

Regenerating and future proofing our town centres



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Foreword

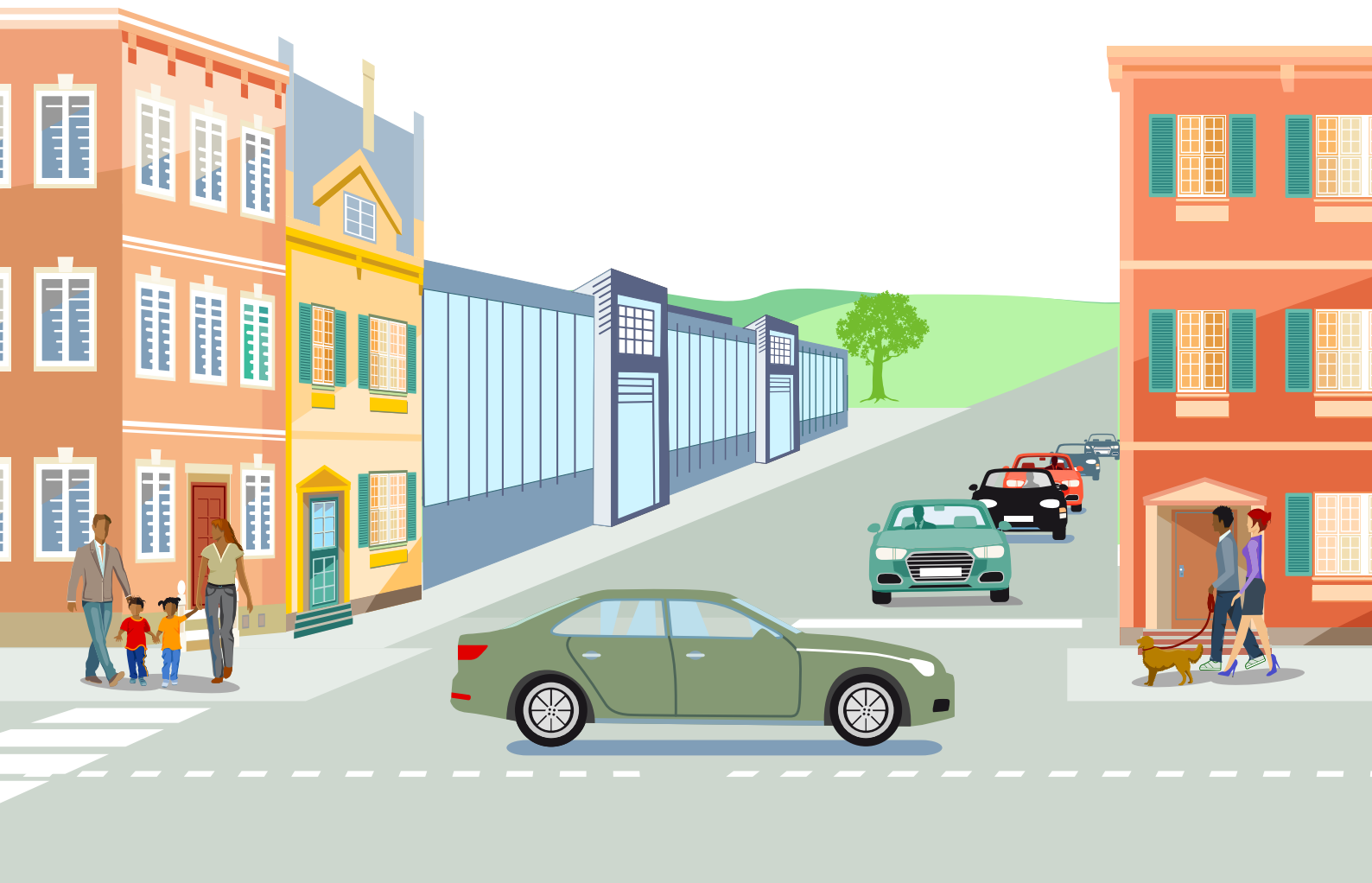
The future of our town centres is high on the national agenda with the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee recently publishing its “High Streets and Town Centres in 2030” report. This is the outcome of a six month inquiry into the future role of the high street in contributing to the local economy and the health, cohesion and cultural life of the local community. Its overall conclusions are that high streets and town centres “can survive and thrive, by 2030” providing they adapt. The Committee suggest this can be achieved by placing less emphasis on retail and more on green spaces, leisure, arts and culture, to create areas based on “social and community interactions.”

This level of policy focus, combined with the announcement of the £675 million Future High Streets Fund, presents a great opportunity to create better and more successful places for communities to engage. People want and need to interact and town centres can provide a great platform for that to happen. Whether it’s creating new and engaging cultural opportunities, places to work, to learn, to eat or to live, this is a once in a generation opportunity.

This document covers the views and themes discussed at a recent roundtable in Manchester, an area where our town centres have seen particular focus which has been reflected in the ‘Town Centre Challenge’ issued by Mayor Andy Burnham and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

The North West presents great opportunities to regenerate town centres and harness the demand for experience and amenity space that a revitalised town centre can offer. We are keen to continue the conversation to further explore how these challenges can be addressed in the longer term and how towns can really harness the current level of interest to develop an effective strategy for growth.

— Suzanne Benson – Head of Manchester Office, Trowers & Hamlins



Roundtable

List of attendees

BDP	Ged Couser, Architect Principal, BDP
Bruntwood	Heather Gray, Business Development Manager
Capital & Centric	Tim Heatley, Co-Founder
CBRE	David Allinson, Centre Director at Manchester Arndale
Cushman & Wakefield	Caroline Baker, Partner
Homes England	Nick Cumberland, Senior Area Manager
Levitt Bernstein	Gillian Harrison, Associate
Manchester Metropolitan University	Cathy Parker, Professor of Retail and Marketing Enterprise
RBH	Clare Tostevin, Director of Growth
RSM	Lindsey Cooper, Partner
Sigma Capital Group	Duncan Sutherland, Regeneration Director
Trafford Housing Trust	Paul Westhead, Head of New Business

Hosts

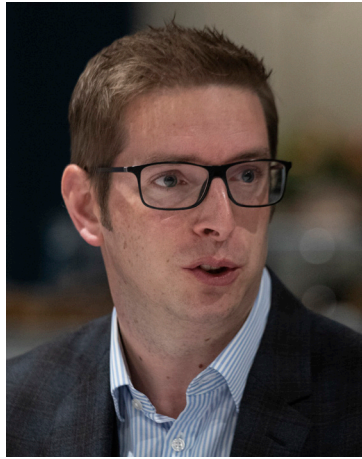
Trowers & Hamlins	Suzanne Benson, Head of Manchester Office
Trowers & Hamlins	Chris Parkinson, Partner
Trowers & Hamlins	Dan Butler, Partner



A town centre isn't just for Christmas – many retailers benefit from the additional spending consumers make in November and December, but towns fulfil important functions all year round. The ongoing management of towns is crucial, they constantly have to evolve. Technology changes, consumers change, the retail sector changes and the place has to adapt to these.

— Professor Cathy Parker, Manchester Metropolitan University





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Homes England can have an active role in supporting town centres to deliver housing through our placemaking role.”

— Nick Cumberland, Homes England



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There is a risk of alienating people by branding towns as “this, that and the other” and the possible negative reaction to that from the people who have lived there all their lives, so it’s vital that the local community is included in the process from the outset.

— Gillian Harrison, Levitt Bernstein



Use of space

To successfully regenerate a town centre, the use of space should meet the demands and requirements of those who will use the space. The challenge is how those managing town centres get people there, whether that is visiting, living or working, and how we curate the right blend of homes, businesses, retail and amenity space to attract people.

Our towns need to work a lot harder to ensure they meet demands on various levels. Allocating some areas to a quieter, slower pace of life, and others to gyms, bars or family entertainment allows for this mix of uses and allows people to live affordably without feeling excluded.

People go to town centres to meet and interact but the drivers for that interaction have changed. There is little point chasing the traditional model of high streets which for the last 40 years has pushed for more retail. The way we plan our town centres has changed very little in the last 100 years which is unsuitable for today's requirements. A town needs to be able to adapt and respond to trends in the macro environment. For example, technology is changing, consumer needs are changing, the retail sector is changing and a town needs to be able to adapt to those demands.

Out of town retail and office parks may have been heralded for their convenience but increasingly they do not offer an experience where people want to work or shop. Shoppers value experience now more than before, as well as community interaction. The ability to marry the convenience of out of town centres with the experience of the town centre is key to revitalising these spaces.

Ensuring that towns have the flexibility and freedom to respond to local needs is also crucial to their future success. The experience of using a town centre should be an enjoyable and uplifting one and we need to create different types of spaces in town centres, for different types of people and differing demands. We need to have a societal mix in our towns from affordable to more aspirational, to attract young and old alike.

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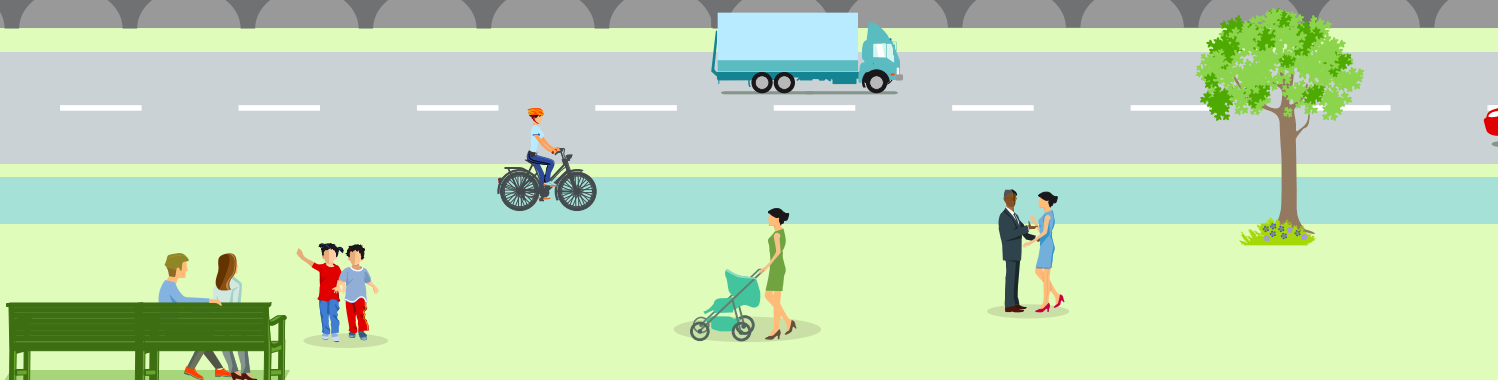
We begin to value experience more now than we used to, community is more important now than ever. I suppose the clever thing to do is think about how we get those out of town uses back into our town centres.”

— Tim Heatley, Capital & Centric

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It is not about bricks and mortar anymore. It is about looking at space and what can happen in that space, and how we cultivate that by bringing the right people together.”

— Heather Gray, Bruntwood



Connectivity

Towns are nourished by the quality of their connectivity and when looking at town centre regeneration it is important to focus on the bigger picture and not to treat a town centre in isolation. How is the town connected to the wider area and how can it use its infrastructure and location to its own benefit?

Looking at a town and working out how it fits into the Manchester city area and Greater Manchester region as a whole is important to understanding the role it plays. By understanding the connectivity and infrastructure within the wider area, you can harness the benefits it offers and enhance them. Altrincham is cited as particularly successful at this as it never tried to compete with Manchester. Ultimately, people will always go to cities and be attracted to Manchester, Liverpool or the Trafford Centre for different uses. Towns may have differing amenities to each other and become known for them. Town centres can better support a sense of and a better integrated community.

Strong infrastructure allows people to access the town and get to other towns or cities. It is unrealistic to imagine that a town can provide everything for everyone at all times. Additionally, a town should attract workers and visitors who will travel in and out on a day-to-day basis. The quality of road and rail networks, other public transport infrastructure as well as transport operations and service quality should not be a hindrance to this. The development and improvement of public transport and the interchange is all part of the process.

Having the appropriate public transport and infrastructure developments in place, and the differing opportunities and amenities from other towns and the city creates a place where people want to visit and live in.

Greater Manchester's town centres, as part of a major city region have greater opportunity to attract investment than more isolated town centres elsewhere in the country.

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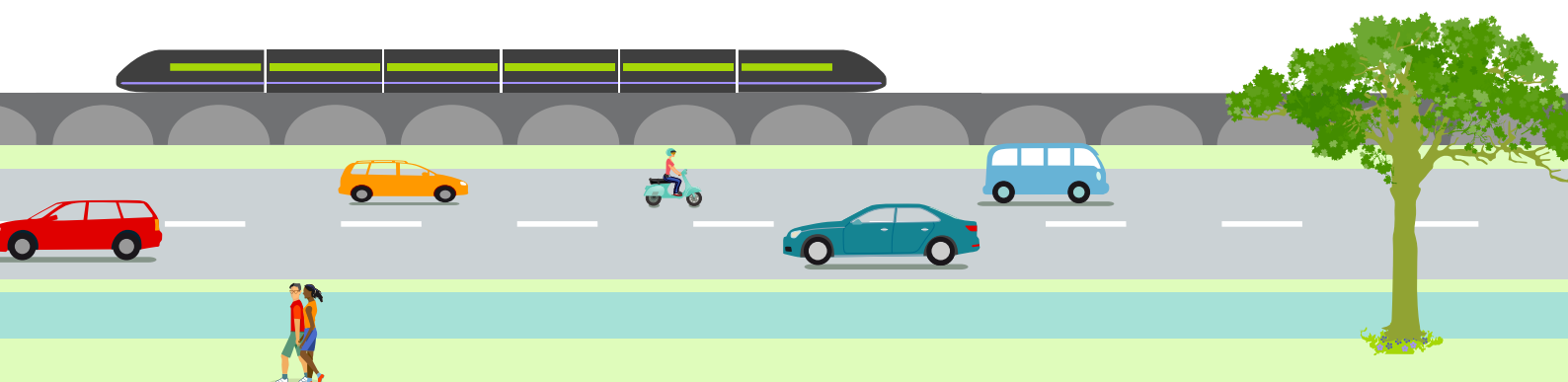
What certainly the local authorities need to ask is what is actually the purpose of our town in the context of its own community, and therefore how it relates to the other towns, be it a city or within a conurbation.”

— David Allinson, CBRE

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Connecting the region's towns to the city and to each other is key to stimulating regeneration. Investment in infrastructure is key to achieving this and there is a clear role for public sector intervention to help accelerate delivery – whether as a funding partner or by using a more strategic approach to help equalise the overall cost of the upfront investment over the life of a scheme.”

— Suzanne Benson, Trowers & Hamlins



Engagement

Early involvement from the local community is essential in the development and delivery of any town centre regeneration project. The approach needs to be collaborative, involving community members and local businesses that are on the ground and invested in the future of their town centre.

Involving local people in decision making creates a real local connection to drive the regeneration forward and allows local communities to take ownership of the project. This in turn means local people will use the facilities in their own town, take ownership of their town and promote their town, which should encourage others to the town.

More than community engagement, a collective engagement from all stakeholders is needed to achieve a shared outcome. This collective buy-in should be at both public sector level with the individual developers and investors but also with local people as well. Involving more people in decision making locally means you will be able to prevent or overcome barriers and prevent problems that may occur in the long term.

Community engagement means that you will create a place that works for its residents. It is important to look at why the residents are not using a place and what they want from it. The attractions offered by town centre regeneration are founded on community interaction and shared spaces.

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If you don't have that ongoing group of people that care about it, if all you have is people that parachute in every ten or 20 years to do something, then you're going to have a problem in your town centre.”

— Professor Cathy Parker, Manchester Metropolitan University

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You have got to get local people visiting their town, owning their town, loving their town and then other people will come along as well.”

— Caroline Baker, Cushman & Wakefield



Repositioning

Getting stakeholders together and moving in an agreed direction is hugely challenging, but establishing what the best direction to head in can be an even greater one. Misunderstanding the problems of a town, or assuming that successful solutions in one town will work in the next is an easy trap to fall into.

Research by the Institute of Place Management identified some two hundred factors that can impact on the health of a town centre. The research supports the idea that in order to reposition a town there needs to be an understanding, predominately through the use of data, about where and why it has been failing.

Understanding where a town sits within a region and connects with its neighbour's is important. The city of Manchester itself has grown and excelled in recent years. Alongside that, the town of Altringham in the borough of Trafford has undergone a renaissance of its own over the last decade and successfully repositioned itself as a bustling market town.

Whilst other towns in the region may learn something from the Altringham example, the specific problems, opportunities and solutions for those towns need to be identified. At the same time, Altringham itself will need to continue to adapt and evolve to maintain its resurgence.

The successful repositioning of a town centre requires a lot of aspects to come together. How does a town centre make its space work better for its community? Does it have the right leadership with a shared vision and willingness to make brave decisions? How does it connect with the wider region and how does it engage with the local community and bring them on that journey?

A series of fragmented short term fixes or a rebranding exercise that doesn't go beyond the surface of the issues can often be damaging. To begin to successfully reposition a town, a long term view needs to be taken in order to allow significant and lasting change.

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Town centres are not the bustling hearts of communities that they once were and we will mourn their loss because they help with our own sense of identity. Nobody wants to live in a failing place and the town centre is the physical representation of how that place is doing.”

— Professor Cathy Parker, Manchester Metropolitan University

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There is that opportunity in all the North West / Greater Manchester towns, to identify an area of the town that is failing or is deprived and make that statement of intent to regenerate and there will be parties out there who would seek to work with the Authority to assist in funding it, and tap into that inherent demand.”

— Paul Westhead, Trafford Housing Trust



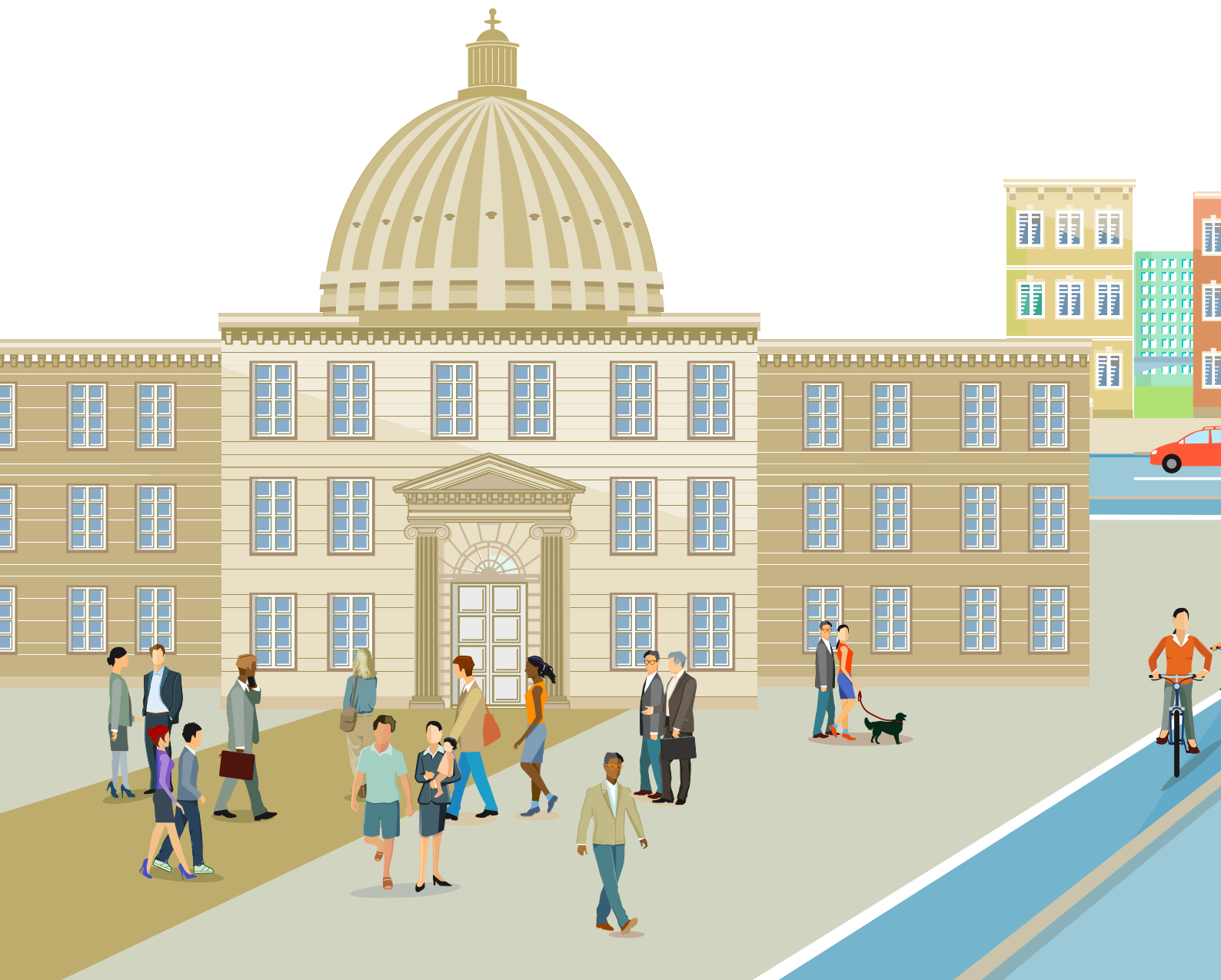
Leadership

A central issue of establishing and progressing a town centre regeneration project is finding a local champion or champions who have the leadership qualities to facilitate a new vision for the town. A strong, strategic, adaptable and long-term vision is needed as well as the drive to see this through whilst maintaining support from the community and negotiating the differing viewpoints of stakeholders. Regeneration schemes initiated by local government can become highly politicised or face uncertainty after a change of leadership.

The vision for the future of a town does not necessarily need to come from the local authority but can stem from local people who are passionate about their area. Recent research undertaken by the Manchester Metropolitan University looks at how towns and cities have changed, including how the local community leaders who have been invested in the town for a certain amount of time are vital to getting things done.

The issues facing high streets and town centres cut across an increasing range of sectors. Strong, influential and inspiring leadership is needed to unite sometimes conflicting viewpoints behind a strategic plan. The governance structure in Manchester has been successful because all the stakeholders know what the strategy is and have all bought into that strategy. However, to see a strategy to fruition takes time, so getting the governance and structures right in order to drive it becomes increasingly important.

Public/private partnerships can work well, when both partners come together with a strong strategy that is focused on delivery. This worked well for Ellesmere Port in Cheshire, where a strategy was developed for the area which took into account the role of Ellesmere Port in that wider area. There was not formal partnership structure in place but each party was passionate about the area.



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Governance is the same sort of thing, because in some places it is great, and you know, I've gone to places and there is no formula it is just people that care and get together and make good decisions.”

— Caroline Baker, Cushman & Wakefield

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You need to have a structure in place to actually get everybody involved and drive things forward. I think if you don't do that, and you just come up with plans, then I think you're going to fail.”

— Duncan Sutherland, Sigma Capital Group





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