Appendix 2: BAS City, Town and District Centre Recommendation Reports

Nottingham City Council

Nottingham City Centre Recommendations report for Nottingham Council

April 2024

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

1.1. In November 2023, BAS Consultancy was commissioned alongside Nexus Planning to produce a report for Nottingham City Centre, and three other Nottingham town centres, to provide an evidence base to support the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan.

2. Brief and method

2.1. The brief specified the following output:

Key local stakeholder and business views on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Greater Nottingham centres as well as future requirements.

2.2. The agreed methodology for gathering information was the same for each town centre and involved:

i) Desk research for context
ii) An assessment of 25 key factors of town centre vitality and viability
iii) A town centre stakeholder workshop

Town Centre Vitality and Viabilty Assessment

2.3. The consultants undertook a detailed, *in situ* assessment of the town centre to provide a framework for understanding its features, performance, and potential concerns ahead of the stakeholder workshop, which took place in the evening of the same day - 6th December 2023.

2.4. Town centre assessments are focused around a robust, evidence-based method developed by the Institute of Place Management, which is part of Manchester Metropolitan University. The Institute is an international thought leader in placemaking and management, is the lead delivery partner in the Government's High Streets Task Force programme, which also incorporates the 25 Factors method in its assessments of high streets.

25 Factors of Vitality and Viability

2.5. The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability[1] are a set of measures that provide a consistent way of measuring place performance over time. Distilled from an original 237 factors that were identified by practitioners and academics as measures of place performance, these 25 factors are key because control over the factor is both within local hands and has the greatest impact on town centre vitality and viability. For this reason, place leaders are encouraged to focus on these issues to deliver effective place transformation:

The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability	
Liveability	Necessities
Activity	Merchandise
Experience	Place marketing

[1] A full explanation of the 25 Factors is here: https://www.placemanagement.org/research/25-vital-and-viable-priorities/ . For the purposes of the study, vitality is defined as ongoing 'busy-ness' and viability refers to the potential for a place to attract investment in the long-term.

Appearance	Recreational space
Walking	Barriers to entry
Commercial attractiveness	Adaptability
Redevelopment plans	Innovation
Functionality	Place management
Retail offer	Anchors
Non-retail offer	Networks and partnerships
Accessibility	Markets
Diversity	Safety / crime
Vision and strategy	

2.6. An assessment of the town centre, plus additional information gained from ad hoc interviews with local businesses, desk research and the stakeholder workshop, provides a numerical score for each factor from 1-5, with 1 reflecting the most negative impacts associated with that factor and five the most positive. These datasets provide an opportunity to assess Nottingham's town centres both in relation to each other and as individual town centres.

2.7. The assessment provides a snapshot of the centre and is not intended to be a forensic appraisal of the centre's performance.

2.8. For ease of understanding the 25 Factors are then subcategorised into five main areas of strategic focus – look and feel, function, offer, opportunity and management.

Area of strategic focus	Factors of vitality and viability
What affects the appearance and experience of the town centre?	Experience, Appearance, Place marketing, Crime and safety, Liveability
How does the centre function?	Activity hours, Necessities, Accessibility Walkability, Functionality
What does the town centre have to offer?	Retail offer, Anchors, Non-retail offer, Merchandise, Attractiveness, Markets, Recreational space
How does the town centre need to change?	Diversity, Barriers to Entry, Adaptability, Innovation, Redevelopment plans
How is the town centre being managed?	Vision and strategy, Place management, Networks and partnerships

2.9. Beyond the 25 factors, the assessor scored a number of other more specific factors that the local authority can use to monitor change in the town centre, including night time economy, litter levels, evidence of local identity and town type.

2.10. The full dataset is included in Appendix 2, with selective, expert analysis included in the main body of the report.

Four R's of renewal

2.11. This analysis leads us to identify a strategy for transformation based around 'Four R's of renewal': Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding or Restructuring. Although places can decline due to a range of factors, IPM research[2] indicates that there are usually four key areas of focus to begin to reverse that decline.

2.12. Firstly, 'Repositioning' describes a strategy which starts with gaining a clear understanding about the centre and using this data to develop a strong vision. Secondly 'Reinventing' refers to the implementation of short-term improvements, activations and development that help local people see their centre in new ways and kick-start footfall. Thirdly, 'Rebranding' focuses on turning around the perception of the place providing a strong, authentic place identity, and finally, 'Restructuring' describes the process of addressing structural problems, either in the physical layout of the town centre or in its governance structures.

2.13. This report's recommendations for each town centre are set out within the framework of these four renewal strategies.

[2] https://www.placemanagement.org/research/4-rs-framework/

3. Context

Tourism

- Overall visitor numbers in 2022 were up 11.9% versus 2021.
- This shows that visitors are returning to the city post covid well. Overall numbers are up 1.3% vs 2019, which again shows that loss of visitors has been broadly recovered compared to before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The visitor economy overall presents an economic value to the city of £569million per annum, supporting 7,447 jobs.
- Day visitors account for 90% of actual visitors to the city and account for 62% of the value.

UNICEF Child Friendly City

Nottingham's commitment to achieving accreditation under the UNICEF Child Friendly City initiative[3] could have important implications for city design, governance, and provision. The inclusion of children in conversations about the city's future may help to improve inclusivity for other marginalised groups, and service and place design that takes into account the desires of diverse groups for safety, opportunities for learning and active space benefits all Nottingham's residents.

University and student population

The University and Council have worked together to develop a student accommodation strategy[4]. It is anticipated that there will 6,500 bedspaces in the City Centre over the next 2-3 years. This is based on the number of bedspaces in extant planning permissions. This figure adds to the existing number of student bedspaces in the City Centre, of which there are around 13,500.

Rock City

The Nottingham live music and club venue and the many others that were founded since it opened in 1980 have impacted the evening economy, contributing to a strong visitor draw and a tradition as a centre for music. The vibrancy of the evening economy is likely to act as a factor in prospective university student choices on where to study, as a location for weekend stays and in local spend. The Nottingham Arena has also performed well as an attractor for visitors to the city, and now generates over £40m a year for the local economy.[5]

Sporting city

The impact of Premier League Football and County Cricket teams is a significant additional draw to the city, with Invest in Nottingham estimating the economic benefit of an additional £120m through associated spend in Nottingham Forest alone[6]. Much

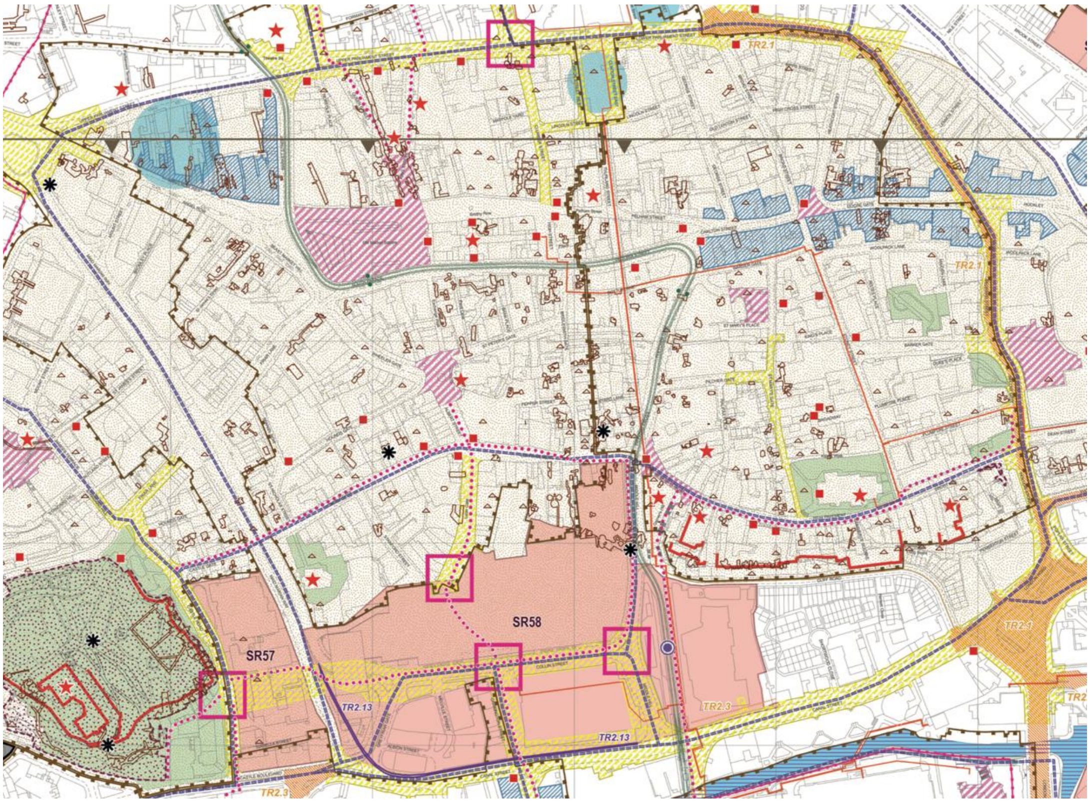
---

[3] https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/information-for-residents/children-and-families/child-friendly-nottingham
[4] https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/media/zqnlifzs/student-living-strategy.pdf
[5] https://www.motorpointarenanottingham.com/history/#:~:text=Proudly%20developed%20and%20owned%20by,local%20transport%20amongst%20other%20businesses.
[6] https://www.investinnottingham.com/news-and-events/read/2022/06/nottingham-forest-what-the-premier-league-means-to-nottingham-b6245

of this spend is generated outside the tourist season, adding to the city's economic resilience, and there are unquantifiable but nonetheless significant implications to the 'soft power' of football and cricket on the global stage, with these city brands being among the most recognised abroad.

4. Vitality and viability assessment

4.1. The complete, aggregated assessment of the groups taking part in the SWOT workshop is in Appendix 1. The assessment covered the city centre as it is defined in the local plan – within the dotted line boundary in the map below:



4.2. Nottingham city centre scores very highly in general for Vitality and Viability, with a range of functions, a varied offer and potential for continued transformation. In comparison with other Nottingham Town Centres assessed - athough comparison is of only limited value given the differences in size and amenity - Nottingham scored 99/125, with West Bridgford scoring 84/125, Beeston 86/125 and Arnold 67/125.

There were nineteen high scoring factors, representing 'good' or 'very good' vitality and viability in Nottingham city centre, comprising the following:

Vital and viable factor	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)
Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	5
Retail offer	Is there a variety of retail types on offer?	5

Anchors	Are there retail or non-retail anchors present in the centre?	5
Non-retail offer	Is there a good range of services?	5
Merchandise	Is there a good range of merchandise at mixed price points?	5
Walking	Is it easy to walk around the centre of town?	5
Experience	Is your general experience of the centre good?	4
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	4
Place management	How well is the place managed, either formally or informally?	4
Necessities	Does the centre provide basic necessities such as toilets, parking, benches etc?	4
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	4
Accessibility	Is the centre accessible via a range of transport modes?	4
Diversity	Is there a good mix of provision?	4
Attractiveness	Is the centre likely to be commercially attractive to investors?	4
Adaptability	Is the centre able to adapt to changing needs?	4
Liveability	Does the centre provide what is needed to live comfortably?	4
Redevelopment plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	4
Functionality	Does the centre perform its function (e.g. tourist centre, comparison shopping centre) well?	4
Innovation	Is there evidence of innovation – new business models, repurposing of space etc?	4

4.3. Activity

Nottingham city centre provides a very strong offer in leisure and activities and continues to invest in this element as an important draw. Three key areas are:

- The daytime tourism offer, including the Nottingham caves, the city's museums and castle, and shopping
- The night-time economy, which is focused on a younger / student audience
- Although outside the immediate city centre, the city's football and cricket venues provide a significant economic boost to the centre itself.

4.4. Retail offer

Nottingham's retail offer is very good in comparison to many other Core Cities. The city has maintained a good mix of independents and multiples, acting as a regional centre for shopping which has escaped the effects of any significant out-of-town development

4.5. Anchors

Anchors are not necessarily retail. Rather they are the significant drivers of footfall in a centre – hospitals, transport interchanges, department stores and museums are examples. Nottingham City Centre has a good number of anchors, concentrated on the daytime economy. There is some improvement ahead in the Broad Marsh redevelopment, green space and connections to Nottingham Castle.

4.6. Non-retail offer

As a major city centre, Nottingham is well-served by professional and personal services businesses, leisure, culture, education and other sectors.

4.7. Merchandise

Nottingham is very well reputed nationally for the quality and range of its retail offer, and though this has dipped slightly in recent years as multiples have been lost to the city, it continues to present an excellent range of merchandise serving different audiences within a compact and walkable centre.

4.8. Walking

The centre is compact, walkable and easy to navigate on foot, though level changes may prove a challenge for some visitors.

4.9. Experience

The general experience of the city centre is very good. The centre is visually stimulating, fun to explore and its historical layout creates experiential interest. The City Council and others provide a good level of activation, meaning that even regular visitors are likely to experience something new every time they visit. The retention of a city centre tourism office provides an important landing point in the visitor experience.

4.10. Appearance

The city centre is attractive, with grand streets and buildings such as the Theatre Royal, University Hall, Museum of Justice and Council House, ancient and well-preserved heritage areas and bold new architecture such as the Nottingham

Contemporary. The centre is also well-maintained, notably in the fabric of its buildings, street infrastructure, such as signage and street furniture, and streets are clean.

4.11. *Place management*

There is a good level of collaboration between key landowners, including the universities and council, and other bodies responsible for managing the city centre. The BID is professionally managed and effective and place management is visible across the centre, with heritage trails, public art, activation and good maintenance all in evidence.

4.12. *Necessities*

The centre provides the necessary basic amenities that are needed to facilitate a visit from a range of people with different needs, such as public toilets, parking, places to rest, good public transport and wayfinding.

4.13. *Accessibility*

The public transport system in the city is among the best provision in the UK and Nottinghamians are proud of this. A bus improvement strategy has been developed and efforts to support sustainable travel modes including cycling and walking are in clear evidence. Conversely, travelling around the city by private vehicle can be confusing and frustrating, and while this may be part of a wider strategy to reduce car use, deliveries and servicing are a vital part of the city centre economy and this is likely to be impacted by the current road network.

4.14. *Diversity*

Daytime provision, both retail and not-retail serves a diverse audience with a range of needs and budgets. There is some potential for a greater diversity of provision in the evening economy, however, which is currently largely focused on bars and restaurants serving younger people. This reduces the diversity of the evening population in the centre and may create a ‘demand spiral’ affecting the viability of other uses.

4.15. *Attractiveness*

Low vacancy in comparison to other centres of this size, and new developments at Broad Marsh are evidence of the commercial prospects and viability of Nottingham city centre.

4.16. *Adaptability*

Due to the opportunity presented by the Broad Marsh redevelopment plans, and other less significant opportunities such as Victoria Market, a vacant Debenhams building and a burgeoning riverside area, the potential for adaptation to meet new demands, consumption patterns and behaviours is evident.

4.17. *Liveability*

Nottingham city centre scores well on the liveability measure, since it provides all that is needed for a range of people to live comfortably. However, there is more to be done to make the city liveable for families in particular, including family appropriate residential units, green space and schools.

4.18. Redevelopment Plans

Broad Marsh Shopping Centre redevelopment plans led by BDP are currently in progress and represent a 'once in a generation' opportunity to transform the southern gateway of the city.

4.19. Functionality

As with all major city centres, Nottingham's performs several functions and so can be described as multifunctional. Multifunctional centres are more resilient, because their economies do not rely on any single source of footfall. However, within this definition, it is possible to identify several distinct sub-functions:

- Comparison retail / shopping centre – including Victoria Shopping Centre, Bridlesmith Gate and Old Market Square areas
- Strong independent shopping offer – including Bridlesmith Walk, Lace Market and Derby Road
- Commercial centre – serving large scale office occupiers such as HMRC and many SMEs, particularly in the digital and technology sectors
- Visitor economy – serving football and cricket fans, daytime tourists and the 'stage and hen' end of the evening and weekend market
- Student centre – serving the students of two universities, with significant Nottingham Trent campus presence in the centre

4.20. Innovation

There is clear potential for innovation, including the highly innovative design for the Broad Marsh Shopping centre by Heatherwick and work to create a designer / maker workshop centre at Sneinton Market.

4.21. The lowest scores in the city centre assessment were as follows:

Recreational space	Is recreational space easily accessible from the centre?	2

Nottingham city centre lacks significant green open space, with the closest accessible space being at Nottingham Castle Grounds. A significant opportunity to redress the deficit lies in the redevelopment of Broad Marsh.

Other specific areas of concern that do not feature as part of the 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability, but that nevertheless have the potential to impact on the city were explored in the stakeholder workshop – see below.

5. Stakeholder workshop

5.1. Strengths

Nottingham’s regional significance as a draw for shopping is seen as a key strength. Nottingham has continued to thrive as a shopping destination in part due to its geographical location in relation to other towns and cities, generating a large catchment, and also the lack of any major out-of-town shopping centre. Within the city, the retail mix is strong with independents and multiples, high-end and budget-friendly shops. The centre is compact and walkable, and easily reached via an excellent public transport network.

The night time economy was also described as vibrant and varied, though many stressed that the evening offer is aimed at student and young weekend visitor markets. Beyond the ‘wet-led’ establishments however, Nottingham’s night time cultural strengths include theatres, cinema and a thriving live music and food scene to add to the sporting draws of the daytime. Nottingham is also a city of events and festivals, attracting diverse audiences across the year.

The students that support much of Nottingham’s evening economy, and the universities they attend were seen as a strength among workshop participants, providing economic vitality, energy and entrepreneurialism. The universities are active participants in Nottingham, as landlords and developers, educators, civic partners and researchers and these roles contribute in different ways to the fabric of the city.

5.2. Weaknesses

There is some concern that Nottingham City Council’s reputation is poor, and the workshop took place in the days following the issuing of a Section 114 Notice. It was thought that administrative boundaries are part of the issue, where the narrow boundaries of the city of 300,000 do not reflect the practical realities of the conurbation of 800,000. As is typical with many cities, Nottingham’s suburbs contain many of the affluent parts of the city and therefore statistical summaries tend to misrepresent deprivation, employment, income and crime.

Despite this however, concerns endure that Nottingham’s centre is not safe for some, though these are largely perception rather than reality, considering comparisons with other cities (see threats below). However, with an evening offer aimed at a younger market, there are parts of the centre that do not attract diversity. This reflects the broader concern that the student population is over-represented in the centre’s residential stock, retail and hospitality offer.

Though the city’s attitude to the student population varies, another weakness of the city, according to some workshop participants is graduate retention, which is the second lowest of the core cities at 29%[7]. This ‘brain drain’ is a concern where the city’s investment in producing highly educated people at the start of their careers is lost to other places.

In part due to the natural topography of the city, north / south movement is challenging, either by car or using active travel modes. The ring road causes severance that limits the potential growth of the centre. Sneinton Market and the Castle are examples of the problems of severance. Other concerns about the fabric

[7] https://shorturl.at/cktLP

of the city centre included the lack of green space and an ageing Victoria Shopping Centre.

5.3. Opportunities

A number of participants identified the redevelopment of the Broad Marsh shopping centre as the most significant opportunity for the city in a generation, in part because of the other opportunities that can be realised through transformation at this scale. Such opportunities include green and open space and community food growing, new residential stock to encourage families, older people and intergenerational living, and better connections between parts of the centre, such as the railway station and Castle grounds.

There were opportunities according to some for new experiments in city management and governance, including BIDs, community ownership and development and local partnerships. Some participants sought participatory structures to drive city vision, such as a citizen's assembly in contrast to an 'institution-led' approach and others believed a growth board was an important area of activity. In higher tiers of governance, the Levelling Up agenda and East Midlands devolution was thought to be a key opportunity to lead a new vision for Nottingham, following the approach of the Manchester and Birmingham regions.

An additional area of opportunity was the potential for Nottingham to lead the way in approaches to city-making. The 'Net Zero City', 'the '20-minute Neighbourhood' and the 'Wellbeing City' were all examples cited by participants.

There was thought to be an opportunity in perception and reputation management that could be defined as place brand development. Some participants believed that improvements could be made in city promotion, given the international significance of Robin Hood and the potential for a modern interpretation of the fable, the Universities, and global platform provided by the city's sporting heritage.

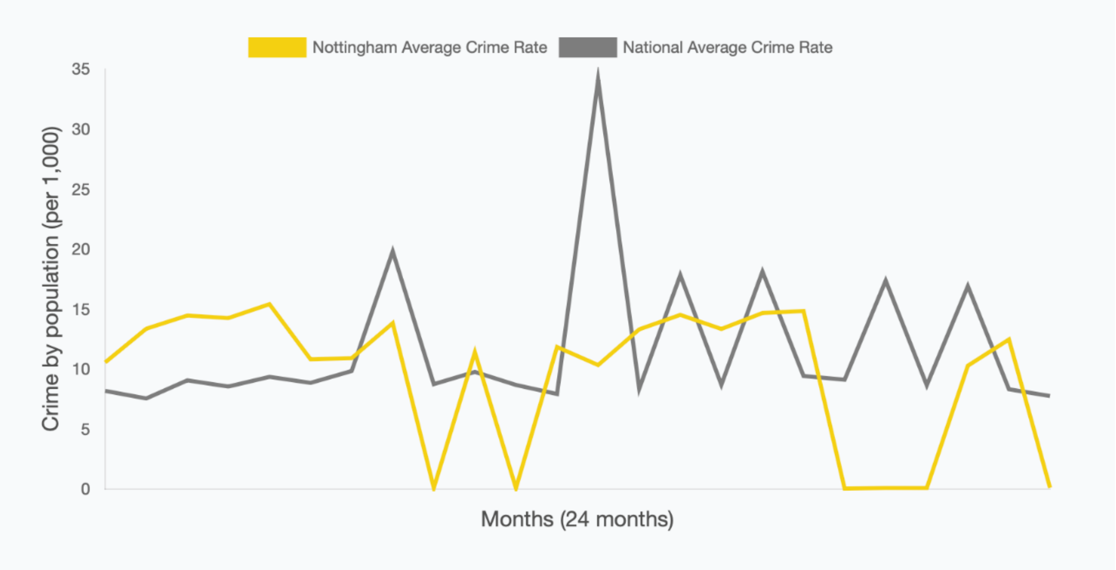
5.4. Threats

Nottingham is subject to many of the structural issues that town centre's across the country face and these were identified by participants – rising rents and costs, increase in e-commerce, the affordability of housing and climate change were all in this category of issues which the city has limited power to change. City-wide issues such as the impact of a large student population on housing and the economy, graduate retention, transience and antisocial behaviour were also raised.

Participants were divided over the extent to which crime and antisocial behaviour was a threat to the city's growth. The relationship between the perception of safety and actual crime rates, particularly in comparison with other places can be complex. The assessment took descriptions from the workshops, those on local discussion sites such as Quora[8] and Reddit[9] and crime rates in comparison with the national average

[8] https://www.quora.com/Why-is-there-a-lot-of-crime-in-the-UK-city-of-Nottingham
[9] https://www.reddit.com/r/nottingham/comments/ul771k/how_safe_is_nottingham/

over the last two years to understand the picture of crime and antisocial behaviour in Nottingham City Centre.



Source: ADT

The perception of safety in the centre was greater among participants in the City centre workshop than among participants in the other three town centre workshops. In the case of the latter, participants often reported that they rarely visited the centre for safety reasons.

An additional area of threat for the city is the declining budget, which may reduce the social value impact of development such as Broad Marsh, and has the potential to cause delay to projects that have already faced a long lead-in.

5.5. The Four 'R's

Workshop participants were encouraged to consider the starting point for action across the Four 'R's of renewal, Reinventing, Repositioning, Rebranding and Restructuring. Although recommendations include elements of all of these approaches (see section 6 below), participants discussed two particular issues, as below:

- *Rebranding*: being clearer about what the city has to offer, its values as a place, it's message to people outside the city, and the symbols the city uses to represent itself.
- *Restructuring:* The opportunity of the Broad Marsh redevelopment is fundamental to the future of Nottingham

6. Recommendations

The recommendations below are drawn from the data collected across the workshop, tour, assessment and desk research. They represent some of the interventions that the council and its partners can take to address the city's problems for the greatest impact.

6.1. *Markets strategy*

Nottingham is a city of large-scale events and activations. However, some of the more day-to-day activations that can support the economy and sense of place would benefit from renewed focus. Although not raised as a concern in the workshops, the imminent closure of the Council-run Victoria Centre Market and the untapped potential of Sneinton Market provide cause for consideration. It is recommended that a city markets strategy be produced to explore how Nottingham City Council and its partners can support its markets with a comprehensive vision, encompassing:

- The potential for markets to support job creation, apprenticeships and enterprise, including in partnership with the Universities.
- The commodity gaps and local needs that may be addressed through the city's market provision
- Operational issues – potential to secure private operator(s), night markets, street food and events to draw student crowd, discounted units to encourage start-ups etc

6.2. City Brand

The promise of the Nottingham Project in 2020 as a 'once in a generation opportunity to revision the future of Nottingham' has been borne out in part through the place branding exercise which led to the 'City of Rebels'. There is work to do to build from this exercise into a rounded-out place brand, that includes a broader demonstration of brand values, message, city offer and articulation. The brand marque should be accessible to the major institutions to signal citywide initiatives, and a plan to roll out the brand through campaigns should be planned by brand owners and affiliates.

6.3. Night time strategy

As with other devolved cities and city regions, the appointment of an individual responsible for representing and championing the evening and night time economy is recommended. 'Night Mayors' are particularly effective in drawing attention to the drawbacks of night time working, including lack of access to healthcare and professional services, low pay and precarious employment. Strategies and campaigns have focused also on women's safety, spiking and mental health.
Given the importance of Nottingham's night time economy, and the current challenges the hospitality sector in particular faces, a strategic focus on developing an inclusive economy that both supports and diversifies the Nottingham offer is needed.

6.4. Vision and masterplan

Nottingham's approach to city-wide governance is progressive and inclusive, involving a range of institutions and representatives each with their own role to play in stewarding transformation. There is an opportunity to use these governance mechanisms to develop a city vision and place principles which can be articulated across projects from the physical (such as Broad Marsh) to the economic (such as a strategy for the city's markets. These principles should be broadly communicated and consulted upon in a visioning exercise that provides all those from Nottingham to have a say in the direction the city should take.

7. Conclusion

Nottingham has a vibrant and energetic city centre and it remains busy during the day and into the evening. Its culture and heritage is much in evidence in its buildings, streets and caves but those layers of history complement a dynamic and future-focused city.

The development of Broad Marsh as a new shopping centre did not occur and this was viewed by many as a turning point in the story of the city: an opportunity to think more carefully about the sort of city Nottingham could become. The masterplan and wider strategy that emerged demonstrated the potential for a centre that is verdant, low carbon, and that prioritises wellbeing and social interaction.

Nottingham is famed for its shopping, sport and nightlife, and relative to other places, these attractions remain central to the city offer. However, as with all places, there is a need to redefine the city to meet changing needs and to reflect this new vision via the city brand. This process requires the buy-in of the city's institutions and cannot be achieved by the City Council alone. Additionally, it should resonate with the people of Nottingham to create grassroots civic pride, authenticity and mission.

Nottingham's city centre will transform in the years to come, as both the advantages of devolution in the East Midlands and the pressures of council budgets are realised. Strong governance, inclusive place partnerships and clear vision are vital in times of change, and Nottingham City Council has demonstrated a commitment to developing these.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Nottingham City Centre Vitality and Viability Healthcheck

Factor	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)	Notes
Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	5	Very good level of activity for centre of this size
Retail offer	Is there a variety of retail types on offer?	5	Very good range and type of retail for town centre of this size
Vision and strategy	Is there evidence of a vision or strategy driving the centre?	3	Yes, good evidence but some scope for improvement
Experience	Is your general experience of the centre good?	4	Yes
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	4	Yes
Place management	How well is the place managed, either formally or informally?	4	Good structures in place, including BID and Council
Necessities	Does the centre provide basic necessities such as toilets, parking, benches etc?	4	Yes
Anchors	Are there retail or non-retail anchors present in the centre?	5	Yes, M&S, JLP, Office occupiers, Unis etc
Non-retail offer	Is there a good range of services?	5	Yes
Merchandise	Is there a good range of merchandise at mixed price points?	5	The city has a retail offer for all ages and budgets

Walking	Is it easy to walk around the centre of town?	5	Compact and walkable, with pedestrianised sections and efforts to reduce car use
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	4	Significant efforts in evidence
Networks and partnerships	Are there effective partnerships operating for the benefit of the centre?	3	Yes, but some need to bring this together and include stakeholder voices from community
Accessibility	Is the centre accessible via a range of transport modes?	4	Yes, including well used tram
Diversity	Is there a good mix of provision?	4	Yes
Attractiveness	Is the centre likely to be commercially attractive to investors?	4	Yes
Markets	How well is the market performing, if there is one?	3	Several markets with mixed fortunes - Sneinton Market requires focus
Recreational space	Is recreational space easily accessible from the centre?	2	
Barriers to entry	Is there space available for rent to new businesses?	3	Nottingham lacks sufficient city centre green space
Safety / crime	Is there evidence of local fear of crime?	3	Some evidence - particularly from suburban participants
Adaptability	Is the centre able to adapt to changing needs?	4	Yes – Broad Marsh key opportunity but development across the city
Liveability	Does the centre provide what is needed to live comfortably?	4	Yes
Redevelopment plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	4	Yes - Broad Marsh has potential to be major draw, plus castle area redevelopment

Functionality	Does the centre perform its function (e.g. tourist centre, comparison shopping centre) well?	4	Yes but it has multiple functions, some of which perform better than others - retail is good, tourism less so.
Innovation	Is there evidence of innovation – new business models, repurposing of space etc?	4	Yes - e.g. Bridlesmith Gate, Sneinton Market, Broad Marsh
	TOTAL V&V SCORE:	**99**	/125

Stakeholder workshop: SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Compact / walkable x 4	Single narrative / brand / marketing	No Meadowhall / out of town	Purpose built student accommodation?
Public transport and cycling x 4	Local government administrative boundaries - 300k vs 800k pop. X 3	EMCCA - Transport investment	Austerity and council funds x 3
1000 years of heritage - robin hood / caves x 3	Inner ring road W / N / E	Broad Marsh - once in generation opportunity for regen at scale x 3	Online shopping growth
3rd sector	Reputation of city (Council?) - Castle and Robin Hood Energy	Urban living - 'gentle density' x 2	Graduate retention
John Lewis / M&S x 2	Hidden treasures	Community ownership. Right to grow food	Jobs in the city centre / work from home
Universities - 70k in city x 3	Wealth drain	Growth board	Viability
Diversity x 2	Safety	Resillient urban form - fine grain enables conversions	Inflation
Independents x 4	Too many empty units	BID / SLS - partnerships	Safety
Cultural places: arts, theatre, music x 3	Students and student accommodation x 2	NTU and Castle Meadow campuses	Inequality

Nightlife	Segregation between students and others	Repurposing retail - to what?	Strength of suburbs x 2
Student population	Victoria Centre x 2	Integration of generations	Change in population demographics
Large events x 2	Opening Hours	East Midlands levelling up	Graduate retention and brain drain
Sporting sector x 3	North / South topography	Reclaiming place as top 10 retail destination	Lack of shared vision x 2
No major out of town shopping centre	Lack of green space in centre x 2	Better use of assets	Affordability of housing
Green space x 2	Graduate retention x 2	Wider cultural / visitor offer to reflect demographic	Climate Change
Airport x 2	Distribution	Partnerships / community groups	Broad Marsh Threats: Antisocial behaviour, return to retail, WFH, free parking out of town, climate change, biz rates x 2
BID x 3	North / South active travel	University campuses	Support night time strategy
Robin Hood	Residential accommodation inbalance	Combined Authority	Business rates
Innovation and creativity	Private car access for disabled users	15 minute city x 2	Connectivity to adjacent places
Market square	Out of town ownership of property	More green space x 2	Transience of student population
Local loyalty	Permeability / tension of different users	Widen opening hours	Preponderance / imbalance of student accommodation
Sneinton Market		Carbon Neutral commitment	Antisocial behaviour of students
Bridlesmith Gate		Sporting heritage	Modal conflict of shared spaces
East / West Walking and Cycling		Much better than the stats - city / uni	Thinking we can return to the past re retail

Night time economy		Energy costs and offices	
Draw as regional centre		Wellbeing	
Creativity and Innovation		Night time economy	
		More culture and heritage	
		Citizen's Assembly	
		Sporting heritage as partnership / attractor	
		New housing format / design	
		Make our city unique	
		Flexibility on Council Owned Property	

SWOT Analysis – Nottingham Tourism Unit (submitted)

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• **A variety of attractions** • The combination of products in the City and Shire • **World renowned folk hero Robin Hood** • Strong business engagement / membership • **Central UK location** • Established calendar of events • **Two universities** • Food & Drink – Local Artisan Produce • **Product awareness** • History & Heritage • **Accommodation base (City)** • Quality of life • **Established DMO – Tourist Information Centre** • Compact city centre • **Established BIDs – overseeing place management- city and North Nottinghamshire** • Sporting city/destination • **Best public transport in the UK** • Great balance green & rural/cosmopolitan & urban • **Strong narrative** • Culture	• **Predominantly seen as a day trip/weekend destination** • Lack of or limited offer of new events and new products which are increasingly important to engage the visitor • **Lack of or limited offer of events and products that can attract overnight visitors** • Limited Robin Hood tourism offer across both city and county • **Continuity of brand delivery across all main visitor touch points** • Travel and Infrastructure – connectivity between city and county • **Technology – Connectivity** • The landscape of the local visitor economy post Covid-19 • **Lack of funding / resources** • Political boundaries/local authorities • **Duplication/Lack of joint approach** • More accommodation in the county

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Green credentials and sustainability • **Improve & refresh activity/promotional materials/and commercial collateral** • Student population – 15% • **Explore opportunities for Group Travel** • £30m investment in Nottingham Castle • **Local Visitor Economy Partnership** • £10m investment 5G in The Forest • **Investment southside of the city/ Broad Marsh** • **Weekend Break/extended stays** • Great Outdoors • **Residents fall back in love with hidden treasures on their doorstep** • Domestic Market • **Cross industry collaboration** • Membership/Brand led approach • **Maintaining consistent growth – UK heritage – cultural – sport - destination** • Implementation of online bookable products (TXGB) • **Ambitious plan to be UK's first carbon neutral city** • Membership growth and support • **Visitor Experience – appetite for travel consumer trends – targeted marketing** • Extend typical vacation season/window • **Core Cities initiatives – Better together** • Strong Business Visit & Events Sector • **Inclusive: Local Cultures & Lifestyle (people)** • Devolution deal • **Strengthening Local Supply Chain**	• **Decline of local authority budgets** • Uncertainty travel – Cost of living crisis • **More collaboration with partners and local authorities required** • Growth of other UK cities heritage destinations • **Competition for market share** • Lack of funding/sponsors • **Diminishing levels of marketing resource and points of entry branding/ signage** • Drop in the number of international visitors • **Limited access to tourism market intelligence – access to data** • Understaffing • **Collaboration** • Lack of a high capacity convention centre to compete with other UK cities • **Capital investment – New Products** • Skills training • **Business Support** • Lack of marketing budgets

SWOT analysis, Inward Investment Team (Submitted)

STRENGTHS

- **Reputation as vibrant University city hosting two world class Universities, thus lots of young people**
- Thriving Biosciences, Fintech & Tech scenes delivering significant number of knowledge intensive, well paid jobs
- **City centre is relatively small and therefore all areas are reachable within a reasonable walk**
- Great restaurant scene
- **Thriving independent scene**
- Nottingham Contemporary plus its reputation across the European arts crowd
- **Globally recognized 'hero' Robin Hood**
- Diverse offering so that many groups of society feel like there is something for them in the city centre – theatre shows, comedy, music venues, bars, restaurants, canalside walks, skate spaces, new library and play park (pending)…
- **Reputation as an environmentally conscious city**
- Train station is a pleasant station and clean station.
- **Centrally located in the country**
- Tourist attractions such as Nottingham Castle

WEAKNESSES

- **Sentiment internally that we are a forgotten city by the government, that we have too many vacant units, poor retail offer.**
- Reputation that the Broad Marsh site has been a development in the making for decades, but little has been delivered.
- **Reputation that the city is difficult to drive and park in due to road layouts.**
- That arriving to Nottingham by train, the Broad Marsh development usually needs to be crossed, which doesn't always give the best impression.
- **That the retail rankings has slipped so significantly from being in the top 10 UK cities for shopping, to…..where?**
- Inadequate funding given for place marketing activity from collective stakeholders (businesses), despite general rhetoric stating its importance.
- **We (businesses, people) have a shared identity in Nottingham, a definite personality. But do we use it enough?**
- Some of most deprived areas in UK fall within City boundaries
- **High, or perception of high levels of homelessness.**

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Market Square – central focal point**
- Broad Marsh - indisputably massive opportunity for the city centre and for Nottingham(shire) residents.
- **To retain students once graduated, to grow the talent pool**
- To shout loudly about the things we do well – our amazing quality of life, nightlife, innovative and exciting businesses, university strengths, strong sectors…
- **To work across all stakeholders – incl. businesses, residents, education, arts etc as a unified positive force / network. Opportunity to be optimistic.**
- Combined Authority – good press, powers, leverage private sector investment.
- **Nottingham Forest in Premier League provides global platform for city – PL football broadcast into 1bn homes around the world.**

THREATS

- **Draw of other cities, namely London and Manchester, for the 'scene' – shopping, nights out, instagramability.**
- Lose students to other cities - 'university city', transient, moving often on to London once studies complete.
- **Occasional bad press with long lasting reputational damage**
- Fallout from Section 114 notice.

Gedling Borough Council

Arnold Town Centre Recommendations report for Gedling Borough Council

April 2024

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

1.1. In November 2023, BAS Consultancy was commissioned alongside Nexus Planning to produce a report for Arnold, in the Borough of Gedling, and three other Nottingham Centres.

2. Brief and method

2.1. The brief specified the following output:

Key local stakeholder and business views on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Greater Nottingham centres as well as future requirements

2.2. The agreed methodology for gathering information was the same for each town centre and involved:

i) Desk research for context
ii) An assessment of 25 key factors of town centre vitality and viability
iii) A town centre stakeholder workshop

Town Centre Vitality and Viabilty Assessment

2.3. The consultants undertook a detailed, *in situ* assessment of the town centre to provide a framework for understanding its features, performance, and potential concerns ahead of the stakeholder workshop, which took place in the evening of the same day – 5 December, 2023.

2.4. Town centre assessments are focused around a robust, evidence-based method developed by the Institute of Place Management, which is part of Manchester Metropolitan University. The Institute is an international thought leader in placemaking and management, is the lead delivery partner in the Government's High Streets Task Force programme, which also incorporates the 25 Factors method in its assessments of high streets.

2.5. The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability[1] are a set of metrics that provide a consistent way of measuring place performance over time. Distilled from an original 237 factors that were identified by practitioners and academics as important measures of place performance, these 25 factors are prioritised for action because control over the factor is both within local hands and has the greatest impact on town centre vitality and viability.

2.6. For this reason, place leaders are encouraged to focus on these issues to deliver effective place transformation:

The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability	
Liveability	Necessities
Activity	Merchandise
Experience	Place marketing

[1] A full explanation of the 25 Factors is here: https://www.placemanagement.org/research/25-vital-and-viable-priorities/ . For the purposes of the study, vitality is defined as ongoing 'busy-ness' and viability refers to the potential for a place to attract investment in the long-term.

Appearance	Recreational space
Walking	Barriers to entry
Commercial attractiveness	Adaptability
Redevelopment plans	Innovation
Functionality	Place management
Retail offer	Anchors
Non-retail offer	Networks and partnerships
Accessibility	Markets
Diversity	Safety / crime
Vision and strategy	

2.7. An assessment of the town centre, plus additional information gained from ad hoc interviews with local businesses, desk research and the stakeholder workshop, provides a numerical score for each factor from 1-5, with 1 reflecting the most negative impacts associated with that factor and five the most positive. These datasets provide an opportunity to assess Nottingham's town centres both in relation to each other and as individual town centres.

2.8. The assessment provides a snapshot of the centre and is intended as an indicative rather than definitive appraisal of the centre's performance.

2.9. For ease of understanding the 25 Factors are then subcategorised into five main areas of strategic focus – look and feel, function, offer, opportunity and management.

Area of strategic focus	**Factors of vitality and viability**
What affects the **appearance and experience** of the town centre?	Experience, Appearance, Place marketing, Crime and safety, Liveability
How does the centre **function**?	Activity hours, Necessities, Accessibility Walkability, Functionality
What does the town centre have to **offer**?	Retail offer, Anchors, Non-retail offer, Merchandise, Attractiveness, Markets, Recreational space
How does the town centre **need to change**?	Diversity, Barriers to Entry, Adaptability, Innovation, Redevelopment plans
How is town centre **management**?	Vision and strategy, Place management, Networks and partnerships

2.10. The full dataset is included in **Appendix 1**, with selective, expert analysis included in the main body of the report.

2.11. This analysis leads us to identify a strategy for transformation based around 'Four R's of renewal': Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding or Restructuring. Although places can decline due to a range of factors, IPM research[2] indicates that there are usually four key areas of focus to begin to reverse that decline.

2.12. Firstly, 'Repositioning' describes a strategy which starts with gaining a clear understanding about the centre and using this data to develop a strong vision. Secondly 'Reinventing' refers to the implementation of short-term improvements, activations and development that help local people see their centre in new ways and kick-start footfall. Thirdly, 'Rebranding' focuses on turning around the perception of the place providing a strong, authentic place identity, and finally, 'Restructuring' describes the process of addressing structural problems, either in the physical layout of the town centre or in its governance structures.

2.13. This report's recommendations for each town centre are set out within the framework of these four renewal strategies.

2.14. *Stakeholder workshop*

2.15. The stakeholder workshop took place in the Council offices from 6pm – 8pm. Invitees comprised a range of representatives with a specific interest in the town centre, including businesses and business organisations, resident representatives, council officers and others, as below:

Name	**Representing**
Jenny Hollingsworth	Gedling Borough Council
Tanya Najuk	Gedling Borough Council
Mike Avery	Gedling Borough Council
Alison Gibson	Gedling Borough Council
Ophelia Gamble	Gedling Borough Council
Kathryn Banning	Gedling Borough Council
David Ellis	Gedling Borough Council
Jenny Eurge	Gedling Borough Council
Reverend Peter Bowers	Arnold Methodist Church
Patrick Henderson	Arnold Methodist Church
Marika Lawrence	Willmott Dixon
Adam Dodd	Willmott Dixon
Jerry Major	Willmott Dixon
Howard Whitehurst	Arnold Community Centre
Ben Bowley	Leonard Design
Peter Walster	Aldergate Properties
Dawn Bramhall	KH Hair and Beauty Salon
Nathan Wall	Gedling Borough Council
Heather Lindley-Clapp	Nexus Planning
Ben Stephenson	BAS Consultancy

[2] https://www.placemanagement.org/research/4-rs-framework/

2.16. The agenda comprised the following:

- Introduction
- What's going wrong with our city centres?
- SWOT EXERCISE: Thinking about your place
- Break
- Feeding back on your SWOT
- What do we do about it? The four 'Rs'
- Community-led placemaking
- A vision for your centre

2.17. The session focused on providing information about the history and current state of the UK's high streets, learning from examples of other places that have successfully transformed, particularly through citizen participation, and an interactive session which encouraged participants in groups of five or six to develop and then compare their own analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the town centre.

2.18. The SWOT analysis formed the main part of the workshop. Participants were given time to discuss the issues and were then set a final challenge of deciding together what strategy they would employ to tackle them, using the Four 'R's of Renewal (see 2.12 above). Broadly, the four approaches are a) Developing a strong, evidence-based vision, focusing on activating the public realm, changing perception through place branding, or creating structural change, either in local governance or physical layout. Although most places require a combination of these approaches, agreeing on a place to start is the key to developing the partnerships needed to transform them.

3. Town centre context

3.1. Arnold is the largest town centre in Gedling, a Metropolitan Borough in the north of the city of Nottingham. It is known as a market and manufacturing town, with a history of brewing and frame knitting. Both Gedling Borough Council and Nottinghamshire County Council are based in Arnold.

3.2. The town centre is linear in form, laid out along Front Street and Worrall Avenue, part of which is pedestrianised. The town centre is well provided for with supermarkets (and therefore parking), with an ASDA and Iceland in the town centre and a Sainsburys on the Southern periphery. Beyond the supermarkets, the range of shops and services is a relatively typical mix for a high street serving a low to middle income catchment, including a Poundland, Savers, vape shops, and hair and beauty businesses.

3.3. In addition, there are two butchers shops, a bakery, a deli and a fishmonger. The centre has some useful comparison shopping including Shoezone, a Bon Marché clothing store, CEX tech exchange and Yeomans outdoor supplies store. There is also a Boots and a Lloyds Bank.

3.4. Arnold has been locally known for its hospitality offer for many years. Hospitality businesses including bars and cafes are now concentrated in a small section of the centre and appear busy during the day and into the evening. The evening food business trade is focused mainly on the take-away market, with a good range of options.

3.5. The centre also boasts a new council-led development known as AMP, which provides favourable lease terms for retail and office-based businesses in a new building on the former market square. A section of the square has been retained for occasional guest markets, events and hospitality. The retail is fully let, with some space remaining in the offices above.

3.6. Alongside the commercial offer, Arnold is provided with a good-sized library and leisure centre, refurbished in 2015, and the Bonington Theatre refurbished in 2014, based in the same complex of buildings on the northern edge of the centre.

3.7. The southern gateway to the town centre features a former Wilko store, which is currently vacant. However, vacancy in general is well below the national average.

4. Vitality and viability assessment

4.1. The vitality and viability assessment took place in Arnold Town Centre on 5 December 2023. This was accompanied by council officers and other invited parties with an interest in the regeneration of Arnold town centre. The complete assessment dataset is in Appendix 1. The total vitality and viability score was 68/125.

4.2. By way of comparison – though comparison is not of significant value since all places are unique and serve different catchments - the other centres assessed scored as follows: Beeston: 86/125, West Bridgford: 84/125 and Nottingham City Centre: 99/125.

4.3. None of the factors assessed scored over 4, or ‘good’. The factors that were scored most highly are below:

Factor of vitality and viability	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)
Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	4
Barriers to entry	Is there space available for rent to new businesses?	4
Retail offer	Good range and type of retail for centre of this size	4

4.4. The assessment found that Arnold town centre featured a well above average range of activity in the centre, reflecting the excellent leisure and cultural offer, including the Bonington Theatre, library and leisure centre. In addition, the Arnold Methodist Centre plays a role in the life of the town centre as does the use of the pedestrianised section. On the day of the assessment, several activations were taking place, including carol singing, a Santa Claus and Dickensian characters bringing life to the centre.

4.5. There are also low barriers to entry: there is space available – in the AMP development, on the market and in vacant retail units - to launch a new business in Arnold. Unit vacancy is relatively low in general, but there were some opportunities across various uses.

4.6. There were a good range of stores including Boots, Shoezone, CEX, ASDA and Iceland, representing well above average provision for a centre of this size.

4.7. Positive elements of the town centre were noted that do not feature in the factors list:

- Footfall - although potentially unrepresentative due to Christmas, Arnold town centre was very busy with shoppers, patrons of hospitality venues, school children and people passing through. Arnold as a centre is clearly well used and valued locally.
- Hospitality - the centre's hospitality offer provides demonstrable social value to sections of the community and is well used both during the day and into the evening.

4.8. The lowest scoring factors are below.

Factor of vitality and viability	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)
Experience	Is your general experience of the centre good?	2
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	2
Diversity	Is there a good mix of provision?	2
Attractiveness	Is the centre likely to be commercially attractive to investors?	2
Markets	How well is the market performing, if there is one?	2
Recreational space	Is recreational space easily accessible from the centre?	2
Safety / crime	Is there evidence of local fear of crime?	2
Redevelopment plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	2
Innovation	Is there evidence of innovation – new business models, repurposing of space etc?	2
Vision and strategy	Is there evidence of a vision or strategy driving the centre?	1
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	1
Networks and partnerships	Are there effective partnerships operating for the benefit of the centre?	1

4.9. Experience

4.10. As reflected in the workshops, and in conversations at the workshop, the experience of the town centre is due consideration. The functionality of the pedestrianised section including the section outside AMP highlights the diminished experience of the sections which accommodate cars.

4.11. Appearance

4.12. Some sections of the centre are characterised by poor quality architecture and shop units. The centre is maintained to an acceptable standard but street furniture, planters, entranceways and building facades could in some cases benefit from updating. The pedestrianised section features an attractive paviour design.

4.13. Diversity

4.14. Although there is a mix of provision, particularly given the presence of several supermarkets, on the high street shop frontages there is a concentration of take-aways and hospitality that creates a lack of balance.

4.15. Attractiveness

4.16. The town centre was assessed to carry a below average level of attractiveness to commercial investors, based on existing uses and vacancy. However, there is potential for development on several town centre sites and a town centre masterplan in production that is likely to identify the opportunities in more detail. Gedling Council offers said that AMP units had filled quickly, though there is some office space as yet unlet.

4.17. Markets

4.18. The potential for Arnold Market as a catalyst for regeneration, activation, job creation, innovation and addressing gaps in provision is not yet fully realised. The recommendations and case studies sections consider this potential.

4.19. The Council intends to consult on the permanent location of Arnold Market, and the type of market provision to be included. A key constraint in this regard is the City Council Market Charter, which impacts on affordability, and the Council seeks to resolve this issue.

4.20. Recreational Space

4.21. The nearest green space is King George V recreation ground. Although this is close by, the routes to the park are not well signed and Gedling Road creates severance between the park and the town centre. Due to the park's design, it is not possible to view the park clearly from the centre. It is unclear how the amenity is used to provide space for town centre events, the there is a clear opportunity to do so.

4.22. *Safety / crime*

4.23. There is both a perception of crime and antisocial behaviour and some evidence that Arnold suffers higher crime than in other town centres in Nottingham. Tom Randall, MP for Gedling took part in an Opposition Day Debate focusing on retail crime in town centres on the day of the assessment, citing particular concerns with antisocial behaviour and criminal gangs in Arnold, but praising proactive, intelligence-led policing which was acting as a deterrent to shoplifting.

4.24. *Redevelopment Plans*

4.25. A masterplan is in development which will illustrate the opportunities to develop sections of the town centre. However, following the AMP redevelopment, there are no significant development plans in the centre currently.

4.26. *Innovation*

4.27. Arnold Town Centre is relatively traditional in its provision and there was little evidence of innovative or novel business models in operation in the town centre. The clearest demonstration of innovation is the development and operation of the AMP on a cost neutral basis to accommodate start-ups.

4.28. *Vision and strategy*

4.29. There is currently no single vision or strategy for Arnold Town Centre, but instead a series of council-led plans focusing on economic development, masterplanning, and planning. There is an opportunity to draw these and other issues together in an asset-based plan to deliver joined-up, co-created transformation of the centre.

4.30. We are aware that the Council has commissioned a Masterplan for Arnold town centre. We understand that the Vision for the centre is still emerging, but that initial feedback from the consultants has noted the importance of a stronger emphasis/focus on the following:

- Greater Connectivity to and from Arnold
- Wayfinding
- Recommendations for improvements to shopfronts/accommodation above shops
- Pedestrianisation of certain key sections of the town centre
- New housing within the town centre
- Car park re-configuration (noting that some car parks are at full capacity while others have less usage)
- Improvements to support active travel and public transport provision from outlying Gedling Borough areas (e.g. Burton Joyce, Lambley, Colwick Newstead, etc.)
- Improvements to the public realm, including lighting scape
- Improvement to green spaces in and around the town centre.
- Public art
- Opportunities to bring more public services into the town centre to support the long-term sustainability which could improve the Boroughs HQ
- Identifying opportunities to embed the heritage of Arnold town centre into key interventions.

4.31. Place Marketing

4.32. There is no single agency responsible for promoting the events, offer and opportunities to invest in the town centre, but some evidence of marketing on council websites and notice boards.

4.33. Networks and Partnerships

4.34. Little evidence of community groups or networks focused on delivering change for the town centre.

5. Stakeholder workshop

5.1. Attendees at the stakeholder workshop are listed in paragraph 2.15 with the feedback from the SWOT analysis provided in Appendix 2..

5.2. Strengths

5.3. There was much to celebrate about the town centre, and attendees of the workshop reflected the civic pride that many have for Arnold. A key strength, cited five times across different groups' analyses is the flat, walkable and compact nature of the centre. A significant proportion of the centre is pedestrianised and well laid out, with new public realm, seating and decorative elements such as patterned pavements and planters.

5.4. The centre is also positioned well for public transport, making it easy to access, and there is ample parking. Arnold is also surrounded by residential, providing a convenient centre for a large proximal catchment. The convenience of the centre and its offer in relation to other centres in Gedling was also seen as an important factor. Given the supermarkets, pharmacy and other daily staples, Arnold's offer is suitable for the weekly shop, in contrast to Mapperley Top for leisure and Netherfield for independents. A strong sense of the centre's function and understanding the shifts in function in 'competing' local centres and their impact on Arnold is an important factor in planning and vision development.

5.5. Despite the clear sense of Arnold as a convenience shopping centre, the anchor offer was also highly regarded. For a town centre of this size, participants identified an array of anchors that act as a draw, across a range of activities. In particular, the Bonington Theatre and cinema, library, leisure centre and particularly its swimming pool were all mentioned, as were good health facilities.

5.6. Public ownership of land and buildings in the centre was seen as a strength, allowing for widescale masterplanning and redevelopment, particularly at gateways.

5.7. Weaknesses

5.8. Although public transport – principally buses - was seen by some as a strength, others believed the lack of tram or train acted as a barrier to the economic growth of Arnold Town Centre. Connectivity to other parts of the city was also thought by some to be a weakness as was accessibility for less able and older people, cycle infrastructure and poorly maintained roads. The centre was also thought to be dirty and unsafe.

5.9. Whilst the variety of the retail offer was seen by some to be strong, the quality of the offer was not necessarily so. Some participants said that shops catered for a demographic with a limited budget. There was a perception of too many uses of a similar type, and the upkeep of shopfronts was said to be poor in places. Vacancy was said to be higher than surrounding centres.

5.10. High street features thought to be lacking in Arnold included offices, walk-in healthcare, older persons' accommodation, an offer to suit younger people, university or college facilities and council facilities. Some of these can be found outside the town centre, but do not necessarily contribute to the town centre economy. With a vacant anchor site at the southern gateway and ASDAs plans unclear, there was concern that the future of the centre was in doubt.

5.11. Some participants did not welcome a recent proliferation of hospitality uses, and particularly the alcohol-led cluster in the pedestrianised section of the centre.

5.12. Opportunities

5.13. The existing culture and leisure uses were thought to be an opportunity to develop the centre of Arnold into a culture and leisure hub, to bolster the centre's economy outside shopping hours. Studio and performance space, outdoor screenings run by the Bonington and art in the public realm were suggested as opportunities, potentially associated with a food and beverage offer distinguished from existing take away and budget options.

5.14. The public realm and in particular the underutilised green space of the Recreation Ground were considered a key opportunity for events and activations.

5.15. The culture and leisure opportunity was built upon by others who wished to see more joined up marketing of events, culture and activity occurring in Arnold to a wider audience.

5.16. Other town centre uses presenting an opportunity to grow Arnold included further education, higher education or adult education facilities, hotel accommodation, town centre residential, including for older people, and civic uses, with a potential relocation of Gedling Council offices into the centre to support the local economy.

5.17. Some members of the group believed that Arnold had the potential to deliver the principles of ten-minute neighbourhood, where everything that people in the community need for day-to-day living is within a ten-minute walk or cycle, and recommended that this principle help guide the master planning process.

5.18. Threats

5.19. An important threat to the future success of Arnold town centre according to some was the fortunes of other centres in the area, including Sherwood and Mapperley, where growth is considered to be outstripping Arnold. An offer which distinguishes Arnold from these other centres was suggested as the key to ensuring Arnold's success. Netherfield's supermarkets were thought to be a potential threat to the function of Arnold as the centre to visit for the weekly shop.

5.20. Structural issues which do not lie within local control were also cited as a threat – the rise of online shopping and closure of some units such as Wilko being among these.

5.21. Perceived threats that might be addressed locally included a 'lack of aspiration' for Arnold, and conversely 'grand ideas' that did not match local desires. Parking was also seen as an issue - although others believed that the centre offers sufficient parking – as was the concentration of bars in the centre, which was thought to be contributing to a perception of insecurity.

5.22. Four 'R's of Renewal

5.23. Participants selected two starting points for the strategy to transform Arnold town centre. The first of these was 'repositioning', which focuses on the smaller interventions that can be delivered relatively quickly. With a pedestrianised public realm, the opportunities of the AMP, the market and the proximity of the park, the opportunity to activate Arnold town centre was seen as key in the process of changing local perceptions.

5.24. The second potential starting point for change in Arnold was 'restructuring', in this case making physical changes in the centre which provide a better customer experience, improved accessibility and reduced sense of insecurity. Suggested interventions are set out in the recommendations section of this report, below.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Vision

6.2. The council can administer and drive a process of visioning, co-created with the local community, including businesses, residents, faith leaders, representative organisations, local institutions, County Council, health bodies and, given the issues with crime and antisocial behaviour, police.

6.3. The vision should look to identify actions for short (1 year), medium (1-3 years) and long-term (3-10 years) timeframes, with a clear sense of the mechanisms and funding that will unlock delivery. Delivery of the vision should be considered a joint responsibility with the community, and steps should be taken to develop an informal group of local representatives to help guide the development and delivery of the vision. This group should be a trusted, ongoing and inclusive reference group to represent local interests in the town centre.

6.4. Rather than be considered the same output, the vision should help drive the development of the masterplan. An early visioning process which helps to inform the brief for the masterplanners about what local people want in the longer term should give way to a more iterative process as the masterplan comes forward.

6.5. In addition to physical changes, both the vision and the masterplan should consider how Arnold should change economically, socially and environmentally, with the physical design of the centre reflecting those changing needs and desires.

6.6. Masterplan

6.7. Responding to the recommendations of the workshop participants, the following elements may be considered for inclusion in the masterplan brief:

6.7.1. Market review

The potential for the market to more closely align with changing shopping habits and demand patterns should be explored alongside the physical layout of the market. There is opportunity to ask the public what commodities they want from the market, preferred operating hours etc.

Consideration should be given to different sustainable models of operation, both commercial and not-for-profit, and a long-term plan put in place. Municipal markets work best when they are led by regeneration teams as opposed to compliance teams and the Council should support the market as a vital part of town centre activation, whether as direct operator or landowner.

This may mean investing in street furniture, hot food, entertainment, guest markets and youth enterprise markets such as The Teenage Market[3], which helps connect young people to their place while giving them valuable experience in selling, interacting with the public and developing job-ready skills.

6.7.2. Public realm

- Decorative lighting (e.g. festoon lighting across pedestrianised section and at AMP), Improved crossings, such as into the recreation ground
- Clutter removal and aesthetic improvements to Front Street to improve the pedestrian experience and reduce the dominance of the car.

6.7.3. Gateways

There are four gateways into a relatively permeable town centre, and there is an opportunity to make improvements to each of these.

- Wilko / Sainsbury's – the South-western approach to the centre is fragmented and though new uses for the Wilko building provide an opportunity to announce arrival into the centre, the section between Sainsburys and the market square may benefit from some pedestrian-friendly improvement to knit Sainsbury's into the town centre fabric.

---

[3] https://theteenagemarket.co.uk

- Recreation Ground – Improvements to routes across Hallam's Lane / Gedling Road and sightlines into the park. Use of park as extension of town centre, e.g. events, market overspill, bonfire night etc.

- Bonington Theatre – North-eastern gateway to town centre can be marked by public realm treatment or arch to recognise civic and leisure function of library, leisure centre and theatre. Consider timed closure of centre to traffic if takeaways can be accessed from ASDA carpark - this may encourage takeaways to offer tables and chairs on street. Daytime closure could also be considered since servicing occurs from rear.

- Access from High Street – Routeways into town centre from the northwest present confusing and potentially insecure experience. Could alleys be improved with public art, lighting, ad-hoc commercial uses, trails etc?

6.7.4. *Ten-minute neighbourhoods*

The workshop suggested that a fundamental part of the masterplan brief should be the 'ten-minute neighbourhoods' principle, which holds that the Arnold community should be able to access day-to-day amenities and merchandise within a 10-minute walk or cycle ride.

6.7.5. *Crime and antisocial behaviour*

The wet-led night time economy and daytime antisocial behaviour are both causes for concern among some members of the community. A strategy which acts to diversify uses and activity both during the day and at night may help to reduce this and, at night in particular, contributes to the ambition to make Arnold a cultural hub, with accompanying food uses.

6.8. *Case studies and resources*

- Ten ways to create a ten-minute town
- 25 Priorities for vital and viable high streets
- A guide to managing your night time economy
- Street Design for Age Friendly Neighbourhoods
- Community Town Centres
- Community leadership approach to managing street crime
- Town Centre Partnerships
- Beyond retail: redefining the purpose of town centres
- Markets as social spaces
- Developing active networks in local communities

7. Conclusion

7.1. Arnold is a predominantly mid-century town centre with a clear convenience function that it performs well for local people. A commitment to developing a masterplan for the town centre is to be welcomed since many of the challenges of the centre have their solution in design, layout, infrastructure and appearance.

7.2. Arnold's leisure and cultural offer are impressive for a town centre of this size and although shopping provides a solid base on which to develop, there is a clear opportunity to integrate some of these uses out into the public realm. This requires a strategic partnership of Arnold's institutions to develop a vision that embeds culture and leisure in the town centre to meet place-based outcomes – a growing economy, health challenges, reduced crime, youth engagement and social connection.

7.3. The centre is clearly celebrated by many and does not suffer the footfall and vacancy challenges of many places its size. However, there is work to do to ensure Arnold adapts to the changing needs of the communities around it if the centre is to thrive.

Acknowledgments

BAS Consultancy would like to thank the Gedling team for arranging the tour and workshop and providing information and data to support the production of this report.

About the author

Ben Stephenson is consultant director at BAS Consultancy. He is a place professional with over 20 years' experience. He has held the role of Chief Executive at two Business Improvement Districts in London, currently at Angel Islington BID in Islington, and formerly in Waterloo. Prior to that Ben worked in senior place management roles across the capital, most significantly as Head of Policy at South Bank Employers Group, a membership organisation driving forward the regeneration of the South Bank. In these roles he has devised and delivered major events, launched a successful daily street food market, project managed the delivery of a co-working space for built environment professionals and authored policy documents covering sustainable transport, air quality, governance, and culture.

Also running Bristol-based BAS Consultancy, Ben's specialisms include Business Improvement Districts, high streets and economic development, community and business engagement, neighbourhood planning, food, and culture. He delivers workshops in towns across the UK, and helps to run the BID Foundation, the professional body for BIDs. He is also a placemaking specialist for Design West, the design review panel for the South West of England.

Ben is bringing this experience to towns and cities through the UK High Streets Task Force, both as a Task Force Expert and as one of the programme's development team. He has worked in the last two years with a wide range of centres, including Bedminster, Bradford, Corby, Eastbourne, Gateshead, Grays, Kendal, Longton, Luton, Newcastle, Paignton, Preston, Rochdale, Southend-on-Sea, St Helen's, Streatham, Swinton, Thornton Heath, Tottenham and Whitechapel.

His work as a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Place Management includes delivery of a range of projects and programmes including the Vitality and Viability programme.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

25 Factors of Vitality and Viability assessment

Factor	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)	Notes
Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	4	Good level of activity for centre of this size
Retail offer	Is there a variety of retail types on offer?	4	Good range and type of retail for centre of this size
Vision and strategy	Is there evidence of a vision or strategy driving the centre?	1	Little in evidence
Experience	Is your general experience of the centre good?	3	Below average for centre of this size - maintenance and appearance
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	2	Some potential for improvement
Place management	How well is the place managed, either formally or informally?	3	Evidence of good management in market and AMP
Necessities	Does the centre provide basic necessities such as toilets, parking, benches etc?	3	Some potential for improvement
Anchors	Are there retail or non-retail anchors present in the centre?	3	Yes, including several supermarkets
Non retail offer	Is there a good range of services?	3	Above average for centre of this size
Merchandise	Is there a good range of merchandise at mixed price points?	3	Above average for centre of this size
Walking	Is it easy to walk around the centre of town?	3	Yes although linearity means some distance from one end to the other
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	2	Little evidence of this

Networks and partnerships	Are there effective partnerships operating for the benefit of the centre?	1	None that focus on town centre issues in evidence
Accessibility	Is the centre accessible via a range of transport modes?	3	Yes (although no tram or train)
Diversity	Is there a good mix of provision?	2	Excluding supermarkets, diversity is lacking
Attractiveness	Is the centre likely to be commercially attractive to investors?	2	Due to high vacancy, currently less attractive
Markets	How well is the market performing, if there is one?	3	Some potential for improvement
Recreational space	Is recreational space easily accessible from the centre?	2	Arnot Hill Park closest green space
Barriers to entry	Is there space available for rent to new businesses?	4	Yes
Safety / crime	Is there evidence of local fear of crime?	2	Yes, cited regularly
Adaptibility	Is the centre able to adapt to changing needs?	3	Yes there is potential for adaptation, including former Wilko site
Liveability	Does the centre provide what is needed to live comfortably?	3	Above average for centre of this size
Redevelopmen t plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	3	No firm plans in existence currently
Functionality	Does the centre perform its function (e.g. tourist centre, comparison shopping centre) well?	3	Convenience - performs well
Innovation	Is there evidence of innovation – new business models, repurposing of space etc?	2	Minimal evidence of this
	TOTAL V&V SCORE:	**67**	/125

Appendix 2

SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Parking x 2	Public transport x 2	Culture	Sherwood
Diversity of offer x 2	Poor connectivity	Leisure	Mapperley
Flat / walkable / pedestrianised x 5	Quality of offer	Adult learning / HE / FE	Parking x 2
Health offer	Roads	Town centre residential x 2	Fast food parking
Culture offer	Accessibility for all	Joined up marketing	Lack of diversity in the offer x 2
Leisure offer	Feeling safe	Public realm / Art / Character	Online shopping
Close to residential on all sides x 2	Cycle routes x 2	AMP - outdoor cinema	Not appealing to full demographic
Transport x 3	Dirty	Capture demand in older people for better access	Reduced aspiration / inspiration
CCTV	Non-central offices	Cultural offer - studio and performance space?	Closure of shop units
Bonnington Theatre x 2	Empty units	F&B in cultural uses	Density of cafes and bars
Pool	Poorly maintained sites in private ownership	County council ownerships to explore	Grand ideas not suiting residents
Library	Perception of too many unwanted uses	Parks / open space	
Gateway opportunities	Walk-in health services	Civic centre located in centre	
Public ownership	Limited offer	Older persons living in centre	
Main town centre	Too many bars (suddenly)	Health centre in centre	
Cinema and library	Accessibility for older population	10 minute neighbourhoods	

	ASDA future plans unclear	Library	
	Lack of offer for young people		
	No County Council facilities		
	No colleges / uni presence		
	Location of library, leisure and transport		
	Lack of older persons accommodation in centre		

Broxtowe Borough Council

Beeston Town Centre Recommendations report for Broxtowe Borough Council

April 2024

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

1.1. In November 2023, BAS Consultancy was commissioned alongside Nexus Planning to produce a report for Beeston and three other Nottingham Centres.

2. Brief and method

2.1. The brief specified the following output:

Key local stakeholder and business views on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Greater Nottingham centres as well as future requirements

2.2. The agreed methodology for gathering information involved the following:

i) Desk-based research
ii) An assessment of 25 key factors of town centre vitality and viability
iii) A town centre stakeholder workshop

Desk-based research

2.3. The consultants undertook desk-based research before the visit, reviewing several sources of information, including online historical and contemporary data, descriptions, reviews, directories and records. In addition, Council officers were also invited to send any strategic documents pertaining to the town centre that could provide the consultant with context and vision.

Town Centre Tour and Vitality and Viability Assessment

2.4. The consultants undertook a detailed, *in situ* assessment of the town centre, to provide a framework for understanding its features, performance, and potential concerns ahead of the stakeholder workshop.

2.5. Town centre assessments are focused around a robust, evidence-based method developed by the Institute of Place Management, which is part of Manchester Metropolitan University. The Institute is an international thought leader in placemaking and management, is the lead delivery partner in the Government's High Streets Task Force programme, which also incorporates the 25 Factors method in its assessments of high streets.

Twenty-five Factors of Vitality and Viability

2.6. The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability[1] are a set of measures that provide a consistent way of measuring place performance over time. Distilled from an original 237 factors that were identified by practitioners and academics as measures of place performance, these 25 factors are key because control over the factor is both within local hands and has the greatest impact on town centre vitality and viability. For this reason, place leaders are encouraged to focus on these issues to deliver effective place transformation (see overleaf):

[1] A full explanation of the 25 Factors is here: https://www.placemanagement.org/research/25-vital-and-viable-priorities/ . For the purposes of the study, vitality is defined as ongoing 'busy-ness' and viability refers to the potential for a place to attract investment in the long-term.

The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability	
Liveability	Necessities
Activity	Merchandise
Experience	Place marketing
Appearance	Recreational space
Walking	Barriers to entry
Commercial attractiveness	Adaptability
Redevelopment plans	Innovation
Functionality	Place management
Retail offer	Anchors
Non-retail offer	Networks and partnerships
Accessibility	Markets
Diversity	Safety / crime
Vision and strategy	

2.7. An assessment of the town centre, plus additional information gained from ad hoc interviews with local businesses, desk research and the stakeholder workshop, provides a numerical score for each factor from 1-5, with 1 reflecting the most negative impacts associated with that factor and five the most positive. These datasets provide an opportunity to assess Nottingham's town centres both in relation to each other and as individual town centres.

2.8. The assessment provides a snapshot of the centre and is not intended to be a forensic appraisal of the centre's performance.

2.9. For ease of understanding, the 25 Factors are subcategorised into five main areas of strategic focus – look and feel, function, offer, opportunity for transformation and management.

	Area of strategic focus	Factors of vitality and viability
	What affects the **appearance and experience** of the town centre?	Experience, Appearance, Place marketing, Crime and safety, Liveability
	How does the centre **function**?	Activity hours, Necessities, Accessibility Walkability, Functionality
	What does the town centre have to **offer**?	Retail offer, Anchors, Non-retail offer, Merchandise, Attractiveness, Markets, Recreational space
	How does the town centre **need to change**?	Diversity, Barriers to Entry, Adaptability, Innovation, Redevelopment plans
	How is town centre **management**?	Vision and strategy, Place management, Networks and partnerships

2.10. The full dataset is included in Appendix 2, with selective, expert analysis included in the main body of this report.

'Four R's of renewal'

2.11. This analysis leads us to identify a strategy for transformation based around 'Four R's of renewal': Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding or Restructuring. Although places can decline due to a range of factors, IPM research[2] indicates that there are usually four key areas of focus to begin to reverse that decline.

2.12. Firstly, 'Repositioning' describes a strategy which starts with gaining a clear understanding about the centre and using this data to develop a strong vision. 'Reinventing' refers to the implementation of short-term improvements, activations and development that help local people see their centre in new ways and kick-start footfall.

2.13. 'Rebranding' focuses on turning around the perception of the place providing a strong, authentic place identity, and finally, 'Restructuring' describes the process of addressing structural problems, either in the physical layout of the town centre or in its governance structures.

2.14. This report's recommendations for each town centre are set out within the framework of these four renewal strategies.

Stakeholder workshop

2.15. The stakeholder workshop took place in the Council offices from 6pm – 8pm on 29 November, 2023. Invitees comprised a range of representatives with a specific interest in the town centre, including businesses, business organisations, resident representatives, civic bodies, council officers and others. The full list of attendees is in Appendix 3.

2.16. The agenda comprised the following:

- Introduction
- What's going wrong with our city centres?
- SWOT EXERCISE: Thinking about your place
- Break
- Feeding back on your SWOT
- What do we do about it? The four 'Rs'
- Community-led placemaking
- A vision for your centre

2.17. The session focused on providing information about the history and current state of the UK's high streets, learning from examples of other places that have successfully transformed, particularly through citizen participation, and an interactive session which encouraged participants in groups of five or six to develop and then compare their own analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the town centre.

2.18. The SWOT analysis formed the main part of the workshop. Participants were given time to discuss the issues and were then set a final challenge of deciding together what

[2] https://www.placemanagement.org/research/4-rs-framework/

strategy they would employ to tackle them, using the Four ‘R’s of Renewal (see 2.2 above). Broadly, the four approaches are a) Developing a strong, evidence-based vision, focusing on activating the public realm, changing perception through place branding, or creating structural change, either in local governance or physical layout. Although most places require a combination of these approaches, agreeing on a place to start is the key to developing the partnerships needed to transform them.

3. Town centre context

3.1. Beeston Town Centre is a busy and popular town centre in the southwestern suburbs of Nottingham, in the Borough of Broxtowe. It has a population in the wider Beeston area of 52,000 recorded in the 2021[3] census, relatively unchanged from the 2001 census with an 84% UK born population, 5.6% African born and 5.5% EU born populations.

3.2. Beeston town centre is laid out in a linear form with two pedestrianised sections – Chilwell Road / The Square and High Road bisected by Station Road. Secondary centres of activity include Albion St, Villa Street and the B6006, around the Cricketers Pub, an independents-focused offer on Chilwell Road and the transport interchange and Arc Cinema at Styring Street.

3.3. The town centre benefits from good transport links, including tram and bus connections, with Beeston Station - though poorly connected to the centre - serving Nottingham, Leicester, Cardiff, London and other destinations.

3.4. Broxtowe Council has provided raw data footfall figures from the town centre that have been plotted by total monthly figures (both single and repeat visits) across three years. The graph shows the impact of lockdowns in two significant dips, first in November 2021 and then as Plan B (work from home) is introduced in early 2022.

3 https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/eastmidlands/nottinghamshire/E63002057__beeston/

| BAS |
Consultancy

3.5. Recovery of footfall has been healthy and largely in line with national expectations for town centres.

3.6. Beeston Civic Society ran a wide-ranging conversation with the community in 2020 focusing on the local vision for Beeston in the period emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic[4]. The exercise focused on the experiences of local people and an in-person workshop connected to the exercise generated some general priorities, including:

- "Think local"
- "An affordable place for young people to live and work"
- "Make the Square a place to showcase creativity"
- "A greener and more sustainable Beeston"
- "Living sustainably for wildlife and humans"
- "Better local transport serving a multi-cultural and car free centre"
- "An art and cultural strategy promoting individual and personal growth"
- "Create an attractive town centre"
- "Bring people together by drawing on experiences from the University and local industry"
- "Engage with young people. Give them a reason to stay"
- "More green spaces, more trees, more affordable housing, more independent shops and better public transport"
- "Be positive about living in Beeston"

Members of the Civic Society were present for the BAS Consultancy workshop on 29 November 2023.

4. Vitality and viability assessment

4.1. The vitality and viability assessment took place in Beeston Town Centre on 29 November 2023, accompanied by Mark Thompson, Broxtowe's Strategic Planning Manager. The complete assessment dataset is in Appendix 1. The total vitality and viability score was 86 /125.

4.2. By way of comparison – though comparison is not of significant value since all places are unique and serve different catchments - the other centres assessed scored as follows: Arnold: 68 /125, West Bridgford: 84/125 and Nottingham City Centre: 99/125.

4.3. A number of the factors assessed scored over 4, or 'good', with one factor scoring 'very good'. The factors that were scored most highly are below:

Factor	Explanation of Factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)
Merchandise	Is there a good range of merchandise at mixed price points?	5

[4] https://beestoncivicsociety.org.uk/beeston2020vision/

Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	4
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	4
Necessities	Does the centre provide basic necessities such as toilets, parking, benches etc?	4
Anchors	Are there retail or non-retail anchors present in the centre?	4
Non-retail offer	Is there a good range of services?	4
Walking	Is it easy to walk around the centre of town?	4
Diversity	Is there a good mix of provision?	4
Safety / crime	Is there evidence of local fear of crime?	4
Adaptability	Is the centre able to adapt to changing needs?	4
Liveability	Does the centre provide what is needed to live comfortably?	4
Redevelopment plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	4
Functionality	Does the centre perform its function (e.g. tourist centre, comparison shopping centre) well?	4

4.4. *Merchandise*

For a town centre of this size, there is a good level and range of merchandise including books, jewellery, gifts, grocery, electronics and clothes, across different price points. The offer also caters to a range of communities, including Korean and Polish with halal options.

4.5. *Activity*

The centre provides a range of activity for locals, including screenings, festivals and events, a market, street-based activations and the Beeston Street Art Project. Accessible from the town centre, Beeston has a marina and the Lakeside Arts centre at the University of Nottingham Campus which hosts performances, shows and exhibitions.

4.6. *Appearance*

Beeston is well-maintained and the pedestrianised sections in particular are pleasant environments with planters and trees, murals and public art.

4.7. Necessities

The town centre features most of the basic necessities that enable a wide variety of people with different needs to enjoy a visit, including good signage, public toilets, transport access and parking, and places to rest.

4.8. Anchors

Evidence shows that certain types of operation draw footfall at different times of day, for different reasons. Whether there are a good number of anchors, 'linked visits' occur which encourage dwell time, and increase the resilience of places. Beeston hosts a number of different types of anchors in the centre that drive consistent footfall, including a Boots, a Tesco Extra and Sainsbury's – both of which are central enough to act as draws to the high street – a Post Office, library and civic centre. At night the cinema and gym act as anchors also.

4.9. Non-retail offer

Some of the anchors described above such as the library, Pure Gym and cinema are part of a good non-retail offer in the centre. Coffee shops and places to eat are also in abundance and help to encourage non-retail dwell time. This reflects an important shift in town centres, where the balance between shopping and socialising is shifting towards the latter, so those high streets that have adapted to these new functions are more resilient.

4.10. Walking

The high street is in the main, highly walkable, although the linearity may reduce walkability for some visitors due to the distance from one end of the centre to the other. The severance presented by the crossing at Station Road (B6006) is also an issue and those at the workshop raised concerns about clutter in the pedestrianised section reducing walkability.

4.11. Diversity

There is a good mix of provision in Beeston across professional and personal services, evening economy, various commodities, leisure and culture. This is aimed at a range of budgets, ages and communities, making Beeston an inclusive town centre.

4.12. Safety / crime

There appear to be few concerns about Beeston town centre, including at night, when footfall levels continue to provide natural surveillance. Crime rates are low in Beeston relative to other town centres – Beeston is the third safest town centre in Nottinghamshire, with crime 30% below the national average, and 36% below the regional average in the West Midlands.[5]

4.13. Adaptability

---

[5] https://crimerate.co.uk/nottinghamshire/beeston#:~:text=The%20overall%20crime%20rate%20in,58%20crimes%20per%201%2C000%20people.

The centre appears to have adapted well to changing shopping and leisure habits and there are a good number of things to do in the town centre that do not involve shopping. Adaptation towards hospitality has proved a success in Beeston with cafes, restaurants and take-aways proving popular with locals.

4.14. *Liveability*

Beeston provides many of the day-to-day goods, services, green space and entertainment to meet liveability needs at a local level. Beeston is reputed to have a good sense of community and high levels of social infrastructure relative to other town centres. The high street supports a diverse range of local demographics.

4.15. *Redevelopment plans*

The redevelopment of the building that contains the Arc Cinema has been successful and there is an opportunity for further redevelopment or new uses at the former Wilko site, Beeston Square car park (to the south of the Arc – expected to be a block of student housing) and 33-35 the Square. These development opportunities form a cluster which presents an opportunity to think strategically about their collective use.

4.16. *Functionality*

Although the function of Beeston has shifted over time from retail-led to mixed use, the centre appears to have adapted to this change well. The centre functions well as a convenience location, but also provides other functions including as a leisure centre and comparison shopping centre.

4.17. The lowest scoring factors are below:

Factor	**Explanation of Factor**	**Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)**
Vision and strategy	Is there evidence of a vision or strategy driving the centre?	2
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	2
Networks and partnerships	Are there effective partnerships operating for the benefit of the centre?	2

4.18. *Vision and strategy*

Although efforts have been made both within and outside the Council to consider the vision for Beeston, these have not provided a single, shared strategy or plan of action. There is a need to join up the economic development, community, planning, highways, public health and regeneration functions of the council with the local community and institutions such as large office occupiers, healthcare, schools, higher education and further education to develop this.

4.19. Place marketing

As with the vision or strategy, there is no single source of information about what's on in Beeston, and this makes it challenging for visitors and locals alike to understand the full offer. Visit Nottinghamshire's web page[6], which gives a very limited sense of the Beeston offer is a good example of this issue. There is more to do on the Beeston brand, messaging and coordination of activity in the centre.

4.20. Networks and partnerships

As described in the Vision and Strategy section, there is a lack of focus on the development of the town centre according to local wishes – The Civic Society is an important body acting in the best interests of the centre, but an effective network should include a broad representation of institutions, businesses and residents with a clear decision-making remit – see recommendations Section 6.

5. Stakeholder workshop

5.1. Attendees at the stakeholder workshop are in Appendix 3.

5.2. Strengths

5.3. The variety of shops, things to do and non-retail economy was a great strength in Beeston, according to participants in the workshop, and this is reflected in the town's reputation. Among particular uses mentioned, were the farmers market, Hallams, independent shops and cafes, the cinema, barber shops, charity shops and the bars and night time economy were particularly prized.

5.4. Students and student spend was cited as a key strength, both during the day and into the evening and it was thought to be important to keep Beeston attractive to students when they make their choice about where to live in the city. The University of Nottingham, which is nearby to the east, is also seen as important to the local economy for its staff, as is Queen's Medical Centre and the Boots Head Office. These markets create strong demand patterns in Beeston town centre, which keeps the economy buoyant.

5.5. Beeston's food culture was seen as a key strength and an opportunity to bring restaurants, the market and street food operators together in a regular festival, such as the street food festival at the Garage in Chilwell. Other events such as the Open Gardens Trail, Beeston Festival, Oxjam, Christmas and Light Night were thought to be important draws.

5.6. An additional strength in Beeston was its exceptional connectivity – and particularly public transport connections - to other parts of Nottingham and beyond to other cities.

5.7. Weaknesses

5.8. Among the weaknesses of Beeston were issues around walkability and connectivity. Crossing the High Road was an important issue for many, given the speed of traffic

[6] https://www.visit-nottinghamshire.co.uk/explore/market-towns/beeston

between the two pedestrianised sections, and the linearity which was seen to detract from the centre's walkability. Others mentioned general clutter, such as tables and chairs on the high street, which reduces walkability and wheelchair access, the route between the centre and the station, and poor access to areas to the north of the centre. Additional physical issues included quality at the fringes of the high street, and a lack of cycle paths. There is also no clear 'focal point' or centre.

5.9. Where some believed the student population to be important for the local economy, others balanced this with concerns over housing at the edges of the centre. Conversion to Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) is a local problem though steps have been taken through an Article 4 Direction to prevent this. Some participants voiced concerns about the potential development of a student block in the centre, with the potential for large numbers of students to change the character and demand for particular uses in Beeston. General housing affordability was cited as an issue.

5.10. Suggested weaknesses in the centre also focused around what is lacking or has been lost. For some participants, the loss of banks, though a national trend was a cause for concern. Others mentioned a lack of welcoming green space, greenery and shelter, poor signage and low lighting at night.

5.11. Opportunities

5.12. University Facilities, Health facilities, residential in flats above shops and a 'sustainable living centre' were all thought to be worthwhile additions to the town centre, to diversify the markets using the high street. Other physical opportunities included more public toilets, green spaces, performance space and street furniture. One participant suggested a 'town-wide shopping trolleys' scheme like those provided in indoor shopping centres. This fed into a wider ambition to develop a 'Beeston brand'.

5.13. Development of both the square and the market that it accommodated was considered an opportunity, with ideas including covering the square with a retractable canopy, enhancing the bandstand and providing community space.

5.14. Assets and infrastructure under public ownership including the transport interchange and council owned buildings were also seen as an opportunity to be strategic.

5.15. Threats

5.16. Issues outside local control were raised as continuing threats to Beeston's continued success, including rates, rents, price rises and the loss of key retailers and services. Gentrification, 'studentification' and transience were also mentioned, as part of a broader concern over balancing the tension between competing needs.

5.17. Participants were concerned about the lack of investment in Beeston, and how this could see the centre's reputation slip behind that of competing local centres. The rise in parking charges could also contribute to this threat, according to some.

5.18. Four 'R's of renewal

5.19. When asked to select the priority areas for transformation, from among the four 'R's of renewal (see Section 2.11), participants suggested three possibilities. These were:

- Restructuring: the redevelopment of The Square as a catalyst for regeneration in Beeston
- Restructuring: the reconvening and reconstitution of a Beeston Town Board to drive forward change, using expertise and experience. The board should think long term and apolitically, and develop strategy underpinned by evidence and data
- Rebranding: Given the strong base, some participants believed that a place brand development exercise would be beneficial (see recommendations below).

6. Recommendations

6.1. Vision

6.2. The council can administer and drive a process of visioning, co-created with the local community, including businesses, residents, faith leaders, representative organisations, local institutions, County Council, health bodies and police.

6.3. The vision should look to identify actions for short (1 year), medium (1-3 years) and long-term (3-10 years) timeframes, with a clear sense of the mechanisms and funding that will unlock delivery. Delivery of the vision should be considered a joint responsibility (see governance below).

6.4. *Governance*

6.5. Governance is an iterative process, starting with the informal and progressing towards the more formal and structured as delivery begins to occur. In the case of Beeston, this process could start around the task of developing the vision described above. Convening all those that want to talk about Beeston's future is a good opportunity to identify those that might want to be more closely involved in the process. This should build on the Civic Society's 2020 work, rather than attempt to replicate it.

6.6. This in turn can lead to an initially informal steering group and/or sub-groups of individuals developing sections of the vision they have the skills or interest to take forward. In this case governance should be considered a loose term which provides the opportunity for anyone who wishes to get involved in planning for the future to do so, according to their particular skills set.

6.7. This process is not simply the means to developing the vision, but an end in itself. It should create and strengthen local networks, it should seek broad buy-in and ownership and it should encourage local people to deliver elements of the vision themselves.

6.8. Other recommendations

- Identify with the business and resident community small-scale actions around clutter removal, public realm improvements, walkability and accessibility. Businesses should be involved to stress the area where outdoor seating and signage are important.

- A nighttime economy and culture strategy may become more important if Beeston's nightlife expands as a result of new student populations. Helping the night time economy and culture sectors grow in a way that benefits local people, creates jobs and provides access to a range of people requires positive planning and local consultation.

- An events plan may consolidate the great successes of Beeston's existing calendar and consider the role events play in the economy and reputation of the centre. Are events held at the right time? Do they benefit and involve local businesses, including by celebrating sectoral clusters such as food and drink? Do events support the brand messaging? Is the promotion of events reaching the right audience? How can Beeston encourage more accessibility both in community led events and attendance?

- A creative place brand exercise would help to amplify the town centre's reputation to a geographically wider audience, generate clear messaging about the offer and direction of travel, and deliver campaigns around events and the nighttime economy that attract greater spend. Such an exercise might be led by a new Town Board but should be considered an opportunity to be broad and inclusive.

- Produce a strategy for the development (potentially as a Supplementary Planning Document) for the cluster of sites around the transport interchange, The Square and significant new student housing.

6.9. Case studies

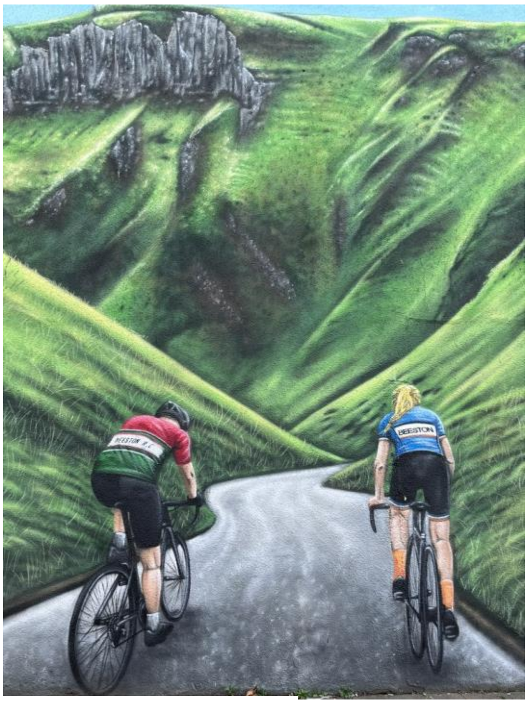
- Rebranding the high street
- 25 Priorities for vital and viable high streets
- Encouraging a thriving and diverse night-time economy
- Street Design for Age Friendly Neighbourhoods
- Community Town Centres
- Town Centre Partnerships
- Retailing, sustainability and regeneration

7. Conclusion

Beeston is a highly regarded and resilient town centre with a diverse offer. There is clear evidence of civic pride and commercial confidence in the centre, with businesses reporting good trade and very low vacancy for a high street of this size.

Beeston's events calendar activates the town and provides a draw across the year, and Broxtowe Council is supportive of community ideas and leadership to see events and activations delivered.

There is a need to develop an inclusive mechanism – potentially through a new Town Board - for ongoing conversations about the future of the town centre, and this should lead on a vision and strategy looking to long term liveability for the people of Beeston.


Beeston Street Art Trail

About the author

Ben Stephenson is consultant director at BAS Consultancy. He is a place professional with over 20 years' experience. He has held the role of Chief Executive at two Business Improvement Districts in London, currently at Angel Islington BID in Islington, and formerly in Waterloo. Prior to that Ben worked in senior place management roles across the capital, most significantly as Head of Policy at South Bank Employers Group, a membership organisation driving forward the regeneration of the South Bank. In these roles he has devised and delivered major events, launched a successful daily street food market, project managed the delivery of a co-working space for built environment professionals and authored policy documents covering sustainable transport, air quality, governance, and culture.

Also running Bristol-based BAS Consultancy, Ben's specialisms include Business Improvement Districts, high streets and economic development, community and business engagement, neighbourhood planning, food, and culture. He delivers workshops in towns across the UK, and helps to run the BID Foundation, the professional body for BIDs. He is also a placemaking specialist for Design West, the design review panel for the South West of England.

Beeston street art

Ben is bringing this experience to towns and cities through the UK High Streets Task Force, both as a Task Force Expert and as one of the programme's development team. He has worked in the last two years with a wide range of centres, including Bedminster, Bradford, Corby, Eastbourne, Gateshead, Grays, Kendal, Longton, Luton, Newcastle, Paignton, Preston, Rochdale, Southend-on-Sea, St Helen's, Streatham, Swinton, Thornton Heath, Tottenham and Whitechapel.

His work as a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Place Management includes delivery of a range of projects and programmes including the Vitality and Viability programme.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Beeston Vitality and Viability Healthcheck

Factor	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)	Notes
Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	4	Good level of activity for town centre of this size
Retail offer	Is there a variety of retail types on offer?	3	Above average range and type of retail for town centre of this size
Vision and strategy	Is there evidence of a vision or strategy driving the centre?	2	Some evidence of council place strategy
Experience	Is your general experience of the centre good?	3	Above average centre experience for town centre of this size
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	4	Good appearance for town centre of this size. Well kept
Place management	How well is the place managed, either formally or informally?	3	Some place management activity (e.g. Market)
Necessities	Does the centre provide basic necessities such as toilets, parking, benches etc?	4	Good level of necessities - wayfinding, seating, toilets

Anchors	Are there retail or non-retail anchors present in the centre?	4	Above average number of anchors for town centre of this size
Non retail offer	Is there a good range of services?	4	Good non-retail offer including banking, professional services and leisure
Merchandise	Is there a good range of merchandise at mixed price points?	5	Good range of merchandise on offer at different price points
Walking	Is it easy to walk around the centre of town?	4	Walkable, pedestrianised centre - less good between centre and train station
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	2	Some evidence of place marketing including events marketing
Networks and partnerships	Are there effective partnerships operating for the benefit of the centre?	2	Some existing networks (but none specifically devoted to town centre)
Accessibility	Is the centre accessible via a range of transport modes?	3	Above average accessibility, good transport links, adjacent parking
Diversity	Is there a good mix of provision?	4	Good diversity of offer for town centre of this size
Attractiveness	Is the centre likely to be commercially attractive to investors?	3	Clear potential for investment
Markets	How well is the market performing, if there is one?	3	Stable market with some room for improvement, enlarging, and activation
Recreational space	Is recreational space easily accessible from the centre?	2	Good access to green space in Broadgate Park
Barriers to entry	Is there space available for rent to new businesses?	3	Some space is available, but vacancy is low
Safety / crime	Is there evidence of local fear of crime?	4	Very little evidence
Adaptibility	Is the centre able to adapt to changing needs?	4	Yes - flexible space and opportunity in Council owned buildings on Square
Liveability	Does the centre provide what is needed to live comfortably?	4	Yes

Redevelopment plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	4	Council's plans for development of square and new student accommodation will enlarge market
Functionality	Does the centre perform its function (e.g. tourist centre, comparison shopping centre) well?	4	Convenience centre - performs very well
Innovation	Is there evidence of innovation – new business models, repurposing of space etc?	3	Some evidence
	TOTAL V&V SCORE:	**85**	/125

SWOT analysis

Strengths	**Weaknesses**	**Opportunities**	**Threats**
Students and student spend	Housing quality	Develop branding x 2 'A Buzz in Beeston'	Poor transport
Variety of shops x 2	Lack of 'what's on' comms	Improve connectivity / walkability	Competing centres
Variety of residents x 4	Accessibility / walkability	Town trail	Lack of investment
Farmers market x 2	Linearity x 3	Shop local	National issues
Compact	Street clutter / licenses?	Good quality residential (including above shops)	Gentrification
Heritage buildings	Peters out at Broadgate	Council ownership of property	Tension between opposing needs
Hallams	Crossing the High Road	Investment in green space	Seasonal absences
Independent shops / coffee shops x 4	Quality at fringes	Make more of transport infrastructure	Future Housing developments
Cinema(s) x 4	Poor connectivity to rail station	Develop markets x 3	Rents

bars / nightime economy x 2	Expensive (prices and rent)	Students	Withdrawal of concessions on transport
Connectivity / public transport x 3	Closure of banks	BID	Parking charges
Charity shops x 2	Lack of welcoming outdoor space, greenery and shelter	Street furniture	Tesco or Sainsbury's leave
Public toilets	Lack of music venues / cultural spaces	Update	Money
Council support / events e.g. oxjam, light night, Friday 18, xmas x 3	Signposts	Health Centre	Too much student accommodation and too high rise x 2
Pedestrianised x 2	Accessibility / walkability	University facilities in centre	New building too focused on students
Food culture	No focal point / centre x 2	Good place to live - near to culture and city	Student population is transient / Studentification x 2
Connectivity to larger centres and cities	Dark	Ten Bell area	Don't want 24/7 activity
Employers - Boots, Uni, NHS	Not friendly to disabled people or prams x 2	own-wide shopping trolleys	Rent / rates / estate price rises can outprice small independents
Concentrated population	Not enough residents	Theatre / performance spaces	Loss of retail
University / QMC	No cycle paths	More public toilets	Loss of banks
U3A and voluntary sector	Independents	More green spaces	
Library	Poor transport links to north	Develop Beeston Square - keep bandstand, trees, water fountain, community space	
Beeston Street Art Trail	Limited capacity for cars / busy roads	Covered ourdoor areas - rain and sun	
Open Gardens Trail	Vape shops	Sustainable living centre	
Barber shops and hairdressing	Need to defend historic buildings	Better local buses	

Professional services	Conversion of houses to student HMOs	Use of River / Canal	
	Lack of buses from Stapleford / Wollaton, Brancote		
	Signage		
	Square Location		

Appendix 3 – Workshop attendees

Name	Representing
Cllr Barbara Carr	Broxtowe Council
Cllr Steve Carr	Broxtowe Council
Dave Lawson	Planning Policy, Broxtowe Council
Mark Thompson	Broxtowe Council
Heather Lindley-Clapp	Nexus Planning
Cllr Sarah Web	Broxtowe Council
Phil Langran	Resident
Jenny Langran	Resident
Dan Walker	CP Walker
Karen Stainer	Resident
Sandra Rose	Resident
Dave Rose	Resident
Pauline Tilly	Resident
Cllr Vanessa ??	Beeston Central Ward
Cllr Gabby ??	Beeston Central Ward
Paul Sweeney	Robert Ellis
Caroline Penn	Resident
Barbara Selwood	Resident
Mervin Brown	Resident
Julian McGuinness	Resident
Steve Simms	Broxtowe Council
Peter Robin	Beeston Civic Society

Rushcliffe Borough Council

West Bridgford Town Centre
Recommendations report
for
Rushcliffe Borough Council

April 2024

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

1.1. In November 2023, BAS Consultancy was commissioned alongside Nexus Planning to produce a report for West Bridgford and three other Nottingham Centres.

2. Brief and method

2.1. The brief specified the following output:

Key local stakeholder and business views on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Greater Nottingham centres as well as future requirements

2.2. The agreed methodology for gathering information involved the following:

i) Desk-based research
ii) An assessment of 25 key factors of town centre vitality and viability
iii) A town centre stakeholder workshop

Desk-based research

2.3. The consultants undertook desk-based research before the visit, reviewing several sources of information, including online historical and contemporary data, descriptions, reviews, directories and records. In addition, Council officers were also invited to send any strategic documents pertaining to the town centre that could provide the consultant with context and vision.

Town Centre Tour and Vitality and Viability Assessment

2.4. The consultants undertook a detailed, *in situ* assessment of the town centre to provide a framework for understanding its features, performance, and potential concerns ahead of the stakeholder workshop.

2.5. The assessment was followed by a second tour of the centre with a group of local ward councillors, council officers, and a city centre Business Improvement District representative, and a follow up meeting at West Bridgford Library. In attendance were:

- Cllr Brennan
- Cllr Chaplain
- Cllr Plant
- Cllr Calvert
- Cllr Upton
- Catherine Evans, Economic Growth Officer
- Richard Mapletoft, Head of Planning Policy
- Alex Flint, Nottingham BID

Tour of West Bridgford Town Centre

2.6. Town centre assessments are focused around a robust, evidence-based method developed by the Institute of Place Management, which is part of Manchester Metropolitan University. The Institute is an international thought leader in placemaking and management, is the lead delivery partner in the Government's High Streets Task Force programme, which also incorporates the 25 Factors method in its assessments of high streets.

Twenty-five Factors of Vitality and Viability

2.7. The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability[1] are a set of measures that provide a consistent way of measuring place performance over time. Distilled from an original 237 factors that were identified by practitioners and academics as measures of place performance, these 25 factors are key because control over the factor is both within local hands and has the greatest impact on town centre vitality and viability. For this reason, place leaders are encouraged to focus on these issues to deliver effective place transformation (see overleaf):

The 25 Factors of Vitality and Viability	
Liveability	Necessities
Activity	Merchandise
Experience	Place marketing
Appearance	Recreational space
Walking	Barriers to entry
Commercial attractiveness	Adaptability
Redevelopment plans	Innovation
Functionality	Place management
Retail offer	Anchors
Non-retail offer	Networks and partnerships
Accessibility	Markets
Diversity	Safety / crime
Vision and strategy	

2.8. An assessment of the town centre, plus additional information gained from ad hoc interviews with local businesses, desk research and the stakeholder workshop, provides a numerical score for each factor from 1-5, with 1 reflecting the most negative impacts associated with that factor and five the most positive. These datasets provide an opportunity to assess Nottingham's town centres both in relation to each other and as individual town centres.

2.9. The assessment provides a snapshot of the centre and is not intended to be a forensic appraisal of the centre's performance.

[1] A full explanation of the 25 Factors is here: https://www.placemanagement.org/research/25-vital-and-viable-priorities/ . For the purposes of the study, vitality is defined as ongoing 'busy-ness' and viability refers to the potential for a place to attract investment in the long-term.

2.10. For ease of understanding, the 25 Factors are subcategorised into five main areas of strategic focus – look and feel, function, offer, opportunity for transformation and management.

	Area of strategic focus	Factors of vitality and viability
	What affects the **appearance and experience** of the town centre?	Experience, Appearance, Place marketing, Crime and safety, Liveability
	How does the centre **function**?	Activity hours, Necessities, Accessibility Walkability, Functionality
	What does the town centre have to **offer**?	Retail offer, Anchors, Non-retail offer, Merchandise, Attractiveness, Markets, Recreational space
	How does the town centre **need to change**?	Diversity, Barriers to Entry, Adaptability, Innovation, Redevelopment plans
	How is town centre **management**?	Vision and strategy, Place management, Networks and partnerships

2.11. The full dataset is included in Appendix 2, with selective, expert analysis included in the main body of this report.

'Four R's of renewal'

2.12. This analysis leads us to identify a strategy for transformation based around 'Four R's of renewal': Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding or Restructuring. Although places can decline due to a range of factors, IPM research[2] indicates that there are usually four key areas of focus to begin to reverse that decline.

2.13. Firstly, 'Repositioning' describes a strategy which starts with gaining a clear understanding about the centre and using this data to develop a strong vision. 'Reinventing' refers to the implementation of short-term improvements, activations and development that help local people see their centre in new ways and kick-start footfall.

2.14. 'Rebranding' focuses on turning around the perception of the place providing a strong, authentic place identity, and finally, 'Restructuring' describes the process of addressing structural problems, either in the physical layout of the town centre or in its governance structures.

2.15. This report's recommendations for each town centre are set out within the framework of these four renewal strategies.

Stakeholder workshop

2.16. The stakeholder workshop took place in the Council offices from 6pm – 8pm. Invitees comprised a range of representatives with a specific interest in the town centre, including businesses and business organisations, resident representatives, council officers and others. The full list of attendees is in Appendix 3

[2] https://www.placemanagement.org/research/4-rs-framework/

2.17. The agenda comprised the following:

- Introduction
- What's going wrong with our city centres?
- SWOT EXERCISE: Thinking about your place
- Break
- Feeding back on your SWOT
- What do we do about it? The four 'Rs'
- Community-led placemaking
- A vision for your centre

2.18. The session focused on providing information about the history and current state of the UK's high streets, learning from examples of other places that have successfully transformed, particularly through citizen participation, and an interactive session which encouraged participants in groups of five or six to develop and then compare their own analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the town centre.

2.19. The SWOT analysis formed the main part of the workshop. Participants were given time to discuss the issues and were then set a final challenge of deciding together what strategy they would employ to tackle them, using the Four 'R's of Renewal (see 2.2 above). Broadly, the four approaches are a) Developing a strong, evidence-based vision, focusing on activating the public realm, changing perception through place branding, or creating structural change, either in local governance or physical layout. Although most places require a combination of these approaches, agreeing on a place to start is the key to developing the partnerships needed to transform them.

3. Context

3.1. West Bridgford is a pleasant and relatively affluent suburb in the south of Nottingham, part of the Borough of Rushcliffe. It has a growing population of 36,487[3], up from 34,500 in 2001. The mid-sized town centre is linear in form with a mix of retail, hospitality and services. Key anchors include a well-used library and café, and Bridgford Park and Croquet Lawn which hosts a bi-monthly farmers market.

3.2. Elswehere on the High Street, the Test Match pub is a key driver of footfall on cricket days and the Marks and Spencers Simply Food drives custom during the week. The centre has retained its branch of Halifax and a Post Office, and there is a good range of merchandise, including clothes, books, crafts, gifts and grocery. The High Street continues to thrive both during the day and into the evening with a range of food and beverage options.

3.3. Beyond the town centre, the local economy is supported by two major sporting venues – City Ground, home of international brand Nottingham Forest Football Club, and Trent Bridge, home to Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club. Though some distance from the town centre, match days provide an economic uplift to the high street, and in particular hospitality venues.

[3] (2021 Census)

4. Vitality and viability assessment

4.1. The complete, aggregated assessment of the groups is in Appendix 1. The assessment included the primary shopping centre of West Bridgford, and did not include the secondary centre on Melford Road, although this was visited.

4.2. West Bridgford scores highly in general for Vitality and Viability, with a range of functions, a varied offer and locally valued green space. It comparison with other Nottingham Town Centres assessed, West Bridgford scores on a par with Beeston at 84/125 and 86/125 respectively.

High scoring factors in West Bridgford included the following:

Vital and viable factor	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)
Recreational space	Is recreational space easily accessible from the centre?	5
Safety / crime	Is there evidence of local fear of crime?	5
Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	4
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	4
Necessities	Does the centre provide basic necessities such as toilets, parking, benches etc?	4
Non-retail offer	Is there a good range of services?	4
Accessibility	Is the centre accessible via a range of transport modes?	4
Markets	How well is the market performing, if there is one?	4
Liveability	Does the centre provide what is needed to live comfortably?	4
Redevelopment plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	4
Functionality	Does the centre perform its function (e.g. tourist centre, comparison shopping centre) well?	4

4.3. Recreational Space

The green spaces of Bridgford Park and the Croquet Lawn are well maintained and used for events and markets as well as recreation and have particular amenity value given their position in the heart of the town centre. This amenity value was reflected in comments in the stakeholder workshop where green space was the most cited ‘strength’ of West Bridgford.

4.4. Safety / Crime

The other very high scoring factor was lack of evidence of crime or fear of crime, also echoed in the stakeholder workshop as a key benefit of living in West Bridgford.

4.5. Activity

Evidence of community was also clear, with a central and well-used library in the centre of town that acts as a hub and a promotional centre for the many other community activities and events. Lutterell Hall, a few minutes’ walk from the library also performs an important local function as a community centre, with social activities, classes, private hire and a café. Elsewhere, there are leisure and social uses as well as retail that provide a range of activity to provide mutliple reasons to visit the town centre for all ages.

4.6. Appearance

The town centre has benefited from public realm improvements, and in particular the broadening of footways, inclusion of street furniture and planters and good lighting on Central Avenue. Shopfronts are well maintained in general and there is little litter or detritus on the streets. The centre is well maintained although in need of updating in the coming years.

4.7. Necessities

West Bridgford town centre is well appointed with basic amenities such as good wayfinding, public toilets, seating, public transport and parking. These provide the basic conditions for accessibility for a range of visitors.

4.8. Non-retail offer

There is a strong, and well-reputed food and drink focus in West Bridgford with many options for daytime and evening dining. The centre also accommodates a range of personal and professional services and some office uses which provides the multifunctional footfall associated with greater r8esilience. Community uses such as the library, green space and schools provide additional reasons to visit the centre.

4.9. Accessibility

The centre is flat and compact with wide footways and places to rest, and is therefore walkable and accessible by bike. However there is some traffic dominance, with central barriers, a significant road junction and multiple crossings. Buses regularly serve the centre although there is no tram network in West Bridgford. A large car park beside the library provides sufficient parking for a centre of this size.

4.10 Markets

A popular farmers market operates twice a month on the Croquet Lawn from 8am – 2pm. Occasional guest markets are also run on this section of green space in the centre.

4.11. Liveability

West Bridgford town centre provides a good range of amenities, merchandise, services and opportunities for social connection that score it highly on liveability. As with all places, local people would need to travel outside the centre for certain products or services – for instance, there is no hardware store, cinema or centrally located leisure centre.

4.12. Redevelopment Plans

Council plans to pedestrianise Central Avenue between Bridgford Road and Rectory Road have received some support and would be beneficial overall to the operation of the town centre. Opposition from the private bus service operator on the grounds of accessibility has been submitted and this has slowed the progress of the project.

4.13. Functionality

Principally, West Bridgford is a convenience centre, serving a local resident catchment for everyday needs. It provides this function well. A secondary more limited function is as an evening destination for a broader catchment.

Low scoring factors in the West Bridgford assessment comprised the following:

Vital and viable factor	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)
Vision and strategy	Is there evidence of a vision or strategy driving the centre?	2
Networks and partnerships	Are there effective partnerships operating for the benefit of the centre?	2
Barriers to entry	Is there space available for rent to new businesses?	2
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	1

4.14. Vision and strategy

Evidence of town centre strategy is as part of the council's broader planning function and local plan, but there was no evidence of a more holistic town centre strategy encompassing long term goals and vision in economic, social and environmental terms.

4.15. Networks and partnerships

Despite a strong and active community and voluntary sector, including groups that operate in the centre, there was little evidence of a network that focuses on delivering improvements for the town centre. The West Bridgford Way website, delivered through Rushcliffe Council's economic development function provides some of this function.

4.16. Barriers to entry

Low vacancy in the town centre reduces the opportunity to start a business in the town centre, though the farmers market may provide an entry point for specific types of businesses.

4.17. Place marketing

West Bridgford Way provides an online landing page for West Bridgford, with limited information.

5. Stakeholder workshop

5.1. Attendees at the stakeholder workshop are in Appendix 3.

5.2. Strengths

5.3. West Bridgford is a place that local people are proud of, with strengths including a central green space, good events calendar and a range of reasons to visit.

5.4. The food and drink scene acts as a draw for Nottingham residents living outside West Bridgford and is seen as a safe and calm alternative to going out in Nottingham City Centre in the evening. It also provides a cluster for patrons attending sporting fixtures at the nearby football and cricket stadia. There was some suggestion however that the offer is targeted at higher income diners and drinkers and that West Bridgford could benefit from establishments catering for a range of budgets.

5.5. The shopping offer, despite losing ground to hospitality businesses in recent years, was said to be strong with a good range of provision, including clothes, gifts, books and grocery. The farmers' market is a key draw for both locals and those visiting from further afield.

5.6. The 'forward thinking' Borough Council was also celebrated as a helpful partner to the community, with events and community activity supported on a regular basis. Attendees at the workshop believed that the West Bridgford events calendar was particularly good for the centre.

5.7. Weaknesses

5.8. It was thought that the relationship between the town centre and the two stadia was underexploited, and that the hospitality cluster could do more to attract patrons on days with sporting fixtures. Additionally, West Bridgford lacks hotel and B&B accommodation which could provide a base for sports fans.

5.9. The lack of tram and train connections to other parts of the city were thought to be restricting growth in the local economy, as was the tighly boundaried centre and lack of development space, which restricts opportunities for the centre to grow.

5.10. Another key area to improve was the cultural offer. West Bridgford has no theatre or cinema in contrast to Beeston, Arnold and other suburban town centres in Nottingham which limits the evening economy to hospitality. Diversification of the evening offer ensures greater resilience.

5.11. A key theme included the public realm which was said by some to be 'tired' or in need of updating. Clutter removal was supported, with particular reference to the central street barriers preventing pedestrians crossing, and the majority supported the pedestrianisation of Central Avenue to enable flexibility for events in particular, given the limitations of the croquet lawn and the difficulty the community faces in obtaining road closures for larger scale events.

5.12. Opportunities

5.13. There was some enthusiasm for the intensification of town centre living, including providing accommodation for older people to create ease of access and new markets.

5.14. The relative 'weakness' of the Nottingham City Centre offer was also thought to be an opportunity, with West Bridgford already attracting shoppers, evening drinkers and diners seeking a calmer experience that that offered in a youth-orientated city centre.

5.15. Finally, community involvement in local governance was seen as an opportunity to develop locally-led events, markets, regular use of green space and drive forward a shared vision.

5.16. Threats

5.17. Participants identified key threats to West Bridgford's continuing success and these were were mainly those outside local control. They included the loss of banks and services from the town centre, the potential for the poor reputation of the city centre to affect the viability of its suburbs and the rise of online shopping as a factor driving up retail vacancy. Lack of room to grow, the relocation of the County Council offices and the prevalence of chain stores and coffee shops were also in this category.

5.18. Equally the cost of doing businesses was a cause for concern, including energy costs, business rates and rents. The latter issue of rental values was thought to be compounded by the remoteness of many of West Bridgford's landlords, who were perceived to be less interested in the curation of the town centre and more profit-motivated.

5.19. One factor identified by participants that is under the control of local people is 'complacency'. As other, potentially more affordable, centres grow in popularity there is a local imperative to ensure the offer and reputation of West Bridgford continues to attract custom to keep the economy strong.

5.20. Four 'R's of renewal

5.21. Participants identified two immediate strategies to start work on locally, using the IPM's Four 'R's of renewal. The first of these is Repositioning. The workshop discussed and agreed the immediate need for a **shared vision** for West Bridgford town centre. The group agreed that a holistic vision and delivery plan which takes into account the SWOT analysis should be developed and widescale support for the plan sought.

5.22. The second strategy is linked to the first and relates to 'Restructuring'. With an unrealised opportunity to champion West Bridgford and avoid the complacency that was seen as a key threat to growth in the centre, the workshop recommended new local **governance structures** to take forward the visioning process. It was further suggested that the pre-existing growth boards transform into task and finish groups to realise the delivery of the vision.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Vision

6.2. The council can administer and drive a process of visioning, co-created with the local community, including businesses, residents, faith leaders, representative organisations, local institutions (including crickets and football clubs, which should be considered key stakeholders and potentially funders of town centre improvements), County Council, health bodies and police.

6.3. The vision should look to identify actions for short (1 year), medium (1-3 years) and long-term (3-10 years) timeframes, with a clear sense of the mechanisms and funding that will unlock delivery. Delivery of the vision should be considered a joint responsibility (see governance below).

6.4. The vision might include a range of elements such as:

- The West Bridgford brand – what are the town's values? What are its key selling points? How does it communicate about the place to different target audiences (Local residents, other Nottingham residents, football and cricket fans, visitors from outside Nottingham, evening visitors)
- Economic Growth - how does West Bridgford grow these different audiences and markets? What does inclusive growth look like? What are the physical opportunities to expand the centre (e.g. bigger market, expansion of units to upper floors, intensification of centre. What are the jobs and skills requirements and how can the principles of community wealth building and the circular economy localise the solutions?
- Physical improvements – How can pedestrianisation of the centre be unblocked, what clutter can be removed from the streetscape? Can businesses be incentivised to improve shopfronts? What can be done collectively to install decorative lighting to encourage the evening economy?
- Activation – Where West Bridgford is rightly proud of its events and markets, how can these be grown? What data is being collected that demonstrates their impact on the local economy and how can this be used to adjust events for maximum impact? If it possible to create jobs and apprenticeships through this strand of activity? What events are authentically West Bridgford that should be the focus in future?

- Planning for climate change – as identified in the workshop, plans can be drawn up at a local level to prepare for climate change, including planning for emerging jobs, preparing for extreme weather, planting, circular economy and local net-zero plans.

6.5. *Governance*

6.6. Governance is an iterative process, starting with the informal and progressing towards the more formal and structured as delivery begins to occur. In the case of West Bridgford, this process could start around the task of developing a vision. Convening all those that want to talk about West Bridgford's future is a good opportunity to identify those that might want to be more closely involved in the process.

6.7. This in turn can lead to an initially informal steering group and/or sub-groups of individuals developing sections of the vision they have the skills or interest to take forward. In this case governance should be considered a loose term which provides the opportunity for anyone who wishes to get involved in planning for the future to do so, according to their particular skills set.

6.8. This process is not simply the means to developing the vision, but an end in itself. It should create and strengthen local networks, it should seek broad buy-in and ownership and it should encourage local people to deliver elements of the vision themselves.

6.9. Other recommendations

- The high street would benefit from clutter removal and general updating, including shopfronts, street furniture and planting. Barriers in the central reservation should be removed. The case studies and resources section below includes a link to a manual entitled 'Street Design for Age Friendly Neighbourhoods'
- Work towards the pedestrianisation or timed closure of Central Avenue
- Conduct a commercial landowner audit and build relationships with landlords that have some commitment to West Bridgford. This enables the letting of empty units with curated uses where landlords are across the detail of the local vision.
- Commission research on the potential impact of home working on the West Bridgford economy. Where commuters are no longer travelling into Nottingham or further afield, does this create a new market for co-working space, work hubs, new hybrid café/work models or event daytime business events?
- Where formal culture and leisure uses may be a long-term aim for the centre, in the short term, consider how various indoor and outdoor spaces in West Bridgford can be used to provide screenings, performances and art exhibitions. The council should work with the community to design an event organising process that minimises red tape and cost.
- Community Infrastructure Levy can be spent in the town centre – consider how Rushcliffe's processes enable consultation with the community for defrayal of these funds.
- The night time economy is clearly an important aspect of the West Bridgford economy – bring the sector together locally to form a group, to discuss pressures, gaps in provision, and strategy to enable inclusive growth of the sector.

6.10. Case studies

The following case studies and documents are selected to aid the Council and future governance mechanism in the development of West Bridgford. All of these can be found on the High Streets Task Force Resource Library[4].

- Rebranding the high street
- 25 Priorities for vital and viable high streets
- The Pedestrian Pound
- Encouraging a thriving and diverse night-time economy
- Street Design for Age Friendly Neighbourhoods
- Community Town Centres
- Town Centre Partnerships
- Retailing, sustainability and regeneration

7. Conclusion

7.1. West Bridgford benefits from a comparatively wealthy catchment and caters well to that audience. It is considered one of the best places to live in Nottingham, both by those that live in the area and those that live outside it. There is a good sense of community, but scant evidence of community groups that work together for the benefit of the place, beyond the good work of local councillor representation. If West Bridgford is to continue to meet the needs of the community at a time of significant structural change, here is a compelling need to bring the community together to agree a vision that anyone can take a role in delivering.

7.2. The vision need not involve grand plans. The vision is about strengthening the ties that people have to their place and an understanding of their place in achieving the change that is collectively needed.

[4]

About the author

Ben Stephenson is consultant directoat BAS Consultancy. He is a place professional with over 20 years' experience. He has held the role of Chief Executive at two Business Improvement Districts in London, currently at Angel Islington BID in Islington, and formerly in Waterloo. Prior to that Ben worked in senior place management roles across the capital, most significantly as Head of Policy at South Bank Employers Group, a membership organisation driving forward the regeneration of the South Bank. In these roles he has devised and delivered major events, launched a successful daily street food market, project managed the delivery of a co-working space for built environment professionals and authored policy documents covering sustainable transport, air quality, governance, and culture.

Also running Bristol-based BAS Consultancy, Ben's specialisms include Business Improvement Districts, high streets and economic development, community and business engagement, neighbourhood planning, food, and culture. He delivers workshops in towns across the UK, and helps to run the BID Foundation, the professional body for BIDs. He is also a placemaking specialist for Design West, the design review panel for the South West of England.

Ben is bringing this experience to towns and cities through the UK High Streets Task Force, both as a Task Force Expert and as one of the programme's development team. He has worked in the last two years with a wide range of centres, including Bedminster, Bradford, Corby, Eastbourne, Gateshead, Grays, Kendal, Longton, Luton, Newcastle, Paignton, Preston, Rochdale, Southend-on-Sea, St Helen's, Streatham, Swinton, Thornton Heath, Tottenham and Whitechapel.

His work as a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Place Management includes delivery of a range of projects and programmes including the Vitality and Viability programme.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

West Bridgford Vitality and Viability Healthcheck

Factor	Explanation of factor	Score (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)	Notes
Activity	Is there a range of activity on offer, including events, leisure, clubs etc?	4	Above average level of activity for town centre of this size
Retail offer	Is there a variety of retail types on offer?	3	Good range and type of retail for town centre of this size
Vision and strategy	Is there evidence of a vision or strategy driving the centre?	2	Some evidence of planning focused vision
Experience	Is your general experience of the centre good?	3	Above average centre experience for town centre of this size - traffic detracts
Appearance	Is the centre well maintained both by businesses and the Local Authority?	4	Good appearance for town centre of this size
Place management	How well is the place managed, either formally or informally?	3	Some place management activity (e.g. events and market)
Necessities	Does the centre provide basic necessities such as toilets, parking, benches etc?	4	Good level of necessities - wayfinding, seating, toilets
Anchors	Are there retail or non-retail anchors present in the centre?	3	Above average number of anchors for town centre of this size
Non retail offer	Is there a good range of services?	4	Good non-retail offer including banking, services, library
Merchandise	Is there a good range of merchandise at mixed price points?	3	Good range of merchandise on offer aimed at upper end of market
Walking	Is it easy to walk around the centre of town?	3	Walkable centre but traffic dominated
Place marketing	Is there evidence of place marketing activity?	2	Some evidence of place marketing
Networks and partnerships	Are there effective partnerships operating for the benefit of the centre?	2	Some existing networks (but none specifically devoted to town centre)
Accessibility	Is the centre accessible via a range of transport modes?	4	Above average accessibility, good transport links, adjacent parking
Diversity	Is there a good mix of provision?	3	Above average diversity of offer for town centre of this size

Attractiveness	Is the centre likely to be commercially attractive to investors?	3	Clear potential for investment, but little scope / availability
Markets	How well is the market performing, if there is one?	4	Good, popular market
Recreational space	Is recreational space easily accessible from the centre?	5	Very good - well maintained park and croquet lawn in town centre
Barriers to entry	Is there space available for rent to new businesses?	2	Not very much vacancy, but entry point at market
Safety / crime	Is there evidence of local fear of crime?	5	No
Adaptibility	Is the centre able to adapt to changing needs?	3	To a degree, but small floorplates restricts scope
Liveability	Does the centre provide what is needed to live comfortably?	4	Yes, though potential affordability issues for less wealthy residents
Redevelopment plans	Are there major development plans that could improve the local economy?	4	Yes - pedestrianisation of centre
Functionality	Does the centre perform its function (e.g. tourist centre, comparison shopping centre) well?	4	Cyes - good convenience centre
Innovation	Is there evidence of innovation – new business models, repurposing of space etc?	3	Some evidence of good use of space
	TOTAL V&V SCORE:	**84**	/125

West Bridgford SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Affluence	No tram or train	Population growth	Lack of room to grow
Big brands and indies	Not pedestrianised	Weakness of the city offer	Complacency / other centres improving
Low vacancy x 2	Not enough diversity	Land	Looking tired
Park x 3	Lack of leisure e.g. cinema / theatre	Demand	Impact of city's image

Night time economy	Lack of students	Croquet Lawn	Jazz
Lunch time economy	Street furniture	Removal of road barriers	Buses in centre or not?
Parking	Not much space to grow	Old people's homes	County Hall relocation
Sports grounds	Charity shops	Pedestrianisation	Online shopping
Forward thinking Local Authority / LA events x 2	Fewer independents	Climate change / outdoor seating	Online banking
Strong sense of community x 2	Loss of banks / travel agents	Connectivity with football / cricket grounds	Increased rents
Centralised population / schools x 2	Loss of retail	Soft play	Too many chains
Decent e-connectivity	Lack of hotels	Scope to use outdoor space for events	
Public loos	Parking charges	Different sort of community space / services / hub	
Library x 2	Buses go through centre	Democratisation - town centre governance	
Wide pavements	Too many chain coffee shops	Active travel opportunity	
Croquet lawn / market space x 2	No hardware		
Variety / hospitality	Road barriers		
Students			
Markets			
Public transport provision			

APPENDIX 2

Invitation to stakeholder workshop

Dear xx

Xx Borough Council is working with BAS Consultancy and Nexus Planning to develop our thinking on Nottingham's town centres. Our centres are changing and the need to adapt to these changes should be planned as part of a broader conversation with those that use the town centres, those that work there and those that represent surrounding communities.

To this end we have arranged an interactive evening workshop for up to 40 people on xx/xx/23, from 6pm to 8pm at [xx venue]. The purpose of the workshop will be to consider how town centres and high streets are changing over time and think together about how our centre can meet the needs of the community. In the workshop you'll develop a SWOT analysis for the centre and provide your ideas for a high street vision.

The workshop will be facilitated by Ben Stephenson, who is an experienced consultant working with towns and cities across the country, including as an expert with the High Streets Task Force, a government programme which provides help to town centres to plan for change. Ben is also a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Place Management and Chief Executive of the Angel Islington Business Improvement District.

Refreshments will be provided. Please let us know whether you will be able to attend by xx/xx/23.

Regards etc.

APPENDIX 3

Attendees, Vital and Viable West Bridgford workshop, November 30, 2023

Name	Position / Organisation
Catherine Evans	Economic Growth, Rushcliffe Council
Richard Mapletoft	Head of Planning Policy, Rushcliffe Council
Caroline Saxton	Economic Growth, Rushcliffe Council
Ben Ryder	Business Support and Communications, Rushcliffe Council
Cllr S Calvert	Rushcliffe Council
Cllr D Polenta	Rushcliffe Council
Cllr J Chaplain	Rushcliffe Council
Cllr P Gowland	Rushcliffe Council
Cllr S Dellar	Rushcliffe Council
Will Morlidge	D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership
Ophelia Gamble	
Shamshad Walker	
Daniel Sullivan	Highways, Rushcliffe Council
Ben Tebbutt	
Geri Griffin	WBLAF