

Town Centre Comparative Case Studies

Report on behalf of the Scottish Parliament's Economy and Fair Work Committee in support of the inquiry into town centres and retail.



benton scott-simmons

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Summary

This report was commissioned by the Economy and Fair Work Committee to support its inquiry into town centres and retail.

No two town centres are the same and each face different challenges. Usually, a unique mix of recurring constraints (or advantages) due to their location, natural and cultural assets and economic status.

Each community responds differently to these challenges.

This report summarises 12 case studies from Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; with additional examples from France and New Zealand.

The case studies show how some towns identified and tackled their own challenges.

The most affluent or successful towns were deliberately not chosen. The committee has already identified that towns like St Andrews or Peebles are successful because of their relative affluence and other advantages.

More is learnt when a town faces negative situations and experiences which it overcomes, particularly when there was little or no economic resilience providing a safety net.

The **Lessons Learned** are summarised for each individual case study. This is not simply a case of 'copying and pasting' an apparently successful approach but rather understanding why it worked in its given context; assessing how it relates to the town centre in question and having the expertise and confidence to refine and tailor the approach accordingly.

Often more is learnt from something that doesn't go as expected as opposed to accidentally getting something right. Many of the case studies explored demonstrate that success is not achieved by worrying about risk aversion or fearing change.

Success will look different in every town centre, but there are recurring critical success factors:

- Towns cannot afford to wait until everything is perfect, it's about waiting until everything is good enough to make a start and anticipating opportunities. The approaches taken in Stockton-on-Tees and Merthyr Tydfil were bold with councils making major investments even before plans were finalised.
- Bolder approaches do not necessarily mean greater risks, clearly both Stockton and Merthyr were aware of potential market opportunities, were prepared to move quickly and adjust plans accordingly.
- Ensure that the right individuals with the right experience are in the right seats. Clonakilty has a town architect at the heart of the decision-making process and the quality of placemaking shines through.

- **Make the CPO (Compulsory Purchase Order) and CSO (Compulsory Sale Order) more streamlined** and better understood by providing support to any organisation engaged in developing their town centre. The case studies include several examples where long absent landlords stalled key projects.
- The case studies show that removing departmental **barriers within local government** for projects produces better outcomes with perhaps more flexible town centre teams across local government.
- Encouraging good communication through **Civic Stewardship**, which requires **positive collaboration** at every level.
- Seek out and support individuals who can provide the **creative or entrepreneurial spark** (arts officers in Lisburn or market traders in Altrincham).

The outcomes and impacts in **Opotiki** would easily be recognised as inclusive growth, community wealth building, place making and a move to net zero. The policy language is different, but the ideas are the same with a small, poor and remote New Zealand town delivering impacts that would be impressive for Scotland's bigger cities.

The funding framework supported several desired policy outcomes across a range of activities. These activities were part of the **long-term vision for the town** and were developed as the regeneration project progressed.

This is in sharp contrast to many funding opportunities in Scotland and the UK where the focus is often on individual shovel ready projects to be delivered within challenging timetables. **This risks prioritising projects best able to take advantage of funding opportunities rather than best able to deliver impacts.**

The private sector will always seek to realise commercial value from real estate. Building back a cohesive town centre with stronger social and community values needs to be balanced with the private sector's desire to realise commercial value.

When community and commercial values diverge, these areas are arguably in the most need of policy intervention to re-establish successful town centres.

Walthamstow is an unusual case study in demonstrating that both buoyant and struggling towns need to be better aligned with the needs of the community and the community wealth building agenda.

Walthamstow has been able to **maintain its unique and special identity**, despite resource pressures, within London. This is a considerable achievement, especially given other towns cite the difficulties of developing a distinct identity while nearby other cities.

The selected case studies exemplify how 12 towns identified the problems they were facing whilst recognising they could be overcome. Importantly, they all chose to do something about them.

Dumfries

(Population 34,000)



Case study: strong community vision, delivery and ownership of the town centre.

Dumfries is a market town acting as the regional capital for Dumfries and Galloway and the council's administrative centre.

Dumfries is famed for its connections with Robert Burns.

More recently Moat Brae House and Garden was restored as the National Centre for Children's Literature and Storytelling.

The historic riverside of the River Nith is a natural asset but problems with flooding have hindered development.

Challenges

Vacant and unused buildings suffer from a lack of maintenance and scar the town centre.

A relatively remote and rural town but within ready travelling distance to Carlisle (35 miles).

Key public sector assets including Council offices & Crichton Campus are outside the town centre.

Town centre suffers from flooding from the river Nith, in the Whitesands area.

Challenging perceptions, loss of confidence and lack of an evening economy in the town centre.

Large Debenhams high street store opened in 2014, closed in 2021 with large job losses.

Business rates frequently cited as a barrier to new businesses moving into the town centre.

Frequently cited issues around traffic management within town centre.

What was done?

- High street pedestrianised in **1989**
- Dumfries Urban Design Strategy in **2005**
- Friar's Vennel (demonstration project) in **2009**
- Planestanes event space **2010**
- Burns Square **2013**
- Midsteeple Quarter society set up **2017**
- Moat Brae House and Garden opens **2019**
- New town centre action plan & vision **2022**.

How was it done?

Midsteeple Quarter is an independent organisation set up by the local community to deliver the vision for the town. Their aim is to shape a new future for Dumfries town centre which responds to the needs of the community and is run for their benefit.

The organisation addressed a need for the community to take a leading role to focus long efforts to regenerate the town centre.

What was done differently?

Midsteeple Quarter has over 400 members with a board to direct projects on their behalf. The Board includes expertise in planning, housing enterprise, creative industries, property development and legal services.

It employs a project team to deliver objectives agreed at board level.

Midsteeple Quarter is independent and run by the local people that are its members. This provides a focus and ongoing engagement that could not be delivered by the council.

The Stove helped Midsteeple Quarter establish itself and Midsteeple Quarter continues to work in partnership with The Stove Network (an arts & community project based on the high street).

Midsteeple Quarter, in addition to formal applications for funding, is also supported by generous donations from the local community and supporters further afield who have a love for the town "and want to see it flourish".

What was achieved?

This year Midsteeple Quarter will begin phase of repurposing and extending town centre buildings, creating enterprise space on the ground & first floors with upper floor flats.



This includes space for pop-up projects, events, long-term units for hire, a retail unit and co-working space. The homes will be owned by Midsteeple Quarter available to at affordable-to-mid-market rates.

Raised £2.6 million to redevelop The Oven ('The Bakers Oven' 2018 Phase 1 – Community Asset transfer of 135-139 High Street which had been previously acquired by DGC in 2009 but had lain empty until used as a pop-up venue for local charities).

Key stakeholders

● Midsteeple Quarter ● The Stove (public arts) ● D&G Council (Town Centre Living Fund) ● The Holywood Trust (funding) ● Scottish Government (funding) ● Creative Scotland ● SURF

Measuring progress

- Dumfries has shown gradual improvement, with relative improvement in town centre vacancies.
- The projects are delivering:
 - 60 new homes bringing 200 people into the town centre
 - 50 new commercial spaces (including micro-enterprise)
 - Supporting 25 start-up businesses in the town centre
 - Supporting 25 businesses to become more productive to create & retain 75 town centre jobs
- Delivery will support environmental outcomes, currently exploring potential for geothermal district heating
- Work closely with the Stove Network (arts and community organisation)

Current indicators

- Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**
- Town centre footfall **Stable**
- Population **Stabilising**
- Community engagement **High**

Lessons learned

Of the £2.6m raised to fund The Oven, only £0.2m was funded by the local council. Seeking additional resources (including crowd funding) allowed first-hand knowledge of developing a collective ethos and helped in forming their own creative hub in the town.

Crowd funding bought 5 prominent buildings in the area, creating new business opportunities and new homes. Meanwhile uses for two other empty buildings allowed momentum to be maintained while plans are progressed, and additional funding secured.

Further information: [Midsteeple Quarter](#) [The Stove Network](#) [Midsteeple Quarter](#) [Midsteeple Quarter](#) [The Stove Network](#) [Saving the High Street \(Dumfries case study\)](#)

Galashiels

(Population 15,500)



Case study: encouraging more diverse town centres through the planning system

Galashiels was a medieval town and is currently the largest town in the Scottish Borders.

Textile industries developed around the town and although many of the original mills have closed, textiles is still important. Other contemporary industries include food and drink and financial services.

The Great Tapestry of Scotland is now on display at a new purpose-built visitor centre on Galashiels' high street. Galashiels is a key retail centre in the Scottish Borders.

Challenges

Galashiels' town centre vacancy rates have been among the highest in the Scottish Borders.

Bank Street (above) is performing reasonably well with availability of parking and attractive greenspaces. Channel Street is more challenging and hosts larger retail units.

Galashiels is a relatively remote and rural town where the tourism offer wasn't as well established as other Scottish Borders towns. Several large retail units have recently been developed outside the town centre.

The town has suffered from falling footfall due to out of town retail developments and a move towards online shopping.

Some parts of the town suffer from signs of deprivation and continue to struggle (SIMD [report](#)).

What was done?

- Energise Galashiels established **2014**
- Borders Railway opens **2015**
- Pilot scheme: diversifying town centres **2017**
- Community Development Plan **2018**
- Local Development Plan **2019**
- Great Tapestry of Scotland **2021**

How was it done?

The community organisation, Energise Galashiels, was established in 2014 by individuals sharing a vision for a more vibrant, confident and inviting community. The group works alongside the Council to promote attractions, support projects and deliver events.

Last year the new purpose-built Great Tapestry of Scotland gallery, visitor centre, cafe and workshop space was [opened to the public](#) in Galashiels' town centre. The £6.7m project replaced a former Poundstretcher store.

What was done differently?

In several Scottish Borders towns vacancy rates have remained low with only a minor loss of footfall. By contrast some towns, including Galashiels and Hawick, have suffered from rising vacancy rates.

In 2017 the Council launched a new [pilot scheme](#) relaxing the 'core activities' for some parts of selected town centres. The scheme offered greater flexibility in considering a broader range of uses for vacant buildings for towns with higher vacancy rates, including those in Galashiels.

The pilot scheme stated that the Borders Railway offered opportunities to develop the town centre and tourism, but Galashiels lacked the facilities in the town centre to attract tourists, with the town fabric in poor condition in some areas.

The pilot scheme fits well with the work of Energise Galashiels in tackling the condition of the town centre fabric and encouraging alternative uses of vacant buildings (building on the flexibility offered by the pilot scheme).

What was achieved?

The opening of the Great Tapestry of Scotland visitor centre was delayed due to pandemic and the project's economic and social benefits may take longer to realise.



Seen as a catalyst for regeneration, the project (within walking distance of the Borders Railway), will attract over 50,000 visitors to Galashiels each year, create 16 jobs around £900,000 of extra spending each year is predicted for the local economy. The business case for the visitor centre projected an additional 12,000 extra visits to other town centre attractions supporting a further 17 jobs.

The town centre pilot scheme was adopted into the recent Local Development Plan ([online](#)). Core use requirements were removed from Hawick, relaxed in Galashiels and other towns.

Higher standards of policy tests will be in place in the town centres of Peebles, Kelso and Melrose (which continue to perform well in terms of footfall and vacancy rates).

Key stakeholders

● Scottish Borders Council ● Energise Galashiels ● South of Scotland Enterprise Agency

Measuring progress

The projects are delivering:



Bringing people back into the town centre by considering a wider range of uses for long-vacant properties.



The new visitor centre includes workshop space, meeting space and other facilities for new businesses.



The new centre is projected to add between 30-40 tourism related jobs to the local economy.



Growing tourism through the Borders Railway provides less carbon intensive options for those visiting the region.



The Great Tapestry of Scotland provides a platform to link visitors with the town's other heritage and tourism assets.

Current indicators

Town centre vacancy rates - **Improving**

Town centre footfall - **Slight Decline**

Population- **Growing**

Community engagement - **High**

Lessons learned

The town centre pilot scheme demonstrated a need to fine-tune policies to meet the needs of different town centres and the aspirations of local communities.

There is some evidence (but limited) that Galashiels now hosts a more diverse range of businesses following the pilot scheme. However, changes to the planning system alone are not enough.

Energise Galashiels has been particularly successful in ensuring decision-making is community-led, reflecting the diverse views of the community and not just the loudest voices.

Further information: [Heartland of the Borders](#) (Energise Galashiels) [Energise Galashiels](#), [Scottish Borders Local Development Plan](#) [Energise Galashiels](#)

Kilmarnock



Case study: flexible and community-led approach to regeneration and consolidation.

Kilmarnock has a history as an industrial town. Mining and the Industrial Revolution introduced new heavy industry to the town including engineering.

Most of this industry has now closed. In 2012 Diageo closed the town's Johnnie Walker bottling plant with the loss of more than 700 jobs.

[HALO Kilmarnock](#) is a major town centre regeneration project on the former Johnnie Walker site. HALO is creating a dynamic commercial, educational, cultural, leisure and lifestyle quarter of the town.

Challenges

Kilmarnock's town centre has many long-vacant units. The traditional town centre office and retail market is weak.

The pandemic has accelerated trends of retail and footfall leaving the town centre.

Employment and activity in Kilmarnock's town centre has held up reasonably well compared to most towns but has clearly declined over the last decade.

There is a recognition that the town centre needs to be slightly smaller and nimbler.

Flood risks necessitate the reuse of existing buildings rather than new developments

Some communities around Kilmarnock's town centre suffer from relative deprivation.

What was done?

East Ayrshire Council has decided to help move the town centre away from a solely retail focus to broaden opportunities for wider uses.

In addition to HALO, other key town centre projects include St Marnock's Square, where a row of shops was demolished creating the potential for high quality [green space](#) (next page).

The [Ingram Enterprise Centre](#) opened in 2018 to host new and expanding businesses Business Gateway maintains a presence in the building to provide support.

The Ingram Centre was the latest in a series of 25 buildings in Kilmarnock's town centre to undergo restoration and refurbishment through the [CARS & THI](#) schemes.

The [White Tile Building](#) is a prominent run-down building on King Street. Funding has been secured to repurpose the building into a creative industries campus including café, showcase and exhibition space, business space (working with Utopia Computers, a team of multi award-winning engineers).

The White Tile Building's roof will be turned into a rooftop terrace and garden for small business and creative space to spur innovation.

How was it done?

[Celebrate Kilmarnock](#) is a community-led partnership encouraging stakeholders to collectively reimagine and reinvent Kilmarnock's public spaces.

The overall Celebrate Kilmarnock vision is to establish Kilmarnock as a destination town, enlivening the town centre with activities and events during the day and into the evening.

Celebrate Kilmarnock work closely with the Council, leading consultations with the community and stakeholders to better shape and deliver projects to maximise local benefits.

What was done differently?

The demolition of shops was a decisive move recognising an oversupply of retail space, the need for green space and that regeneration resources needed to be targeted elsewhere.

What was achieved?

The opening of HALO Kilmarnock was slightly delayed due to the pandemic but is now open. When projected occupancy is achieved, the project will add over £200 million to the local economy and sustain 1,500 jobs.

ST MARNOCK'S SQUARE | STAGE 3 SUMMARY



The HALO project won Regeneration Project of The Year (2022) at the Scottish Property Awards.

Before the pandemic, the Ingram Enterprise Centre was operating at nearly full capacity. This has spurred further consideration of providing additional business space within the town centre for established businesses.

Initial work began on the White Tile Building last year with Celebrate Kilmarnock helping to finalise detailed plans for the repurposing of the building.

Key stakeholders: ● East Ayrshire Council ● Scottish Government (RCGF) ● Celebrate Kilmarnock

Measuring progress

The projects are delivering:



Bringing people back into the town centre, with affordable housing as part of the HALO project.



New commercial space at the HALO project, Ingram Enterprise Centre and White Building.



Supporting start-up businesses in the town centre (including the Ingram Enterprise Centre).



Community Wealth Building through local community ownership of some repurposed buildings.



Repurposing buildings will support environmental outcomes alongside net zero operations at HALO Kilmarnock.



New cultural space and green space will be made available for a continuing programme of arts and community events.

Current indicators

Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**

Town centre footfall **Declining**

Population **Stabilising**

Community engagement **High**

Lessons learned

The 25 repurposed town centre buildings represent a cumulative approach to revitalise the town centre and are not simply isolated building restorations.

Potential projects were considered in terms of their synergy with previous projects, helping to define and timetable future restoration (or demolition) projects but without a town centre plan in place (forthcoming) giving flexibility.

Nairn

(Population 15,500)



Case study: using a BID to leverage town centre investment

Nairn was originally a fishing village and local market town. Today Nairn is primarily a tourist town on the Moray Firth with leisure activities including golf.

Some hotels, pubs and takeaways are on offer in the town centre, but the chief night-time focus appears to be at the harbour and seaside area.

Nairn's vacancy rate was higher than the Highland town centre average, yet it also provided a substantial retail offering and several key services for the local area.

Socioeconomic status is higher than in other kinds of town and there is a mix of professionals and non-professionals.

Challenges

Several large retail units have recently been developed outside of the town centre.

Cycling facilities were lacking, its built environment was poorly maintained in places, and it had a large and prominent vacant site.

It lacked much in the way of greenery, had little in terms of public art and appeared to have no real night time economy.

The town has suffered from falling footfall due to out of town retail developments and a move towards online shopping.

Although the Town House was well maintained, derelict and vacant buildings were seen in a several places.

What was done?

Nairn's [town centre action plan](#) highlights the challenging funding environment and the difficulties in delivering town centre improvements.

The plan identified several proposals to develop an active, vibrant town centre. These proposals were categorised into three key themes:

- Improve High Street environment and expand activities

- Make better use of area between King Street and the High Street
- Improve walking and cycling links between the town centre and surroundings.

How was it done?

The [Nairn Connects](#) Business Improvement District (BID) was established in 2018 by the businesses within the BID area.

Working with local businesses and the community, the aim of Nairn Connects is to restore Nairn's reputation as a place to visit and shop and make it a more attractive place to do business.

The BID [business plan](#) sets out the five year strategy spending just over £500,000 over five years to help Nairn grow, develop and thrive as a vibrant town and a must-visit destination.

The planned BID activities included providing digital business training, promoting more cross-selling between businesses, providing cost saving advice, street deep clean maintenance and improving town centre signage.

What was done differently?

The town centre action plan set out a clearly challenging funding environment. Many of the action plan's recommendations focused on making better collective use of the town's existing assets.

However, restricting town centre and investment ambitions to modest activities limited the ability of the business community to collectively identify the need for capital investment and secure funding.

What was achieved?

The pandemic limited BID activities and events early on in its first term. The BID has still managed to deliver an impressive programme of events at pace once Covid public health restrictions were lifted.



Events include the second three-day food and drink festival celebrating the seaside town of Nairn, 'Taste of Nairn'. This year's event will boast an Artisan food and drink market, food-related theatre performances and demonstrations.

The BID was projected to raise £106,000 income (before allowing for bad debts) each year. For the last three years the BID has generated income of £137,000 in 2021, £160,000 in 2020 and £99,000 in 2019.

The additional income includes funds to deal with public health restrictions and post-pandemic recovery.

Key stakeholders: ● Nairn Connects (BID) ● Highland Council

Measuring progress

The limited activities and events delivered before Covid public health restrictions were put in place were unlikely to have gained momentum.

It is therefore difficult to identify the role the BID may have played in moving some performance indicators given the significant challenges during the pandemic.

Current indicators

Town centre vacancy rates **Stabilising**

Town centre footfall **Stabilising**

Population **Stabilising**

Community engagement **High**

Lessons learned

The BID's plan reflects the needs of local business. Even backed with a relatively modest budget the BID has been able to secure additional income for Nairn.

This follows a pattern seen elsewhere where BIDs able to develop the capacity and capability of the local business community can identify where capital investment should be targeted to maximise local impacts and secure the appropriate resources from funders.

Further information: [Nairn Connects](#) (BID) [Nairn town centre health check](#) (Highland Council).

Altrincham

Population 52,000



Case study: using a series of locally inspired initiatives based on ideas and entrepreneurs

Altrincham is a market town in Trafford, Greater Manchester, around 8 miles southwest of Manchester city centre.

The arrival of the railways allowed Altrincham and the surrounding areas to develop as desirable places to live within easy commuting distance of Manchester.

In the 1970s the decline of Broadheath, an industrial area, was responsible for a significant decline in employment.

Altrincham was one of 12 partner towns cited in 'How to reinvent the High Street', as part of the ESRC-funded HS2020 project. Altrincham was winner of England's Best High Street in 2018.

Challenges

Established in 1290 the Altrincham Market has been at the centre of community life in Altrincham but had stagnated (until the last decade) and was perceived as being run by the council with little love or care ([online](#)).

In 2010 Altrincham was branded a Ghost Town in the national press. With the highest vacancy rate (30%) anywhere in the UK. The town centre's retail offer needed to be revitalised to develop into a modern market town.

The BID was established in 2016 with the town centre at a crossroads, years of decline resulted in a dated 'look and feel' and empty shops which [encouraged shoppers to go elsewhere](#).

What was done?

The community built its story around being a modern market town. A multi-functional settlement, a great place to live work and visit.

The revival of the Altrincham Market was [remarkable](#). The redevelopment of the indoor market hall became an anchor attracting an influx of independent retailers.

Throughout the town other footfall anchors have been reinstated or upgraded including the library, transport interchange and hospital.

A great deal of effort has been put into promoting local businesses and creating community events in the town centre to get people out onto the high street.

Altrincham's annual music festival [Goose Green](#) now attracts more than 8,000 people.

Retail now plays a less prominent role with the high street now hosting two gyms, an Everyman cinema and a bustling food market, which houses a plethora of eateries and a 180-seater dining area.

Co-working spaces have been encouraged and in-fill residential development has supported people living and working in the town.

How was it done?

The town's reinvention was organic, the BID encouraging diversity of uses in the town at the heart of its marketing and management strategies.

Property developer Nick Johnson won the contract to run the market in 2013, changing its face, and in turn Altrincham. Redevelopment of the market hall attracted new business and entrepreneurs, reopening in 2014.

What was done differently?

Altrincham's Town Centre Partnership encouraged entrepreneurs rather selecting possible tenants to take space at the market.

Trafford Council emphasised a 'whole town centre' approach and establishing partnerships with the community and stakeholders.

This helped instil confidence in the town from businesses, investors and residents.

What was achieved?

Altrincham went from having the highest shop vacancy rate in the UK, to being voted the 2018 best place to live in the North West.

The improvement to public realm made Altrincham streets more walkable and more inclusive, with measurable benefit in rising visitor numbers and footfall.

The refurbished Market House and Market were a catalyst for regeneration. The town centre also benefited from around £4m of public realm improvements, an improved transport interchange (£19m) and new hospital (£17m).

Trafford Council's [Town Centres Loan Scheme](#) loaned over £250,000 to new businesses. The Town Centre Partnership (Altrincham Forward) was dissolved in 2016 following a successful ballot to establish a BID ([online](#)).

Altrincham BID invested £1.4 million over 5 years (2016-21) and continued to drive strong local partnerships, securing a second term (2021-26).

Trafford Council recently consulted on ambitious plans ([online](#)) to further build on the initial success including reducing motor traffic, widening pedestrian areas and improving cycle infrastructure.

Key stakeholders

- Trafford Council
- Altrincham Business Improvement District

Measuring progress

The projects have stimulated a thriving night-time and leisure economy

The projects have encouraged people back into the town centre to live, work and visit.

New commercial spaces for start-ups and co-op space.

Encouraging entrepreneurs to take space and try out new ideas and start-up new businesses.

Supporting businesses through BID projects and Town Centre Business Loans to develop

Public realm improvements have helped to stimulate active travel across the town centre and reduced traffic.

Current indicators

Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**

Town centre footfall **Growing**

Population **Growing**

Community engagement **High**

Lessons learned

Reimagining town centres can be a series of locally inspired and led initiatives, based on ideas and entrepreneurship like Altrincham's market. This can be supported by government through support and removing obstacles to allow local communities to deliver.

Using social media is important to encourage and support engagement with town centre projects. By encouraging entrepreneurs, the town centre gained new ideas and new businesses.

Further information: [Goose Green Festival](#), [Altrincham BID](#). [Visit Altrincham Town Centre Regeneration](#) (House of Commons Library), [How to reinvent the High Street](#) [The High Street Report](#) [Altrincham Market](#) (video)

Lisburn

population 46,600



Case study: focusing on better connecting the community with its town centre

Lisburn is a small city, sitting in the Lagan Valley, lying only 8 miles southwest of Belfast city centre.

Originally famed for its textile industries, Damask from Lisburn became world famous. In the late 1700's the first steam engine in Ireland was installed in one of the city's cotton mills.

Recently, successive Governments have pursued policies designed to encourage the diversification of industries.

This is reflected in the development of a variety of enterprises by local entrepreneurs as Lisburn reclaims its sense of identity.

Challenges

Lisburn had struggled with its sense of identity, proximity to Belfast and Sprucefield, a major out-of-town retail park just outside of Lisburn ([online](#))

Both Belfast and Sprucefield give shoppers convenient alternatives to Lisburn's town centre. By comparison, Lisburn's centre suffered from vacant properties.

Lisburn's retail and leisure offer struggles to compete with Belfast and the evening economy was limited. After Lisburn's historic Hilden Mill was set on fire, there were serious concerns about anti-social behaviour (especially among young people) during the evening.

The city centre struggled as people chose to live away from it.

What was done?

The local city council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) published a [Masterplan](#) in 2010, refreshed in 2019.

A facilitator helped to develop an events programme. This allowed Lisburn to use events and activities focussed on leisure, culture and heritage to attract visitors.

The town identified flexible timescales including short-term (within the first three years), medium-term (within four to ten years) and long-term aims (beyond ten years). This allowed stakeholders to focus effort and target funding.

LCCC attracted new businesses focussed on the redeveloped square such as an artisan bakery and milkshake parlour (2020).

How was it done?

The 2010 City Centre Masterplan identified solutions to the challenges facing the city through a vision of inclusive growth covering:

- economic resilience
- environment and sustainability
- health and wellbeing

The two main outcomes from the Masterplan were high quality design and placemaking and the creation of a vibrant, mixed use, experience focused future.

Capital investment in the public realm, the redevelopment of Market Square was completed in 2019.

Working with the city centre management team to ensure that the new public square was well used and stimulated an evening economy.

What was done differently?

The refurbished (and reclaimed) Market Square was the catalyst for change becoming the setting for a programme of community-led events.

An emphasis was placed on regular community engagement to reach people of all ages. The Council promoted [City Centre Ambassadors](#) to support continual engagement and promote the programme of events and activities.

What was achieved?

Lisburn has reduced vacancy rates (from 22% to 12%) by repurposing vacant and rundown buildings, changing uses to encourage a more diverse and welcoming centre.

Lisburn has achieved an uplift in evening economy with more independent businesses open in the early evening.



The programme of events and activities led to an increase in dwell time and footfall (before the pandemic. Post-pandemic recovery will need to focus on rebuilding this success.

Council's regeneration of the historic quarter and support for first floor residential development (living over the shop) has helped make Lisburn's centre busier and supported the evening economy (attracting 15 new independent businesses).

The Lisburn SAFE project ([online](#)) aims to create a community environment which is safe, free from criminality, anti-social behaviour and a connected community.

Lisburn businesses (and residents) benefited from the Northern Ireland High Street Stimulus scheme (pre-paid card worth £100) to generate an extra £140m on high streets rather than online.

Measuring progress

- Five key objectives were set out in the Masterplan:
- Creation of a vibrant and mixed-use city centre
- An expanded city centre
- A more diverse city centre shopping offer
- A more welcoming and better connected city centre and
- A city centre public realm of distinction

Current indicators

- Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**
- Town centre footfall **Stable**
- Population **Stabilising**
- Community engagement **Good**

Lessons learned

Lisburn's case study is less about changing the 'hardware' and more about updating the 'software'. Initiatives focused on using authentic heritage to better connect Lisburn's community with each other and the city centre.

Lisburn highlights the importance of civic stewardship and the act of caring for your place.

The role of the arts was important in leading creative solutions, for example the success of [Culture Night](#).

Low cost investment focused on better use of what the town already has, with limited additional capital investment needed. For example, innovative lighting or opening doors that are not usually open in the evening.

Key stakeholders

● Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council ● Lisburn Chamber of Commerce ● The Strategic Design Group ([online](#)) ● Local groups incl. YMCA & Cathedral

Further information: [Lisburn City Centre Masterplan](#) [Strategic Design Group](#) , [Living Places](#) - Urban Stewardship and Design Guide.

Merthyr

population 43,800



Case study: An agile approach developing investment and projects into a masterplan

Merthyr Tydfil, often called Merthyr, is the main town in the County Borough Council area. It is about 23 miles North of Cardiff.

The town centre has two modern shopping centres with a regular train service to Cardiff Central. The town centre also has a wide selection of independent retailers in the Pontmorlais [Heritage Quarter](#) and a Cafe Quarter at the Southern end of the High Street.

Merthyr's has a rich industrial heritage, including coal, steel and ironworks. The legacy of deindustrialisation and job losses are still felt today.

Challenges

The town centre has improved in recent years, but some negative perceptions remain. In 2006 the town was ranked as one of the worst places to live.

The decline in employment and move to online shopping has left many town centre buildings vacant.

Successive out of town developments have challenged the town centre, with Merthyr cited as a monument to post-war municipal belief that problems could be solved by new build on the edge of town.

Merthyr's town centre is an important economic hub with a growing role as a tourist destination, but it has struggled to make the most of these opportunities.

What was done?

In 2014 the Council were successful in securing funding of £12.8m through the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places ([VVP](#)) programme.

The VVP funding was used to assess the viability (including for housing) and support the redevelopment of the town centre's derelict and vacant buildings.

The Council used funding to tackle prominent town centre properties (including the Theatre Royal, Miners Arms, Miners Hall and former YMCA building). VVP funding also supported grants made available to the private sector to tackle long-term vacant properties.

In addition to the VVP programme the Pontmorlais Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) sought to bring historic derelict buildings in the town's Heritage Quarter back into use.

The Merthyr Business Improvement District ([BID](#)) was established in 2012, with businesses voting for a second 5-year term. The BID invested £0.9m (2012-17) into the town centre with a further £0.8m 2017-22.

How was it done?

Last year, the Council sought to build on the VVP funded activities, announcing a new 15-year Town Centre [Masterplan](#) to reverse high street decline and deliver a thriving town centre.

The Masterplan was commissioned by the Council, Welsh Government and Transport for Wales. By 2035 the Masterplan will deliver a town centre with high quality residential, office, leisure and retail, new plazas, green spaces and an active riverside.

What was done differently?

Merthyr's regeneration projects have evolved into the new Town Centre Masterplan during the challenging post-pandemic recovery.

The agility of this approach was further demonstrated earlier this year when the Council bought the town's [main shopping centre](#), before the new Masterplan has been finished.

What was achieved?

Before the pandemic (2019), Merthyr's town centre retail vacancy rate had fallen to 8% ([online](#)). This compared to nearly 17% of Merthyr's town centre retail units lying vacant in 2015.



Several significant projects are being progressed including transforming a derelict rugby club in the town centre into a 700-person music venue ([online](#)).

A former local bakers & confectioners building is being brought back to life as a boutique hotel and bistro alongside 23 residential apartments ([online](#)).

The new Masterplan sets out ambitions for Merthyr to become 'the tourism capital of the Valleys and Brecon Beacons' with links to the Cyfarthfa Heritage Area Masterplan ([online](#)).

The Masterplan seeks to anchor Merthyr as a hub to access natural and recreational assets across region. This includes, for example, BikePark Wales ([online](#)) the UK's largest purpose built bike park.

Key stakeholders

● Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council ● Welsh Government ● Transport for Wales ● Merthyr Business Improvement District.

Measuring progress

The projects are delivering:

- Bringing people back into the town centre with flats above ground floor commercial uses.
- Strong focus on consolidating the town centre and repurposing old buildings.
- Development of new commercial spaces with more diverse business community and fewer vacant commercial properties.
- Supporting start-up businesses in the town centre.
- Arts, community and cultural assets are being brought back into use and new venues and assets are being created.

Current indicators

Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**

Town centre footfall **Stable**

Population **Growing**

Community engagement **Good**

Lessons learned

Before the pandemic the broad approach tackling vacant and derelict buildings across the town was starting to have a significant impact. The town centre saw markedly reduced vacancy rates with a more vibrant town attracting private sector investment.

The Council made a bold move to purchase St Tydfil Shopping Centre. This linked together the old and new bus station sites, both also Council owned, providing more options to redevelop the town centre.

Taking ownership of key assets, particularly where synergies are realised, will allow a more flexible approach in developing the Masterplan.

Further information: [Merthyr BID](#) [Merthyr Tydfil Vibrant and Viable Places Programme](#)

Stockton

population 85,000



Case study: Town centre regeneration through radical change and demolition

Stockton-on -Tees (Stockton) is a large market town and former port it once thrived as a hub in the manufacturing conurbation of Teesside. Iron, steel, shipbuilding and chemicals shaped the town and the region.

The river Tees which separates Stockton from rural North Yorkshire was formerly a working river; heavily polluted it generated wealth until the late 20th century but now it is again set to be the centre of the town's renaissance.

“Stockton is probably the best example in the UK of a town that's recognised that shops are not going to be the mainstay of town-centre survival in the 21st century and we need to do something radical about it.” *Bill Grimsey*

Challenges

Deindustrialisation led to an economic slump, loss of jobs and population loss.

In more recent years the town has seen a dramatic loss of retail businesses including Debenhams, Marks and Spencer and New Look.

The high street is struggling to compete with online shopping and recover from the pandemic.

Like many other former industrial towns, the town centre turned its back on a river polluted by industry, but now the river is increasingly becoming an asset for supporting regeneration.

What was done?

Pioneering plans to demolish the failing Castlegate shopping centre and replace it with a new riverside park. The new park will be around three times the size of Trafalgar Square, focusing on leisure, culture, events and recreation activities.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council reinvented Stockton as an outdoor community centre. The town centre became a stage for events and markets.

The local council has invested in the public realm with an emphasis on redeveloping and repurposing retail space.

The town invested in a flying train sculpture, The Stockton Flyer, which rises whistling from its plinth at 1pm every day in a cloud of steam.

Focussed on a programme of events to increase footfall including community carnivals, Diwali inspired festivals and giant tea parties. In 2019 nearly 60,000 people attended the [Stockton International Riverside Festival](#) (over 4 days).

How was it done?

The UK Government's [Future High Streets Fund](#) is being used to demolish a failing shopping arcade, replacing it with the £37m riverside park.

The local council plans to contribute a further £5m and commits to delivering offices in a further £30m phase.

A strategy to concentrate shops in one place moving Castlegate tenants to empty units in Wellington Square, bought by the council in 2019 (both had vacancy levels of around 30%). Council offered grants of up to £5,000 to help businesses refurbish vacant units.

What was done differently?

Enterprise Arcade, at the Fountain Shopping Mall, allows young businesses to take space for £10 a day to try out their format and grow independent traders.

"It seems to be more of a kind of wellbeing approach to urban development, forgetting about the property sector and its needs." John Tomaney, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at University College London.

What was achieved?

Stockton-on-Tees is increasingly a place people want to visit, supported by offering amenities and conveying a sense of progress.



In addition to UK Government funding investment has been provided by Stockton Council.

The council built (and own) a new 128-bed, five-storey hotel in the town centre ([online](#)). The hotel (opened in 2019) forms an important part of the town centre's regeneration scheme in supporting increasing visitor numbers.

Among other key elements of the riverside regeneration, the council is also funding the £30m refurbishment of the Globe theatre, a Grade II listed 1930s art deco gem, nearing completion at the top end of the high street.

Stockton-on-Tee's latest visitor economic strategy highlighted that visitors were spending £226 million each in the town (including £176 million from day-visits).

Before the pandemic, the volume of visitors and value of spending was rising by 6% each year. Stockton-on-Tee's approach is paving the way for a post-retail landscape through social infrastructure.

Measuring progress

- Key public services will be relocated as part of the waterfront scheme. This includes the development of a new leisure centre, library, customer service and register building.
- Discussions are ongoing for a new NHS facility to also be built, moving non-clinical, administration and some diagnostic services to a town centre location.
- The Globe theatre and new hotel will help support the visitor economy as the town recovers from the pandemic and bring people back into the town centre.

Current indicators

- Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**
- Town centre footfall **Stable**
- Population **Stabilising**
- Community engagement **Good**

Lessons learned

"We wanted to create a town centre that people might choose to visit for reasons other than just shopping, especially as there's a very successful retail park jam-packed with big names just 10 minutes away," Neil Schneider, Chief Executive Stockton Council

Stockton-on-Tees highlights the need to be ready to take advantage of market opportunities. Stockton Council was able to consult on its initial plans through the regular 'Let's talk about our towns' series (online) and subsequently submitted outline planning application last year (online).

Partnership working (including with the NHS) has been important to identify a range of activities and assets that can be moved back into the town centre.

Key stakeholders: ● UK Government ● Stockton Council ● North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust

Further information: [Vistor Economy Strategy](#) (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council), [Town centre regeneration](#) (House of Commons Library), [Build Back Better High Streets](#) (UK Government)

Walthamstow

population 109,000



Case study: town centre regeneration to focused on the needs of local residents

Walthamstow is a large town in Waltham Forest London Borough Council. Walthamstow is the main town centre and a key growth area in the borough.

It has excellent transport links to central London and both Stratford and Stansted Airport via Tottenham Hale.

The town has enjoyed significant recent investment including The Scene, a complex with a cinema, restaurants and new homes, the Solum II Station development, with a hotel and homes, and the first phase of refurbishment of the former EMD Granada Cinema.

Challenges

The town's growing population cited a need for affordable new homes in Walthamstow.

Alongside the long-standing issues of affordable homes, residents have suggested improvements are needed in the town's social infrastructure (healthcare facilities, schools and public spaces).

Most people recognised that there was an opportunity to improve the town centre with better quality greener public space and improved signage.

Walthamstow Market makes the town centre unique and special, but residents felt it could be improved and host a better mix of shops better tailored to the diverse population and focused on local independent businesses.

What was done?

In 2013-2014 designers worked on a £1m programme of town centre regeneration with around forty local traders to identify improvements to their shopfronts.

The outcomes of this engagement included new window design and furniture, painting and de-cluttering to ensure shops had a better façades, awnings and shopfront signage.

The works included new shopfront facades along Hoe Street and six new shopfronts at key locations.

The engagement also spurred art installation in the Town Square and Gardens, improved lighting to key roadside buildings (including pubs) and other public realm improvements (focused on Hoe Street).

New local activities include the council and Greater London Authority (GLA) supported [Night Feast](#) providing street food, cocktails, craft beer, arts and entertainment.

[Central Parade](#) is a creative workspace and business hub in the heart of Walthamstow with an in-house bakery and cafe.

Proposals for the EMD Cinema, including a restored 1,000 seat auditorium, could help Walthamstow provide a mix of town centre and evening economy activities for local residents.

How was it done?

The Council developed a Town Centre Strategy and [Delivery Plan for Walthamstow](#). The plans were based on engagement with the community and local stakeholders.

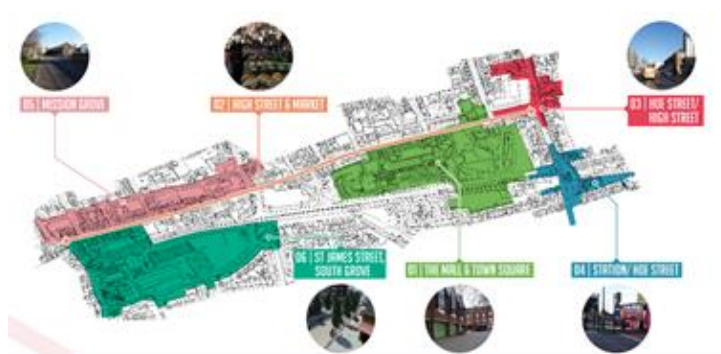
Delivery and funding partners set out in the Delivery Plan include developers, investors, businesses, start-ups, landowners, NHS, GLA, Network Rail and Transport for London (TfL).

What was done differently?

Walthamstow current plans for the town centre include 2,000 new homes alongside significant town centre investment. Current strategies aim to influence and shape investment to ensure they reflect the needs of residents while providing, and upgrading, social infrastructure.

What was achieved?

Hoe Street is becoming a location for independent food, drink and creative businesses, as well as an evening offer stimulated by the opening of The Scene cinema and restaurants and introduction of the Night Tube on the Victoria line.



Feedback from engagement with visitors and the local community showed nearly nine out of ten (88%) of people said they agreed with the town centre regeneration outcomes achieved to date.

Walthamstow's High Street is home to Europe's longest outdoor street market (with over 350 pitches). The market includes stalls and cafes offering food from around the world ([online](#)).

The Council has a policy to 'keep, seed and grow' local businesses to ensure the economy thrives and productivity rises. The Council's most recent economic growth strategy ([online](#)) shows the borough is the fastest growing in London.

Walthamstow has managed to maintain and developing its unique local assets whilst enabling significant economic expansion.

Measuring progress

- The town centre projects are delivering:
- Hoe Street projects supporting a range of thriving independent food, drink and creative businesses.
- Improvements to public spaces and shop fronts at both ends of the High Street and along Hoe Street.
- Town centre projects have focused on support to local independent businesses to encourage a diverse retail and cultural offer.
- Pop-up shops for 'meanwhile' make use of Council properties, making premises available to support small local start-up businesses.

Current indicators

- Town centre vacancy rates Improving
- Town centre footfall Stable
- Population Growing
- Community engagement High

Lessons learned

The Council's approach to planning, the economy, town centres and regeneration have a common theme prioritising a diverse and independent business community with local ownership.

Walthamstow is an unusual case study in demonstrating that even more buoyant market outcomes need to be better aligned with the needs of the community.

Walthamstow has been able to maintain its unique and special identity, despite resource pressures, within London. This is a considerable achievement through taking a 'whole town centre approach', involving local traders in strategy development and focusing on unique assets.

Key stakeholders: ● Walthamstow Forest Borough Council ● Greater London Authority

Further information: [Town Centre Strategy & Delivery Plans](#), [Economic Growth Strategy](#)

Clonakilty

population 4,600



Case study: Placing design at the heart of town centre regeneration

Clonakilty, or 'Clon', is situated at the head of the tidal Clonakilty Bay in County Cork around 40 minutes from Cork airport.

Originally manufacturing linen and cotton the town's industrial past is evident. The closure of the West Cork railway in the 1960s triggered a period of decline, with many buildings became vacant and run down.

The surrounding area is used for dairy farming but more recently the natural assets have seen it develop into a tourism hub for the West Cork area.

In 2016 it was awarded The Great Town Award by the Academy of Urbanism. In 2017 it was recognised as the 'Best Town in Europe' and the 'Best Place of the Year' by the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland whilst also being named 'Ireland's Tidiest Small Town' that year (Source: [Academy of Urbanism](#)).

Challenges

Isolation and initial decline triggered by the loss of its railway connection to Cork City.

A need to replace businesses and jobs from the loss of traditional industries.

Addressing vacant and rundown buildings (including many industrial buildings).

More recently, following recovery, the scale of growth predicted for Clonakilty is now placing significant new demands on social and community infrastructure.

What was done?

Town Development Plans since the 1970s have helped reinforce a strong integrity of place. This has encouraged and supported community creativity and entrepreneurialism.

The [Clonbike Scheme](#) is Ireland's first rural community bike rental scheme. The sponsored bike hire scheme is run by volunteers and adopts the city-bike concept for a small town.

Sensitive in-fill, refurbishment and repurposing of existing buildings to meet changing social trends. For example, the sheltered housing scheme behind Emmett Square in an old orchard where each resident has an apple tree in their garden.

Public realm design of Asna Square (shown left) and Pearse Street compliment the historic setting of the street whilst accommodating new activities and creating spaces for people to linger whilst also retaining limited car access.

Repurposing of industrial buildings including former mills, breweries and warehouses for new uses including housing, offices and retail.

How was it done?

Clonakilty has a town architect responsible for implementing the town's urban design [Masterplan](#). Monthly planning surgeries created a collective understanding and participation in the process.

Clonakilty capitalised on natural assets to develop tourism and is now known as the beach centre of West Cork.

The town used their public space as 'a stage set' where the town squares and streets became "the town's living room".

What was done differently?

The town architect model was innovative and effective, placing a designer at the heart of decision making. This was accompanied by a policy to consolidate the town rather than encourage sprawl and dispersal.

Integrated delivery resulted in positive cycles of creativity and investment. Strategic plans set out community outcomes over a 10-year period.

What was achieved?

The creation of a town centre underpinned by vibrancy and vitality. The latest development plans for West Cork position the town as a key economic driver in the region with the population projected to grow to 6,400 residents by 2028.



A strong sense of localism and building of community wealth with independent shops and restaurants selling locally sourced produce.

A thriving town centre combining strong commercial and social functions.

A strong community with a strong sense of history and place developed through collaborative design.

Supported town centre living on the first floor above retail and other commercial uses. (Source: [Academy of Urbanism](#)).

Measuring progress

The success of independent family businesses such as Clonakilty Black Pudding is tied to a keen sense of community, with the local people as ambassadors.

Colette Twomey has been WMB Entrepreneur of the Year, Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year and EY Entrepreneur of the Year finalist nurturing a small family business into a global name brand.

The Clonakilty Community Garden is a social innovation and education space, where knowledge and resources are shared for food growing, community integration and social inclusion.

Current indicators

- Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**
- Town centre footfall **Growing**
- Population **Growing**
- Community engagement **High**

Lessons learned

An integrated response is required including leadership and governance; local character; amenity; commercial success and viability; community; health and wellbeing

Encouraging appropriate growth that respects local identity, community and distinctiveness.

Application of a simple policy standard: reinstatement works, and regeneration projects shouldn't simply replace but should rather deliver better quality public realm.

Placing design at the heart of decision-making and encouraging development that strengthens the town centre, realising synergies with other town centre businesses and activities.

Key stakeholders: ● Cross departmental collaboration within local government ● Retained a town mayor ● Local Chamber of Commerce

Further information: [Clonakilty Assessment](#) (Academy of Urbanism), [West Cork Development Plan](#) (Cork County Council)

Ōpōtiki

Population 4,800



Case study: aligning national funding, local plans and community engagement

Ōpōtiki is a small town in the eastern Bay of Plenty in the North Island of New Zealand.

Promoted as the gateway to the East Cape its location on a harbour inlet affords a wealth of natural assets including beaches and forests.

It is well connected by the State Highway network and hosts the headquarters of the Ōpōtiki District Council.

Ōpōtiki has a large Māori population, one of the few towns in New Zealand to be predominantly populated by Māori.

Challenges

The local economy is driven primarily by agriculture with unemployment higher than the national average.

Median income in the local area is markedly lower than the national average with Ōpōtiki one of New Zealand's most deprived communities.

Town centre was tired with poorly maintained and dated streetscape furnishings.

Functional town centre with few clothing shops or tourism-related businesses.

Town centre advertising was un-coordinated and cluttered with culture and heritage receiving little recognition.

New Zealand's urban planning system focuses on a presumption of growth and is less well equipped to address smaller and more challenged towns.

What was done?

The town benefited from the government's Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) established to invest NZ\$1 billion (£530 million) each year from 2018 to 2020.

The PGF focuses on raising the productivity potential/ growth in less prosperous regions and small towns of regional New Zealand.

In 2020, Ōpōtiki committed funding to:

- Upgrade meeting houses and traditional meeting places, creating nearly 50 jobs
- Create a new harbour
- Develop the local aquaculture industry
- Town centre projects (including new library)
- Support tourism business growth

In 2020 the Ōpōtiki town centre structure plan ([online](#)) set out a wider range of opportunities and initiatives focused on the town centre.

How was it done?

Several key town centre assets are operated by the community, Ōpōtiki museum is run by the Ōpōtiki Heritage and Agricultural Society as a Charitable Trust.

What was done differently?

The PGF investment sought to create jobs, sustainable economic growth and lift productivity.

Funding bids were also considered in terms of increasing social inclusion, participation, encouraging environmental sustainability and helping New Zealand meet climate change commitments.

Projects needed to encourage more sustainable and productive use of land, water and other resource and resilience by improving critical infrastructure and focusing on opportunities to grow and diversify the economy.

The projects were community-led and harnessed local capacity. The projects helped the community avoid the potential loss of small-town functions.

What was achieved?

The projects helped to fund and facilitate a series of small projects including the new library ([online](#)) enabling new community uses.

In 2020 Ōpōtiki used part of its funding to:

- Upgrade the Maromahue Marae and Te Poho o Kahungunu meeting house and traditional meeting place at a cost of NZ\$365,000 (around £200,000) creating 16 jobs.
- Upgrade the Rere Marae and Te Iringa meeting house and traditional meeting place at a cost of NZ\$744,574 (around £400,000) creating 30 jobs.

The projects focussed on the role played by local communities, local government and business groups to ensure small town survival.

The NZ\$100 million (£53 million) harbour redevelopment will build new sea walls, open a new harbour entrance while closing the existing one. The harbour

redevelopment will encourage onshore servicing and seafood processing facilities based in Ōpōtiki and better connect the town to the sea.



Measuring progress

Ōpōtiki's population is growing, reversing previous decline. The town centre and harbour related projects are already creating jobs.

The projects are delivering:

- Linked to the harbour project, work on a new shellfish processing factory was fast-tracked and now employs more than 140 people.
- More than 80% of processing factory employees are locals and the factory is developing local supply chains around transport and logistics.
- The town centre projects help present a clearer theme highlighting the town's cultural and heritage assets and supporting tourism business growth.

Current indicators: Population: **Growing**

Lessons learned

The projects addressed a wide range of objectives from inclusive growth to improved environmental outcomes. This approach was enabled by the funding framework bringing together a range of projects.

The town centre plan stressed the challenges of a Council budget of just NZ\$200,000 (around £100,000) to revitalise the town centre. The town centre and harbour projects were supported by national funds but developed by the community and supporting Ōpōtiki's long-term aspirations and local plans.

The town benefited from a broad and longer-term approach to funding. This allowed the community to better deliver their vision rather than shovel-ready projects responding to funding opportunities.

Key stakeholders: ● Ōpōtiki District Council, ● New Zealand Government

Further information: [About Ōpōtiki](#) (District Council) [Long-Term Plan](#) (District Council), [Ōpōtiki town centre structure plan](#), [Provincial Growth Fund \(PGF\)](#), [PGF: How we made decisions](#), [Ōpōtiki Harbour construction project](#)

Roubaix

Population 98,800



Case study: Tackling deindustrialisation working within the city region

Roubaix is a city in Northern France, in the Lille metropolitan area on the Belgium border. It grew rapidly in the 19th century due to its textile manufacturing.

It became known as 'The city of a thousand chimneys' as factory chimneys dominated the skyline. Roubaix experienced rapid expansion in the late 1800s but by the mid-1970s its major industries had fallen into decline.

The former new town faced many challenges resulting from deindustrialisation characterised by depopulation, abandoned buildings and infrastructure.

Challenges

Deindustrialisation triggered an economic (unemployment), urban (urban decay) and social (poverty and social exclusion) crisis.

Perceived as 'The poorest town in France', the rate of unemployment rose significantly following the loss of industry.

Roubaix needed a strategy to address the collapse and relocation of its main industries.

The typical characteristics of a textile town with small industrial sites on canals or railways, terraced residential areas and limited green spaces.

How could a smaller town, overshadowed by a larger urban centre (Lille), regenerate itself?

What was done?

To address the wide range of challenges, Roubaix identified a series of strategic objectives. These objectives included:

- Recovery from deindustrialisation by supporting the development of new sectors.
- Revitalisation of the rundown city centre and rebuilding of a retail offer.

- Addressing the need for better, more affordable housing for residents and ensuring that investment and economic development benefit existing residents.

Roubaix encouraged collaboration across industries. Rebuilding the economy included the creation of a cluster of specialised textile businesses which served online and mail order businesses (such as Damart and La Redoute).

An emphasis was placed on reusing redundant industrial buildings in the town centre. This helped provide more choice for people to live in the town centre and strove to avoid the collapse of the inner areas as people moved out.

How was it done?

Investment-related responsibilities were transferred from local governments to the Lille Metropolitan Authority (LMCU) to play a strategic role in economic development and urban regeneration.

LMCU initiated long-term agreements with the mayors of the region's four big cities, which led to collaboration and grouping together of budgets.

The resulting strategy included a spatial plan for Roubaix.

What was done differently?

There is no traditional 'division' in France between the national and local political systems. National politicians often serve as mayors or regional council members.

Strong mutual influence, between the national and local systems, allowed more flexible approaches to strategy development, delivery and funding.

What was achieved?

National legislation was used to create intercommunal co-operation entities and metropolitan authorities to provide services and infrastructure.



A zone of metropolitan co-operation was set up in 2005, '*Aire de coopération métropolitaine*'. Partners developed projects co-operatively relating to transport, green space, water management, knowledge and the creative city.

Flagship projects were split across five areas: Crucial to success was that these areas were addressed simultaneously.

- Recreating attractive and safe public spaces and promoting architectural heritage.
- Bringing retail back to Roubaix.
- Enterprise Zones & other targeted development.
- Developing an innovative and proactive cultural strategy, strengthening culture and tourism.
- Supporting housing renewal to benefit locals

Measuring progress

The local unemployment rate fell substantially from a peak of 33% in the late 1980s, the regional ([NUTS2](#)) rate fell from 18% in 1999 to 9% by 2020.

The image of the city has significantly changed and media reporting, at national level, is overall positive since 2001, emphasising the dynamic strategies and achievements of the city in terms of culture, retail and urban regeneration.

There is also clear evidence of people wanting to move into and invest in Roubaix (additionally spurred by Lille becoming more expensive).

The town centre is now alive with retail and cultural opportunities and is busy during the day.

Service clusters were created supporting the online and mail order business including logistics, advertising, graphics photo studios, packaging, printing, direct marketing, call centres and software.

Current indicators

- Town centre vacancy rates **Improving**
- Population **Stabilising**
- Community engagement **High**

Lessons learned

Roubaix's regeneration was underpinned by the strong city-regional relationship, developed in the early 1990s with increased collaboration between Roubaix Council and the LMCU.

Sharing of resources and budgets across the regions spurred more collaborative working and helped to realise opportunities.

A critical success factor was carrying out the different regeneration elements in parallel, with synergy between elements.

Key stakeholders: EU, Central Government, Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine (LMCU), Ville de Roubaix

Further information: [Green Cities Case Study](#) European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), [How to Mark People Friendly Places](#), Urban Design Group (2022), [Making Connections](#): Transforming People and Places in Europe.

Acknowledgements

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The case studies for the four Scottish town centres drew on the [Understanding Scottish Places](#) online tool and [Town Centre Toolkit](#) provided by [Scotland's Towns Partnership](#) (STP).

Indicators

Most of the indicators referenced in this report describe town centre performance before the pandemic. The indicators are used to provide context for the projects and activities described in the case studies. Key indicators, including footfall, will have moved significantly as a result of the pandemic and associated public health restrictions.

Images

Dumfries: Midsteeple Quarter ([online](#))

Galashiels: Google Street View

Kilmarnock: Google Street View and proposed designs for St Marnock's Square, East Ayrshire Council ([online](#))

Nairn: Google Street View

Other UK

Altrincham: Altrincham Public Spaces Consultation, Trafford Council ([online](#)) and A Market Town Revived, Trafford Council ([online](#))

Lisburn: Lisburn City Centre Masterplan ([online](#)) LCCC and Design guidance Shop fronts and signage ([online](#)) LCCC

Merthyr: Town Centre Masterplan ([online](#)) MTCBC and "Former bakery reborn" ([online](#)) MTCBC

Stockton-on-Tees: Creative Commons and Stockton Waterfront ([online](#)) Stockton Council.

Walthamstow: Town Centre Strategy & Delivery Plans ([online](#)) WFBC and Town Centre Strategy & Delivery Plans ([online](#)) WFBC

International

Clonakilty: [Academy of Urbanism](#)

Ōpōtiki: [Ōpōtiki town centre structure plan](#) and [Ōpōtiki harbour development](#)

Roubaix: [Roubaix Tourisme](#) and [Le Zero Dechet, Roubaix](#)