of Covid-19 and it is pleasing to see how well-received its support has been. Our Experts have continued in their role as 'critical friends' to places and as independent champions of the opportunities that exist in local centres.

Those high streets namechecked in this annual report have real momentum and are delivering exciting new public realm, developments, and events. Many others are doing the same across England. Central to the Task Force ethos is that engaging local communities and business in partnership is not just the right thing to do, politically and morally even, but it results in the best outcomes; developments that stand the test of time; high streets that are well used, and new residents and visitors attracted by truly multifunctional places, with something for everyone. This type of transformation isn't delivered overnight and local authorities cannot achieve it alone.

We are now in an age of unprecedented political attention and investment in local regeneration. In that context it's particularly satisfying to see how both national funding streams and local projects are evolving to meet the demands of modern town centres. We see these examples throughout the work of the Task Force.

In Wakefield, the precinct outside the beautiful cathedral is being transformed into a community and events space where people want to spend time and dwell in the historic centre. The Landscape Institute were pleased to advise on this project which is central to the town's redevelopment plans.

In Newquay, the town recorded its highest footfall for a decade in May of this year, and the growing variety of family activities, independent businesses and restaurants are complemented by a new street market. Newquay's Town Team is well positioned to benefit from 50m investment in a local metro connection to the rest of the region.

In Whitechapel, a new town centre manager has been instrumental in forging connections amongst the local businesses and residents, connecting them to facilities at the truly impressive town hall set in the refurbished old Royal London Hospital.

These are just some of the local success stories, and there are many more developing partnerships and plans now. Places like Earl's Court, London, with huge potential and unique heritage, where the Task Force is supporting transformative thinking with input from experts at RTPI. And places like Ashton-in-Makerfield in Wigan that is engaging a new local partnership, building the town's vision after support from experts at Design Council, and putting national funding to work creating new social spaces and better active travel opportunities.

Of course, there are also huge challenges ahead, not least in the financial pressures facing many local authorities. In response, we must work to ensure that places have the resources they need to continue their progress. The skills, drive, and know how to make this happen is found across businesses, communities, charities, public sector and the place professions. Working in partnership we can continue to create the vibrant, diverse and liveable high streets that everyone wants to enjoy.

“ Central to the Task Force ethos is that engaging local communities and business in partnership is not just the right thing to do, politically and morally even, but it results in the best outcomes; high streets that are well used, and new residents and visitors attracted by truly multifunctional places, with something for everyone”

# Contents

Introduction	5
Working with local authorities	6
Delivery of direct support	7
Case study - Ashton-in-Makerfield	10
New findings on high street regeneration	12
The need for partnership working	14
Case study - Whitechapel Road	15
Internationally-leading research	16
Case study - West Bromwich	18
Satisfaction	20
Insight from professional bodies	22
Our governance	23
The High Streets Task Force consortium	24

# Introduction

During the year of delivery ending 1 July 2023, the High Streets Task Force increased its delivery to places, expanding the support that it provides. Experts were, for the first time, able to focus fully on providing this support outside of previous restrictions and considerations attached to the Covid-19 pandemic. This support continues to be well received by local authorities across the country, as outlined in the Key Performance Indicators and satisfaction score in the appendix of this report.

Entering the final year of the Task Force programme, the positive benefits and impact of its support continue to emerge. Examples are provided throughout this report of how local authorities supported over the last three years have benefitted, utilising this guidance to influence regeneration and activation of their high streets.

At the end of July 2023, the High Streets Task Force has provided some form of direct support to the majority of the 152 local authorities selected in conjunction with government in 2020 and 2021. Provision of this support has generated a vast amount of insight and learning on the challenges local authorities are facing, and the measures required to overcome these. Working locally to analyse the most effective strategies for places to pursue, the Task Force has recommended a number of approaches. The most common of these are: the development of a clear and compelling local vision, the need for place activation, and the requirement for more effective place marketing and branding.

Almost universally across the local authorities that have been supported, there is a clear resource and capacity challenge. Our data suggests that the best way to overcome this is for local authorities to focus on development of their leadership, governance and management practice and capability. In particular, there is a need to develop skills that can facilitate multi-sector collaboration and build local partnerships. Indeed, the need for partnerships is the most commonly cited observation of our Experts, and the primary area of focus for recommended further support.

The programme now has twelve months remaining, during which time the focus will be on continuing to support local authorities and further consolidating the learning and knowledge accumulated since the programme began. It is clear that economic factors that have become apparent in the past year, such as inflation and deficits faced by local authorities, will continue to present significant challenges into the medium term, and high streets will need to remain agile to combat these.

The continued and successful delivery of the Task Force would not be possible without the contribution of its consortium partners, its pool of Experts, Mentors and Facilitators, and colleagues at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The work of this group is testament to the immense passion for places that exists. Together, the Task Force looks forward to continuing its work over the final twelve months of the programme, ensuring that its work is as impactful and wide reaching as possible.



Above: Plymouth City Centre, a supported Task Force location

## Working with local authorities

The graphic below presents an overview of the areas where support has been provided to local authorities during the 22/23 period.

Although our direct support has been focused on these areas, The High Streets Task Force maintains its commitment to raising the skills and resources of local leaders more widely. For every high street we support directly, we hope and expect that many more will benefit from the approaches and learning gained locally.



- |                                       |  |   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Barnstaple, North Devon               | Eastbourne                               | Redditch                                |
| Basildon                              | Edwinstowe-Ollerton, Newark and Sherwood | Sandown, Isle of Wight                  |
| Bedford                               | Felixstowe, East Suffolk                 | Slough                                  |
| Bexhill-on-Sea, Rother                | Feltham, Hounslow                        | Southall Broadway and the Green, Ealing |
| Bideford                              | Gillingham, Medway                       | Southend-on-Sea                         |
| Bolsover                              | Gloucester                               | Stalham, North Norfolk                  |
| Boston Town Centre                    | Gravesend, Gravesham                     | Stevenage                               |
| Brighton                              | Harlow                                   | Stockton                                |
| Burnham-on-Sea, Sedgemoor             | Havant                                   | Uttoxeter, East Staffordshire           |
| Caistor, West Lindsey                 | High Street, Gosport                     | Wallsend, North Tyneside                |
| Carlisle                              | Ipswich                                  | Warrington                              |
| Chesterfield                          | Kilburn, Camden                          | Watton, Breckland                       |
| City cluster, City of London          | Leytonstone, Waltham Forest              | Wavertree                               |
| Cleveleys, Wyre                       | Morecambe                                | Westminster                             |
| Cockermouth, Allerdale                | New Romney, Folkstone and Hythe          | Whitefield, Bury                        |
| Coronation Square, Southcote, Reading | North End Road, Hammersmith and Fulham   | Whitehaven, Copeland                    |
| Dawley, Telford and Wrekin            | Princes Street, Stockport                | Wisbech, Fenland, Cambridgeshire        |
| Earl's Court, Kensington and Chelsea  | Prudhoe, Northumberland                  |   |

# Delivery of Direct Support

As well as ongoing delivery to our first group of 84 local authorities, Q1 22/23 saw us begin engagement with our second group of 68 local authorities. The Task Force has now engaged with all 152 local authorities, and has provided support to the vast majority of these (with a small number due to commence their support in Q1 23/24).

Each of these local authorities begin their support journey with an Unlocking your Place Potential diagnostic. These UYPP sessions constitute the 'gateway' to further support, allowing our Experts to assess in detail, and with consultation with the local authority and other key stakeholders, what the barriers to transformation are within a place and how they should be addressed. The table below details the number of Unlocking your Place Potential diagnostic visits delivered during the year. By the end of June 2023, the Task Force had delivered a total of 133 of these sessions.

Following on from the initial diagnostic sessions, and based on the recommended support required, local authorities proceed to the next step of their support journey. This takes the form of a time limited support package provided by one of our Experts or Mentors. Expert support comprises of 4 days of contact time, with Mentor support offering 3.25 days. It was originally intended that there would be an equal allocation of Experts and Mentors across the participating local authorities (with 76 of each product available). However, our UYPP diagnostics found that in the majority of cases, it was the Expert support that was required (this report will cover some of the common areas of focus for this support). The primary reason for this was that the challenges the local authorities were facing required the greater time commitment offered by the Expert product, and the complexity of the support requirement dictated that the lighter-touch Mentor product was not as widely required. As a result, it was agreed with DLUHC that we would increase our target for Expert support in line with a decrease in Mentor support targets, with targets revised to 121 and 30, respectively.

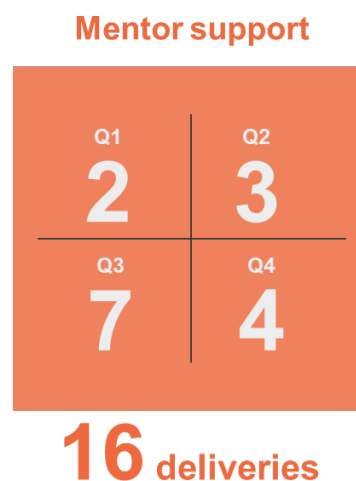
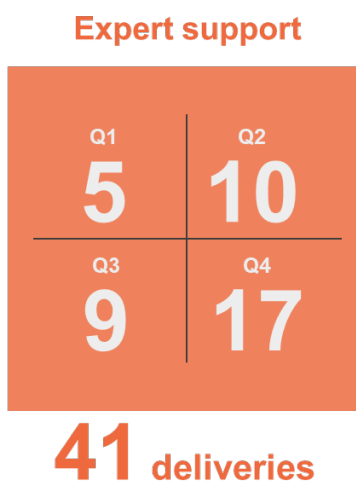
Both Experts and Mentor products are based on the specific need of the local authority, which is matched to the expertise, or 'specialisms', of our Expert register. This expertise is provided by our professional body partners the Institute of Place Management, the Landscape Institute, Design Council, and the Royal Town Planning Institute.

The tables below detail the number of Expert and Mentor products delivered across the year. At the end of June 23, 91 local authorities were either receiving or had received Expert support, with a further 20 local authorities receiving, or having had received, assistance from a Mentor.

“ The Unlocking your Place Potential work was really helpful. It gave us a grounded framework of where we actually are - a strong vision, good stakeholders around the table, but that governance and collaboration piece was missing. ”



**Joshua Singh**  
Planning Regeneration Team Leader, Sandwell West  
Midlands Young Planner of the Year 2023



## Delivery of Direct Support (cont..)

A key challenge for the Task Force since the programme's inception has been delivery of support within anticipated timeframes. The reasons for this are myriad (and clearly exacerbated by covid), but have commonly revolved around a lack of capacity within local authorities to receive support when intended. As such, what was originally planned as a 9-month duration for the provision of a local authority's complete support journey (from UYPP, through targeted Expert/Mentor support, and finally workshop), has on average taken 16-18 months, with many local authorities engaged for longer than this. This has presented operational difficulties, creating a 'humped' delivery calendar vs. plan, with the Task Force team managing up to 90% more active places concurrently than planned. Despite this, we have been able to mitigate against these challenges, maintaining agility to provide local authorities with the highest standard of support.

Following on from the Expert/Mentor support (but sometimes occurring before this has taken place), many local authorities are prescribed either the Place Making Programme workshop, or the Developing a Shared Vision programme (delivered by partners the Design Council). Over the last twelve months, the Developing a Shared Vision programme has run in a revised cohort format, with 3 cohorts of up to 8 local authorities receiving this support over the year. The tables below detail the number of each workshop we have been able to deliver over the year. At the end of June 23, we had delivered these workshops to a total of 49 local authorities (29 receiving Developing a Shared Vision, and 20 receiving the Place Making Programme), with the majority of these deliveries taking place during the 22/23 period (see below).



The placemaking workshop demystified the whole thing about improving our town centre, changing it from a theoretical conundrum to something practical that actually doesn't feel that hard now.

*Service Director, Local Authority, Luton*

### Developing a Shared Vision programme

Q1 <b>0</b>	Q2 <b>8</b>
Q3 <b>7</b>	Q4 <b>7</b>

**22** deliveries

### Place Making Programme workshops

Q1 <b>0</b>	Q2 <b>7</b>
Q3 <b>7</b>	Q4 <b>4</b>

**18** deliveries <sup>8</sup>

## Delivery of Direct Support (cont..)

The Teenage Market licence provides locations with support to deliver high street activation through these youth-led events. The table below shows the number of market support products delivered over the 22/23 period. Many of these local authorities have proceeded to run several Teenage Market events following the end of support, ensuring that the young people in these places are able to contribute and make a real difference to the vitality of their high streets.

Over the last 12 months, the delivery rate of Developing Place Leaders workshops has also increased. These half-day online sessions are provided regionally, and are designed to help improve place leadership skills and knowledge. The programme contains many elements that support current key priorities in local government, such as shaping investment plans for the Shared Prosperity Fund and more broadly in **developing place-based strategies that build local pride** and deliver across funding programmes.



### Teenage Market

Q1 <b>5</b>	Q2 <b>2</b>
Q3 <b>1</b>	Q4 <b>2</b>

**10** deliveries

### Developing Place Leaders training

Q1 <b>3</b>	Q2 <b>4</b>
Q3 <b>7</b>	Q4 <b>5</b>

**19** deliveries

“I couldn’t have been happier with my experience on the day, from communication prior to organisation and clear information on what to accept. It was great meeting a wide variety of other independent makers and sellers providing unique handmade crafts and other goddies...It was our most profitable market to date, and we would certainly showcase at another market if the opportunity arose. Thank you!”

**Trader at Liscard Teenage Market**



## Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan

### Leading in partnership

#### The town

Ashton-in-Makerfield is a market town in Greater Manchester located four miles south of Wigan. It has a population of just under 29,000 and falls under the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan.

The High Streets Task Force visited the town in February 2022 and has subsequently been involved in the development of a community group that now provides place leadership capacity through identifying actionable solutions to local challenges.

#### The challenges

Ashton in Makerfield town centre suffers from traffic congestion and this is exacerbated by HGVs coming off the nearby M6 and thundering through a narrow high street. The makeup of the town centre is largely chain stores with few independents and it lacks character and a sense of identity. This is further compounded by the lack of a market square or 'heart' to the town. The market place is currently used as a car park and there is also a lack of footfall. The fact that it has no real links to the nearby Haydock Park Racecourse is also a missed opportunity.

As a result, there was a keen sense of untapped potential and frustrations among the local population at how the town is being held back. The High Streets Task Force has convened local place leaders – from across voluntary, business and council, to work together on finding practical solutions to these challenges.

#### Building Partnerships

There is a strong voluntary sector and local business community in Ashton in Makerfield. Social capital is strong and the public are clearly invested in the town centre and ambitious for its future. The Council recognises this and, after discussions with the HSTF, were keen to harness the energy and commitment of the local community and build extra capacity to ensure plans to improve the town were led in a bottom up way. After putting out a call for people to join, Ashton Innovation Board was subsequently founded and the first meeting was held at St Thomas' Church, just off the high street.

Around 25 people attended and the group was made up of people from the local business community, night time economy and voluntary sector. A chair has subsequently been appointed and further members are being recruited from faith groups, schools, emergency services etc. to ensure the board is fully representative of the community.

Working in partnership with the Council, this group is now shaping plans to improve the town and has benefitted from the Council being awarded £6.6million from the Capital Regeneration Programme in the Spring Budget.

There is a real sense of excitement at this award and the group is working with the Council to develop ambitious plans to transform the town.

## Ashton-in-Makerfield (cont.)

### Task Force support

#### Visit > 18th Feb 2022

An unlocking your place potential diagnostic visit and community engagement workshop provided insights and catalysed local work to address challenges in the town.

#### Visioning surgery > Nov 2022

Support from the visioning surgery product, which assist places to develop their thinking about a local vision with support from Design Council experts.

#### Expert support > 2023 (report issued July)

Expert support from Ged Gibbons FIPM on placemaking and partnership building.

Ged held numerous meetings with a range of officers from Wigan Council and the Ashton Innovation Board, to provide further analysis and advice over a period of months. This work and its background is summarised in the Expert Report (see attached).

#### Other support

Wigan Council engaged with the Task Force through covid, including recovery planning webinars, and submitted their own local recovery plan in 2020. We have also provided place analyst training to a member of the Council's town centre regeneration team.

### Solutions

Having engaged the community and developed a new model of place leadership, the partnership between the Council and Ashton Innovation Board is focussed on delivering bottom up change through the following:

- Traffic calming and re-routing the HGVs
- Some part pedestrianisation
- A new market square
- Walking and cycling routes
- Improved shop frontages
- An events programme including food markets, live music events and flower markets

### Impact

For decades now online forums have been filled with complaints about traffic congestion in Ashton in Makerfield – and there is a growing sense that these plans can help people reclaim the town and turn it into a more human space. This will help foster a stronger sense of belonging, create more gathering spaces and healthier travel. In turn, it will make the town more attractive for investment and strengthen its identity.

Above all, it is an exemplar in building place leadership capacity to ensure that funding priorities are supported and shaped by local people. This is key to ensuring public funding for high street and town centre regeneration has the intended impact – commercially (e.g. increased footfall and private sector investment); socially (e.g. pride in place) and environmentally (e.g. improved air quality).

# Insights

## New findings on high street regeneration

Task Force Experts use the '4Rs Framework'; to identify the core challenges and barriers to success that places are facing.

Research has identified 237 factors that impact on the success of the high street. However, it is too overwhelming to consider all of these and prioritise interventions. The '4 Rs' framework has been developed to structure complex practice of place transformation.

At a strategic level, the reasons why so many regeneration plans do not achieve real change fall into four categories:

- > The problems facing the centre were not accurately identified
- > The plans were good but not enough action was taken
- > The place changed but people's perceptions didn't
- > There were fundamental issues with governance or the spatial layout of the place

The High Streets Task Force have identified four strategies to address these issues; repositioning, reinventing, rebranding, and restructuring. So, the framework distinguishes between the processes of analysis and decision making (repositioning), effecting change (reinventing), communication (rebranding) and governance/spatial planning (restructuring).

### 'Deep dive' of analysis

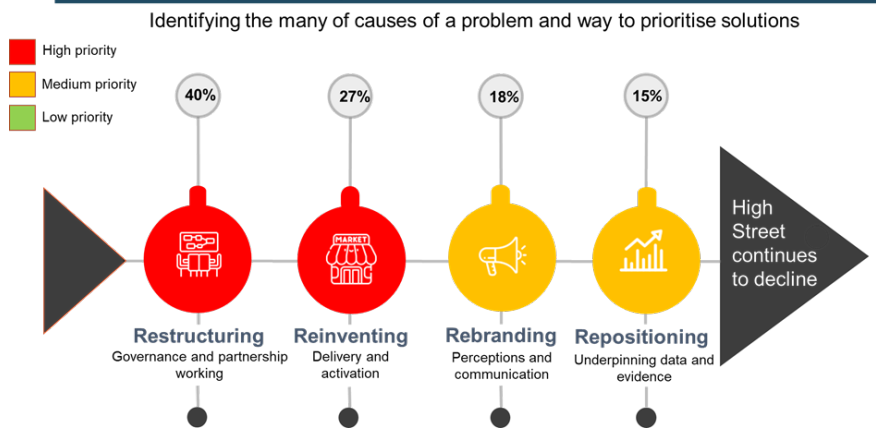
By classifying every high street 'clue', Task Force Experts identify the major strategic barriers facing a place. In April 2023, a 'deep dive' of all of evidence collated through the provision of direct support illustrated where local authorities are experiencing challenges.

Restructuring (40% of places) and Reinventing (27%) comprise the two key priority areas for intervention. Many of the places we have visited have been found to be lacking the necessary capacity to develop a strategy or vision for how their place or, when decisions have been made and action taken, they haven't had the impact that was expected.

This is often because the governance and management mechanisms in the place need to change or develop. In these circumstances, our recommendation has been that the issue should be tackled through a process of Restructuring.

Other places have the structures they need and sensible plans for how the town or city needs to change to better serve its catchment communities, but action isn't being taken. In these circumstances a process of reinvention is needed to kickstart transformation.

#### Fishbone Analysis – Deep Dive (108 places included)



**Reposition:** knowing your town, using relevant data and information to develop a collaborative, inspiring vision that achieves change

**Reinvent:** activate and animate the town, diversify its attractions. Multifunctional places offer different things to draw in footfall and spend

**Rebrand:** establish an identity and sense of place that can engender pride, commitment and attachment and communicate this across the whole community

**Restructure:** putting in place the capacity, leadership and partnerships to deliver change. Considering large-scale spatial change to transform your centre

The 4Rs of renewal

- Repositioning
- Reinventing
- Rebranding
- Restructuring

# Insights

## More findings on high street regeneration



Above: Utttoxeter market place

### Barriers to change

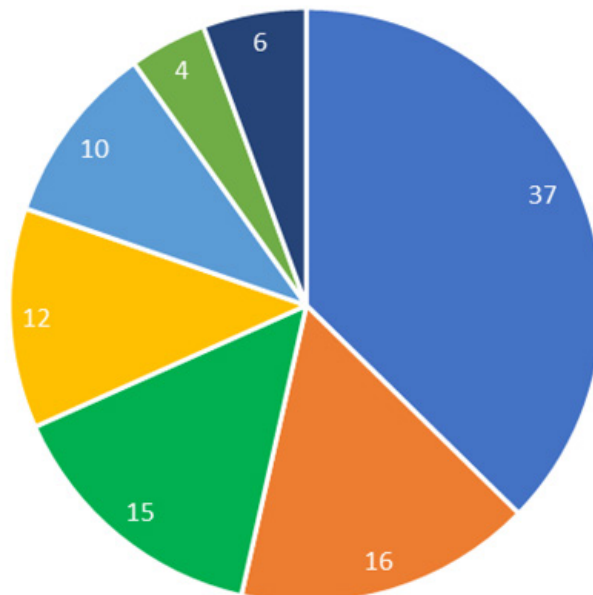
Using the strategic analysis from the '4 Rs Framework', Restructuring and Reinventing are the two key priority areas for intervention (p.11). Drilling down into these strategies, there are specific and common challenges which often require support.

37% of Task Force recommended support was focussed on developing or improving partnership working and local collaboration. This was followed by the need for support on developing marketing/branding (16%), and the need to activate or vitalise the high street (15%).

A 'deep dive' assessment of all of the knowledge and data gathered by the Task Force during the course of the programme allows further context for these recommendations. This work shows a clear alignment with the recommendations of Experts, and an emphasis on the lack of effective partnership working and collaboration. We have identified that:

- > The importance of collaboration is not widely understood by local authorities
- > There are significant capacity gap for place management in local authorities
- > There is a lack of local place leadership
- > There is a significant lack of effective partnerships
- > There are very few GOOD visions, most lack data/evidence and adoption
- > There is often little real engagement by community and businesses in LA plans/ approach

Support requirements for high streets, by topic - Task Force provision (%)



■ Partnerships ■ Place marketing/branding/identity ■ Activation ■ Public realm/connectivity ■ Vision ■ Data/footfall ■ Other

# The need for partnership working

Whilst the work of High Streets Task Force Experts has made positive in-roads to addressing local challenges, there remains the opportunity to consider how to best support local authorities to help improve collaboration, leadership and visioning for the benefit of their place.

The Task Force has shown that local authorities and public funding, on their own, do not create vital and viable high streets. The private and community sectors have a much bigger role to play in the activation of places and the leadership of change, as well as its funding and management.

Devolution has been an important aim of government policy during the lifetime of the Task Force, but this is not just about devolving power to mayoral authorities and then to local government. In order for places to be successful, it must be about local government redefining its power relationships with other stakeholders in the places they are trying to change. This means working in a pluralistic and not an authoritarian style.

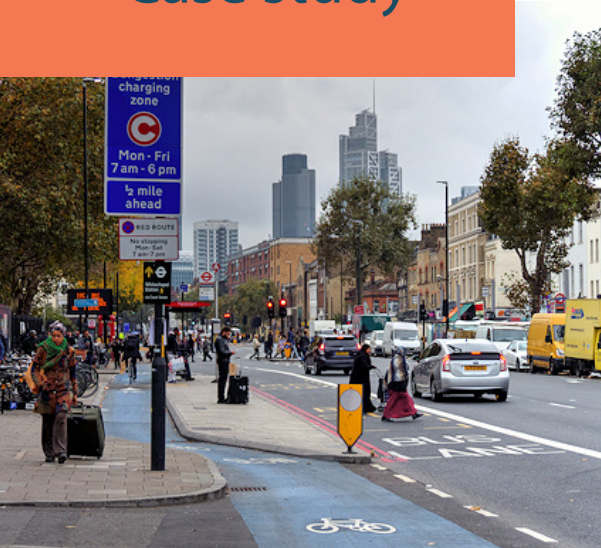
Places need leadership at the town level, and collaboration and facilitation from LAs. Place partnerships, with strong leadership and effective place management coordination, release additional place-changing resource and capacity that comes from local partners. By taking this approach, responsibility for success is shared and is not solely funded from the public purse.

Place partnerships are needed to bring the private, local authority, public and community sectors together in the long-term interests of the location, as well as to oversee the day-to-day activation and management of the place. They should develop the town centre's long-term vision (10% of Task Force recommended support was focussed on vision development, which should directly inform any statutory planning or masterplanning) as well as oversee the medium and short-term action plans (even though much of the activity will be delivered by stakeholder organisations, such as the BID, LA or major property owners - e.g. the shopping centre landlord). Place partnerships should make it explicitly clear who is responsible for what and where funding is coming from. This drives investor and consumer confidence. Place partnerships should also develop/curate the place brand.

The need for effective place partnerships is emerging as a core outcome of the work of the Task Force, and – if places are to be successful into the future - something that must be taken forward and developed after the current programme ends. During the final year of its programme, the Task Force will continue to compile an evidence base to support this, both through our continued Expert support for places and through our Annual Research study (which this year will focus on partnerships).



Right: new food and drink offer in Hull



## Whitechapel Road: convening the council and local community

“We were in the latter years of the Council’s high street strategy and, because of that, the (High Streets Task Force’s advice) landed well at the time. The recommendations followed and it was a useful shot in the arm for the team to rethink about Whitechapel.”

**Adam Richards**  
Regeneration Manager

—  
“The Council has also now got a visible presence in the High Street and businesses have that direct line which is really valuable.”

“As well as Bridget’s (Town Centre Manager) salary being funded by the Council, we’ve got a small budget to deliver improvements for the businesses up and down Whitechapel on a case by case project basis. One example is a shortwave radio scheme to encourage businesses to get in contact with CCTV and the police, to help tackle ASB and security issues.”

### The challenge

Whitechapel Road is a busy and vibrant inner London district on the City Fringe with a strong identity and well-known landmarks, including the daily market and the Whitechapel Gallery. Its retail offer is predominantly independent in nature, with family-owned businesses occupying small units, serving the immediate residential catchment, many of whom follow the Muslim faith. Eid and Ramadan are particularly busy times in Whitechapel and strong community connections have created an ecosystem between retailers, suppliers, eateries and residents that forms the centre of civic life for many.

Following a visit from HSTF experts in July 2021, the local offer was identified as the main barrier to transformation in Whitechapel Road. Although many long-term plans existed at this date, many were contingent on addressing some of the structural problems Whitechapel Road faces – the insularity of the market, the lack of a brand vision for the street, the lack of an evening economy, the complications around footfall and overuse of the area, and the lack of a connection between local people and the long term vision for the place.

### Recommendations

Amongst 8 recommendations made to Tower Hamlets Council, the most important highlighted by HSTF was the creation of a Town Centre Manager post for Whitechapel Road - with the ability to listen, and to act. At the time, the Task Force said ‘Remember that the street is an ecosystem – the role of the authorities is not to regulate businesses for the benefit of the customer experience, but to unlock the efficiencies of the interconnected relationship between them. Map the interests at work on the street and incorporate these into the plan. Resistance to change (e.g. on the market) is to be expected, but where there is broad support for reasonable change, this must be emphasised and change must take place.’

### Impact

Since Task Force support ended, the Council have taken forward the recommendations and have achieved some key early successes in Whitechapel Road; building trust within the local community, increasing business-led marketing, coordination with police, process improvements in engaging new business entrants, improvements in crime reporting, and a greater coordination of council and the local area.

# Internationally-leading research

Led by researchers at the Institute of Place Management, with support from consortium partners Cardiff University and its Professional Research and Data Group (PRDG), the Task Force has undertaken work that informs both its own approach government policy.

## Footfall report 2022

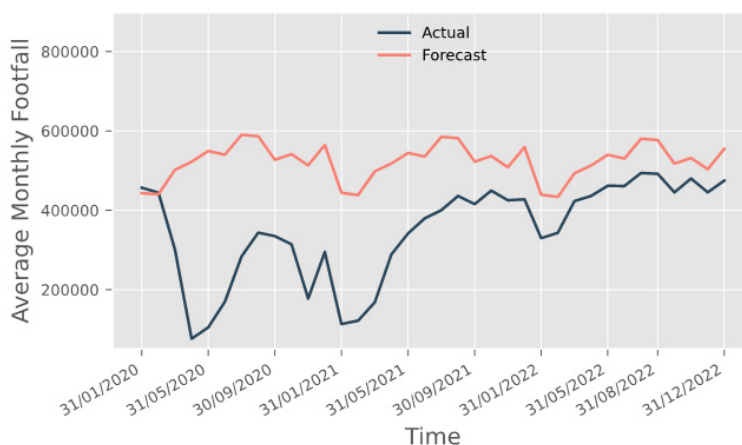
[The third report](#) of a four annual studies on footfall on England's high streets shows how footfall volumes and patterns have changed in the post-Covid era. Understanding footfall is crucial in helping place leaders understand their area's vitality and viability. It helps us understand how people use their high street and indicates what attracts people to the town centre.

The report examines data from a wide range of towns and cities across the country to show the way people are evolving their use of place. Data provided by MRI OnLocation (formerly Springboard) enables comparison across places; daily, weekly, and monthly to see the change before, during and after the pandemic. This allowed us to analyse changes over time and track recovery.

### > Overall Trends

The 2022 report shows that since 2019, footfall in town centres has declined by 17%. Due to the impact of Covid, there can be no accurate predictions for the future or an accurate assessment as to whether footfall will continue to decline at this rate, and so we must wait for the data to stabilise and for a 'new normal' to emerge. However, the key finding of this report is that despite falling footfall, high street shopping habits have not changed since before the pandemic. July and August are still the busiest months, and it appears that people continue to visit high streets on the same days of the week, and at the same times, but with less frequency. For example, in 2022, Christmas, Easter trading and Black Friday saw a decline in footfall in comparison to 2019 data; but the evidence in this report shows these are still very important periods for high street activity.

The graph below presents a comparison between average footfall in England with a pre-COVID forecast based on the previous five years of monthly data.



Clearly, the commonly applied forecasting methods based on several past years of data were no longer appropriate, following the exceptional influence of the COVID pandemic. The disruption caused is all too obvious in 2020 and 2021. Nonetheless, there was an encouraging recovery in 2022, moving towards the expected monthly patterns and volumes. Yet, footfall volume for the whole of 2022 was still some 17.0% down on 2019 levels. It is worth noting that at least two more years of "normal" footfall data will be required before we can resume reliable forecasting. This reinforces the importance of high streets collecting their own data, which they can do using our free to access dashboards, and understanding the nature of their own recovery in the meantime.

# Internationally-leading research (cont.)

## Leadership report

2022's annual research project focussed on leadership. There is an extensive body of literature examining institutional and political leadership in local authorities, but little examination of place leadership.

This research aimed to understand the role and methods of local authority leaders in the successful transformation of high streets and town centres within the jurisdiction of their councils. The research focused on seven place leaders, based within local authorities, who have a strong track record of place transformation. Local Authorities are seen as the responsible body for high streets but this is an over-simplified view. High streets and town centres are made up of a plethora of occupiers, owners, users, residents, visitors, organisations and networks.

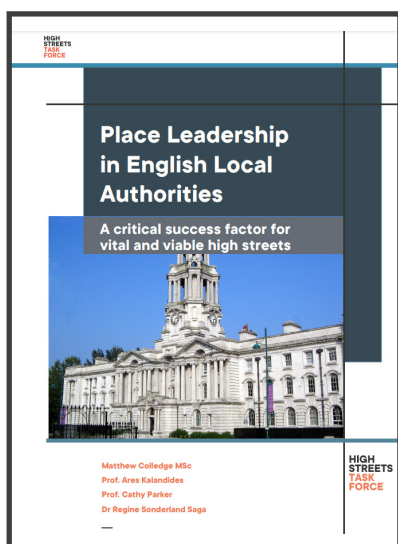
[‘Place Leadership in English Local Authorities’](#) provides further evidence of the value of effective partnerships and collaboration. With the findings demonstrating that when individuals and groups act collectively, through collaboration and partnership working, high streets and town centres can be revitalised. However, this doesn't necessarily happen without intervention. Collaboration and partnerships need to be catalysed, bringing capacity and capability for place transformation from across boundaries. The research shows that place leaders must have the skills and knowledge to do this. They have the trust and respect of a wide range of local stakeholders, who they must work closely with towards the common aim of making a better place.

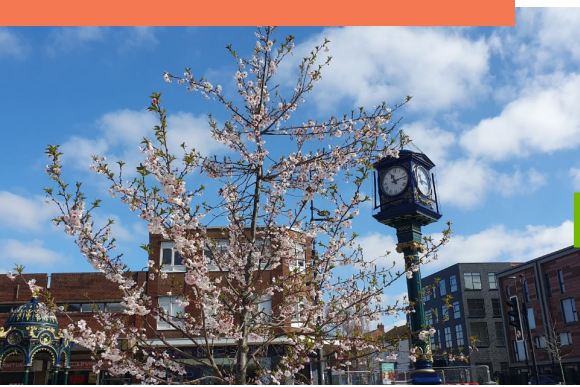


The research also found that place leaders in local authorities have a common set of traits and behaviours. They have a strong belief in their purpose, they are driven, they are passionate, courageous and bold. They are also very resilient because leading change in places is complex and contested. A range of factors impact on local authority leaders' motivation to drive change in places. These factors can be personal, civic or professional. They relate to their individual connection to the place and people (personal), duty to use their council role to the benefit of the places they work in, and the communities they serve (civic) and their skilled performance of their place leadership role (professional).

Finally, and again emphasising the importance of partnership working; nurturing collaboration is key to the place leaders' role. This involves convening stakeholders and developing partnerships. Whilst collaboration can be challenging to facilitate, this research shows that leaders draw on both formal and informal sources of power to overcome such challenges. Where collaborative leadership has been demonstrated effectively, some traditional council procedures, structures and resources have been adopted (e.g. committees, plans, regeneration funds etc.) but they have also been adapted to facilitate place change and collaboration.

The High Streets Task Force 2023 research study will focus on partnerships, and will be published in Autumn 2023.





## West Bromwich, Sandwell Inclusive place shaping

### The town

West Bromwich, Sandwell (pop: 110,000) is located in the Black Country. The Town Centre is 15 minutes from both Birmingham City Centre (New Street, Colmore Row, Curzon Street Station) and Wolverhampton City Centre, connected via the Metro that runs into the Town Centre and has strong surrounding links to the wider country through the M5 / M6 motorway network. West Bromwich, a retail centre and market town, is known more widely in the UK for its links to sport and the local football club, and its historic manufacturing industry and Victorian Legacy. The High Street was once said to be the longest high street in the country and called affectionately 'The Golden Mile' such was the hustle and bustle of commerce.

### The challenges

West Bromwich has been challenged by similar issues experienced by post-industrial towns in England. Although retail has thrived in the town, from the 1970s and again as recently as 2013 with the opening of New Square shopping centre, changes in consumer behaviour and displacement through the newer modern offer has demanded, that the centre evolves too.

The town needs to attract visitors with a more experiential offer and there is also the need for more housing, and to regenerate large parts of the public realm and infrastructure that have been in place for some years. With Birmingham close by, West Bromwich - like many English towns - needs to shape its own unique selling points that will pull people into the town, based on its own heritage, culture and its unique mix of a diverse population, underpinned by a growing young population. This is both a place branding challenge and a capital development challenge, with the town needing to deliver a range of projects over the coming years in order to deliver change.

### Commitment to inclusive place shaping.

West Bromwich and Sandwell Council had achieved significant investment through its Towns Deal, a £67.5m of government money awarded to the local authority. With £25m for a range of projects supporting West Bromwich's 20 year Masterplan, there was a need to ensure that headlines about new investment were followed by action and a sense of progress that is shared by the town's local community.

The High Streets Task Force advised Sandwell Council to focus on building local partnerships and effective communication around the Masterplan and how it will transform the area. Staff at the Council took on this culture of engagement very strongly, and worked with stakeholders including the local college, Business Improvement District, and public sector organisations. These stakeholders were directly involved in shaping the Town Centre Masterplan and the roll out of creative projects on the high street, like new seating, fountain restoration, lighting, urban greening and the increase of artwork.

**Town centre visit > 13 March 2020**

As a Task Force pilot location, Sandwell Council were visited in 2020, hosting a collaborative workshop exploring local challenges. There was then an interval in support as the Task Force delivered Covid-19 recovery help to UK high streets through its central programme and during restrictions period.

**Expert support > 2022**

Support from Judith Doherty, a place and inward investment expert, helped Sandwell and the local community focus on the branding of the town and its masterplan, to deliver this in a way that captures the public imagination and brings people along on the journey.

**Placemaking Programme > 1 March 2023**

While long term capital investment is transformational for the town, there is a need to improve the appearances and conditions for business now. This workshop helped stakeholders explore opportunities to do this through practical interventions, and take these forward.

***“The Unlocking your Place Potential work was really helpful. It gave us a grounded framework of where we actually are - a strong vision, good stakeholders around the table, but that governance and collaboration piece was missing.”***

***“We have since invested in projects which really show the town is changing. A strong level of community buy-in is what we’re looking to achieve, to underpin transformation of place through large scale investment into the Masterplan delivery.”***

**Joshua Singh**

**Planning Regeneration Team Leader + West Midlands Young Planner of the Year 2023, Sandwell Council**

**Impact**

West Bromwich is seeing positive impacts across the town, from initial delivery of placemaking projects and greening, to long-term interest in investment aligned to its masterplan. A culture of partnership and stakeholder involvement has been in evidence since working with the Task Force. People feel like they have a stake in delivering for the town and are seeing progress with the opening of new developments.

**Solutions**

Local input has been ‘baked in’ to future regeneration work through the formation of working groups for individual projects and the Council’s regeneration team have been proactive in delivering social value through each intervention. A new college campus on the high street will increase this feeling of local ownership and momentum, bringing more high street visitors and increasing the vitality of the area. The Task Force and its frameworks have supported Sandwell Council regeneration colleagues to deliver the underpinning partnership working and commitment to co-creation and social value.

West Bromwich has both secured a range of long term capital investment and committed to a community-based process of co-developing opportunities to regenerate a multifunctional, modern centre. This includes:

- New 20 year masterplan - with clear vision for quality environment, spaces and broad offer
- Communications planning focused on raising local excitement and attachment to plans
- Steering groups established for individual projects, drawing in range of perspectives and resource
- Significant urban greening to improve the look and feel of high streets and creative plans incorporating local college input
- New technical college campus approved for West Bromwich high street for engineering and hybrid electric vehicles

# Satisfaction

Across all products and services for which evaluations are conducted (a total of 641 responses), there is a **92% overall average satisfaction rating**.

This is testament to the work of the Task Force consortium, and in particular to the work of our register of Experts, whose direct support to local authorities is the primary subject of this evaluation. Given the complex and contested issues that the Task Force addresses through the project, often working as a 'critical friend', this achievement is significant.

Feedback for the revised format of the Developing a Shared Vision programme is positive as well. Its cohort model has permitted both one to one Expert support, as well as allowing participating local authorities to share learning. As part of Task Force evaluation, respondents contribute their thoughts on a number of specific areas, examples of which are highlighted opposite.

In addition to participant evaluation, we are compiling detailed examples of the wide-ranging impact of High Streets Task Force support. Many towns and cities have revitalised their place vision, local governance and partnerships, drawing on Task Force data to deliver activity and investment that will create unique and resilient places. The Task Force has supported UK Government so that more community organisations and businesses are involved in local decision making and governance structures, and that collectively these groups are aligned to achieving a transformative vision for their urban centres.

Local work to implement the findings of the High Streets Task Force has also informed bids for government and private sector funding, with many supported places achieving significant investment for large scale transformation of infrastructure, the public realm, recreational space(s), business and skills hubs, and the repurposing of large floorplate retail. Examples include:

**Newquay** Nearly £50 million to create a direct train service linking Newquay, St Austell, Truro and Falmouth, alongside better walking and cycling access to stations.

**Accrington** Accrington's Town Square will get a new lease of life with £20 million funding to bring several buildings back into use, including the historic Market Hall which will be transformed into a modern food hall.

**Ellesmere Port** Over £13 million will build new cycle links and walkways in Ellesmere Port and upgrade the market hall with a new children's play area and Changing Places toilets to enable people with disabilities to live more independent lives in the community.

**Q. Task Force support has encouraged me to continue having discussions to improve my high street?**

**Strongly Agree: 52%    Agree: 48%**

**Q. Task Force support will help us improve our high street??**

**Strongly Agree: 36%    Agree: 55%  
Neutral: 9%**



Above: High street engagement in Westminster

## Satisfaction (cont...)

Overall satisfaction programme to date			
Mean   % Satisfied or Very satisfied (Question 3)			
Unlocking your Place Potential	4.22/5		87% (249 responses)
Expert Product	4.57/5		100% (30 LA responses)
Mentor product	4.0/5		100% (2 LA responses)
Place Making Programme	4.49/5		97% (258 responses)
Developing a Shared Vision workshop	<i>Individual LAs</i>		<i>Cohort model (from April 2022)</i>
	3.36/5	36% (11 responses)	3.67/5   83% (6 responses)
Developing Place Leaders workshop (LEPs)	4.41/5		94% (85 responses)
<b>OVERALL SATISFACTION FOR DELIVERY</b>	<b>4.35/5</b>		<b>92% (641 responses)</b>

“The resources provided by the Task Force proved extremely helpful, including their online Recovery Framework. Looking to the long-term future of Ellesmere Port, we’ve benefited from practical advice on bringing together a partnership that can deliver for the area. The Partnership will now push forward with our plans to bring public services, housing and an enhanced cultural offer into the town to support town centre businesses and make Ellesmere Port an even better place to live, work, learn and visit.”

Cllr Richard Beacham  
Cabinet Member for Inclusive Growth, Economy & Regeneration,  
Ellesmere Port

**In the final year of the programme we will be expanding our monitoring and evaluation activity in partnership with Price Waterhouse Cooper, seeking to further demonstrate the positive impact that the Task Force has had for our high streets up and down the country.**

## Insight from professional bodies

To capture further data and intelligence on what our Experts have found, and provide valuable insights into their experience delivering support through the programme to date, we convened an Experts symposium in March 2023.

During the session, we conducted an exercise with the Experts on the key blockers and enablers facing high streets. The lists of blockers and enablers were generated following an analysis of the factors put forward by attendees at the Developing Place Leaders sessions (delivered online to LEP regions across the country).

The Experts were asked to rank a series of factors which block positive place change and factors which enable positive place change, based on how much each factor is locally controllable and how much influence each factor has on the vitality and viability of a high street. In total, there were 270 blockers and 287 enablers to consider. These blockers and enablers were then condensed into 20 of each, based on common themes, and sorted into five categories, as follows:

### Enablers

1. Partnerships & Collaboration
2. Vision & Leadership
3. Community Engagement & Ownership
4. Assets & Resources
5. Investment & Funding

### Blockers

1. Governance & Leadership
2. Financial Constraints
3. Community Engagement
4. Vision & Strategy
5. Infrastructure & Spatial Design

As we can see, the reverse of the main blockers emerge as the main enablers of positive place change. This underlines the fact that our Experts are aligned in their thinking that collaboration, leadership and visioning remain the most important aspects for local places to consider when attempting to affect positive place change for their high street. This correlates with the analysis of our Unlocking your Place Potential recommendations and wider evidence assessment set out in the previous section.



# Our Governance

Effective governance is at the core of the Task Force's ability to achieve its goal of helping to transform high streets and town centres across the country. There are four main components to the governance structure that oversees the performance of the High Streets Task Force (HSTF). The Task Force Board is the most senior governance body and, as a result, is the point of direct escalation for the Sector Leaders Group (SLG), Professional, Research and Data Group (PRDG) and Executive Group.

## High Streets Task Force Board

The HSTF Board was established to oversee the Task Force throughout its five-year commission. The Board provide strategic direction and represent the face of the Task Force through advocacy, media appearances and the use of social media. The Board met twice in-person over the last twelve months, in November 2022 in Stockton-on-Tees, and in May 2023 in Streatham. Both meetings provided the opportunity for board members to visit places where the High Streets Task Force have supported.

Members are comprised of place leaders and innovators who are passionate about high streets, with actual, recent experience of transforming a high street or town centre. These place leaders have experience in various tiers of government, place management, the community, business, investment, and innovation.

## Sector Leaders Group

The Sector Leaders Group (SLG) champion positive transformation of high streets and town centres, representing organisations that have interest and influence across many high street stakeholders. The SLG shares intelligence and information, identifies issues in common, cascades information and insights to the people and organisations that need it, and hence empowers stakeholders to actively transform their local places.

The group is comprised of members who are identifying new ways to be successful on the high street, anticipating and adapting to changes and who are leaders in their areas.

During 2021/22 the SLG reverted to quarterly meetings, convening on 4 occasions, in September, December, March and June.

## Professional, Research and Data Group

The Professional, Research and Data Group (PRDG) collate and review research and data to ensure the HSTF has informed views on significant issues facing the transformation of England's high streets. The PRDG is comprised of professional bodies who represent members with a specialised interest in the high street; UK academics with research expertise in high street and town centre issues; data providers who have useful data on the changing high street; and data delivery partners with relevant skills and knowledge to inform the work of the group.

The group met 3 times during 21/22, in September, December and April. Moving forwards, the group will meet twice yearly.

## HSTF Executive Group (internal governance)

This group, comprised of representatives from the partner organisations within the HSTF consortium, have overseen the direction of the Task Force and monitored its progress towards milestones and objectives. To achieve this goal, the group has oversight of emerging risks and issues and the volume and quality of work delivered by the Task Force. The Executive Group meets on a quarterly basis, convening four times over the last twelve months (September, December, March and June). Our full Partner list is detailed in the following section.

# The High Streets Task Force Consortium



Institute of Place Management is the international professional body for people involved in making, managing and developing places. IPM provides the underpinning research and knowledge for the Task Force, and also matches expertise with local area need, trains experts, and develops the training and data dashboards products. The Institute is part of Manchester Metropolitan University.



PwC is a global professional services network with headquarters in London. PwC has broad experience working with public sector clients, helping to deliver and manage large-scale programmes such as the Task Force. PwC acts as a delivery and planning partner, providing operational capacity and expertise and resources for the coordination of the Task Force.



The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the UK's leading planning body for spatial, sustainable and inclusive planning and is the largest planning institute in Europe with over 25,000 members. The RTPI provides experts to boost local authority capacity, and chairs the HSTF Professional, Research and Data Group.



Design Council is an independent charity and the Government's advisor on design. Their purpose is to make life better by design by enabling better places, products and processes. Design Council has worked with the Task Force to: develop a sustainable brand; use design tools and methods to challenge people to think innovatively about the future of their high streets; and share expertise in inclusion, healthy placemaking, service design, and social and environmental sustainability. Design Council are also leading the design and implementation of the 'Developing a Shared Vision' programme.



The BID Foundation is an industry body for Business Improvement Districts established in January 2018 following a UK-wide consultation. It is an independent and authoritative voice for BIDs, and is leading the development of industry standards. Its members are active place leaders in towns and cities with extensive networks. The BID Foundation co-chairs the High Streets Task Force Sector Leaders Group and has worked with IPM to identify experts and resources for the Task Force.



The Landscape Institute (LI) is the chartered body for the landscape profession. It is an educational charity that promotes the art and science of landscape practice. Its landscape practitioners include landscape scientists, planners, architects, managers and urban designers. The LI provides a pool of experts to contribute to Task Force delivery and services.



Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) is a not-for-profit membership organisation, dedicated to promoting the vitality and viability of urban centres across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Its members develop and implement shared visions, strategies and action plans for hundreds of district, town and city centres. ATCM co-chairs the High Streets Task Force Sector Leaders Group and provides resources on how to improve high streets.



Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement in England. Civic Voice was formed following extensive consultation with hundreds of civic and amenity societies and other interested organisations in 2009. Civic Voice provides relevant advice and guidance resources for place leaders.



MRI On Location (formerly Springboard) is a leading provider of data and intelligence on customer activity in stores and destinations. Springboard monitors customer behaviour in town and city centres, including footfall, demographic profiling and capacity monitoring. Springboard provides the Task Force access to all UK high street and town centre footfall data, as well as training courses and webinars for Task Force users to attend.



Maybe\* uses AI to provide sentiment analysis from social media directly to over 150,000 businesses. They have worked to develop the digital evolution of some 30 towns through the 'What do you think' campaign which aims to improve digital influence to drive footfall. Maybe\* provides the Task Force with consumer sentiment data for UK towns for benchmarking, and hold regular webinars that focus on high street sentiment data evaluation.



The Teenage Market, set up in 2012 by two brothers in Stockport, is active in over 30 locations across the UK, giving local young people the chance to actively engage and take part in events in their town or city. The Task Force will work with the Teenage Market over the five years to provide guidance and expertise for local authorities in England planning to hold Teenage Markets.



Cardiff University's School of Computer Science and Informatics is an internationally leading research School that impacts areas as diverse as healthcare, mobile and social computing, and the environment. They develop and integrate data sets on footfall and other high street performance indicators, as well as contribute to further research.



myknowledgemap

MyKnowledgeMap is a leading e-assessment software and solution specialist, with a full product, project, services and integration delivery. MyKnowledgeMap develop technology solutions that improve skills and knowledge for Task Force users, including high street data dashboards and an online resource repository.

