

WIDER PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE – 19 NOVEMBER 2021

Workshop 6 (Regenerating and Shaping Town Centres and Places)

NOTES

Workshop Facilitators

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General Comments

- There is a renewed sense of optimism around this agenda; the pandemic has reconnected people with their 'places'. Coupled with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the on-going work of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), there are new and developing relationships, which need to be maintained in order to keep momentum.
- Agreement that that assets should not be solely released for the purposes of achieving the highest capital receipt, and should be looked at, at scale, to determine their best use. It is imperative that community conversations take place when considering options.

Town Centres & High Streets

- We need to re-think and re-imagine our town centres, and how they serve their hinterlands. During the pandemic, people began to re-connect with their local places – without visitors, tourists and cars, and the promotion of daily, local exercise, people felt safe to use and connect with their local spaces and places.
- The generic offer of retail and hospitality is evolving in to a more 'place based offer'; could empty retail units be re-purposed for health and wellbeing benefit, for use by the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector (who are currently proceed out of occupying these centrally based units).
- The large volume of charity shops in town centres were discussed, including whether the benefit of these would be felt locally, or nationally (for example, a number of large-scale charity shops are administered nationally). It was also noted that charity shops are a draw for the missing generation (those aged between 20 and 44).
- It was acknowledged that in a rural County like North Yorkshire, the need to provide suitable access by cars is a key factor. However, it was also recognised that had been a growth in cycling and walking in recent years and residents wanted their town centres to be people-friendly places not dominated by cars so there is a careful balance to be struck in re-designing our town centres.
- Communities would like to be more involved; for example in Masham, the community would like to purchase the local greengrocers, which after 300 years, will not be re-open after the pandemic. The community would like to retain this, not only to ensure access to banking, post office service etc. but to preserve the heritage of the building. Unfortunately, the management infrastructure is not available at a community level to purchase the building (and maintain and develop it thereafter), but the will is there. It is crucial that communities are involved in place shaping, and a way is found to integrate partners at a place based level – for example, the Community Networks that will be developed through the new unitary authority.
- The importance of making places attractive to young people was noted; affordability of housing is crucial, could empty retail units be re-purposed for centrally based accommodation. It is crucial to involve young people in the conversation, how do we give space to them, how do we engage and inspire them (for example through the climate change and environment agenda). It was noted that through the Selby Heritage Action Zone (HAZ), young people had been asked to re-

design and build Selby Abbey and the town centre in Minecraft, which had been particularly successful.

Examples

- The regeneration of Stockton on Tees Town Centre and their creative use of centrally based buildings was cited; for example creating small incubation units for small businesses and sole traders. Through their high street Enterprise Arcade.
- The 15-minute city concept; reimagining urban spaces, promoting the idea of mixed use, community based and environmentally friendly infrastructure and development.
- Redditch Regeneration Project.