

Report subject	<b>High Streets Strategy</b>
Meeting date	10 February 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>High streets in town, city and district centres in the UK are changing. Even before COVID 19, high streets were continually in the news and public eye as a result of significant departures of many renowned retail brands, the rise in the number of empty shops and the change in experience reported by visitors. The reasons behind these changes are many and complex. Nationally, many reports have been written, and many experts have commented on the changes happening to high streets and town centres and offered potential solutions. Locally, the preceding Councils worked over many years, with key partners such as the Business Improvement Districts, Chambers of Commerce and industry groups, to proactively support and invest in their town centres in various ways. Whilst this has not stopped, COVID 19 has arguably sped up a process that was already underway and created a new reality that now needs to be considered alongside the previous best practice. However, COVID 19 has also provided an opportunity to bounce back better, together, to embrace the change, and to consider how best a Council and its partners can intervene positively and create, or curate, high streets that are fit for now and for the future. This report expands on the above, and asks for authority to be delegated to the Director of Development and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Economy and Strategic Planning, to work with partners develop a strategy and deliver swift interventions that will support our high streets to bounce back quickly and strongly.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for, Economy and Strategic Planning, to work with partners to swiftly develop a strategy and action plan, enabling the delivery interventions that will support our high streets.</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	To focus resources and effort of the Council and its partners on supporting our high streets to bounce back strongly and quickly, helping to deliver the Dynamic Places priority in the Corporate Plan.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Philip Broadhead - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Economy and Strategic Planning and Deputy Leader of the Council Councillor Nigel Brooks - Lead Member for BCP Retail Strategy and Christchurch Regeneration
Corporate Director	Bill Cotton – Corporate Director Regeneration and Economy
Report Authors	Chris Shephard – Director of Development
Wards	Bournemouth Central; Christchurch Town; Poole Town;
Classification	For Decision

## Background

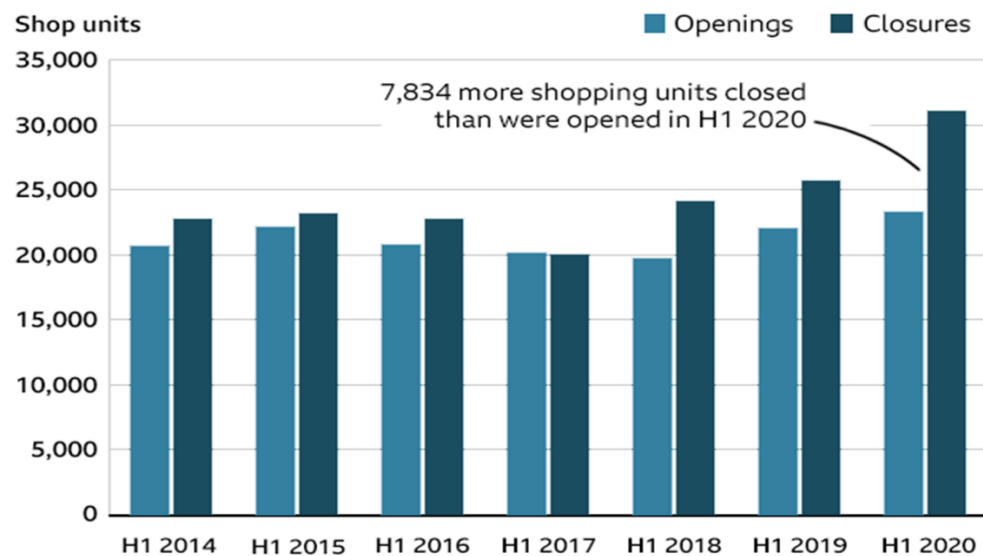
1. The retail sector, and high streets more broadly, are undergoing unprecedented change across the country, affecting many locations. The COVID 19 pandemic has sped up this change, having a major impact on businesses, events and footfall in our high streets.
2. Change on high streets is not a new phenomenon; however, the result of years of structural, societal and technological changes, and now COVID 19, is a perfect storm which has a visible impact today.
3. The changes have also caught the public's attention, with many news articles, features and commentaries covering anything to do with the high street. Many of these stories cover the latest major brand to restructure or close as they react to these changes.
4. Some examples that sum up the situation include:
  - 34% of businesses in the hospitality/accommodation and restaurant/food services sector have 'little or no confidence' they will last beyond January – Office of National Statistics 20th November
  - Investors rush to withdraw cash from property funds £336 million in October – Calastone Fund Network 4th November. The value Great Portland Estates London shops tumbled by almost a fifth – Times 12th November
  - J Sainsbury announce it is cutting 3,000 jobs; a large number going from Argos along with 1,500 to go at John Lewis's head office - 5th November
  - 3 Shopping Centres have failed and gone into receivership; Vancouver Quarter, Norfolk, Rushes shopping centre Loughborough and Kingsgate, Fife - Times 6th November
  - One in eight shops failed to reopen after first lockdown - Local Data Company/PWC 9th November
  - Property owners are facing a £4.5 billion rent shortfall by the end of the year as collection rates continue to suffer amid a government ban on evictions and aggressive rent collection, particularly retailers and leisure companies – Remit Consulting, management consultants. 12th November

- Peacocks, Jaeger, Austin Read and Jacques Vert collapse into Administration – Times 20th November, (followed by Arcadia Group and Debenhams since this article was written).
- Small independent firms on the High Street suffered a net decline of 1,833 stores in the first half of 2020, according to research by the Local Data Company (LDC) and accountancy firm PwC. That was less than a third of the 6,001 chain stores lost. However, the two sectors together saw the biggest decline seen in the first half of a year since its records began. This is supported by the graph in Figure 1.

Figure 1

## Shops closures continue to increase

Openings and closures, H1 2014 to H1 2020



Source: Local Data Company

BBC

- However, whilst these are hugely impactful changes, there are opportunities ahead and it is in our collective gift to grasp them. Building on the positive previous and current work will be an important first step, as well as taking heart from reports such as this one from Centre for Cities which at the time of writing is the latest tracker data.

[https://www.centreforcities.org/data/high-streets-recovery-tracker/?utm\\_source=Centre+for+Cities+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=40f27afe06-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_12\\_19\\_09\\_47\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_2a9c9d5ef9-40f27afe06-156073817&mc\\_cid=40f27afe06&mc\\_eid=ba05a5db96](https://www.centreforcities.org/data/high-streets-recovery-tracker/?utm_source=Centre+for+Cities+Newsletter&utm_campaign=40f27afe06-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_12_19_09_47_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2a9c9d5ef9-40f27afe06-156073817&mc_cid=40f27afe06&mc_eid=ba05a5db96)

- In Centre for Cities terms, “Bournemouth” broadly refers to Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole collectively. In this data, whilst “Bournemouth’s” ‘Spend’ figures place it in the bottom 10, there is more positive news when comparing with local city data:
  - Bournemouth’s town centre economy is classified as Strong;

- Southampton is classified as Moderately Strong (and is even lower in the bottom 10 for Spend); and
- Portsmouth is Moderately Weak.

### **Previous and Current Work**

7. Across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, significant work has been undertaken over the last 10-15 years to support our high streets, town and district centres. Some examples include:
  - Over £10m of public realm investment and improvement in Bournemouth which includes projects such as Horseshoe Common, Richmond Hill, Bourne Avenue, Pier Approach and Beale Place. A further £4m will be invested in Lansdowne in early 2021. These investments have helped to create environments that people want to spend time in and help to build and make communities around.
  - The creation of the Bournemouth Development Company which has created several developments with hundreds of homes for local people, enabling them to live, build and maintain communities in the town centre. The increased number of residents in the town centre has increased the footfall on the high street and provides opportunities for businesses to develop and thrive. Since 2011, £300 million of development has been completed, £180 million of development is currently in construction, and £250 million of development is currently in planning.
  - The creation of three Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), the Poole BID, the Bournemouth Town Centre BID, and the Coastal BID, which are all more than halfway through successful second terms. This has raised funding for each BID area which is then re-invested into projects that “create a strong trading environment which visitors want to return to again and again” ([www.towncentrebids.co.uk](http://www.towncentrebids.co.uk)). The Council is also working to support a fourth BID in Christchurch, as well as assisting the re-ballots of the existing BIDs as they arise.
  - The development of signature events and festivals such as Christmas Tree Wonderland, Bournemouth Air Festival, Wheels Festival, Bourne Free and Arts by the Sea Festival, Poole Maritime Festival, Poole Harbour Boat Show, Stomp on the Quomps in Christchurch, Christchurch Food Festival and more. The Arts by the Sea Festival hosted more 25-40year olds than any other time in 2018 than in its 8 previous years because of the unique experience on offer.
  - Bidding and successfully landing early funding from the Government’s Town Deal fund, which is centred on Boscombe.
  - Investing in Town Teams to address homelessness, anti-social behaviour and cleanliness of Town Centres and High Streets.
  - Investing in and installing clear signage helping to keep people safe during COVID19
  - Recruiting COVID19 Information Officers who have visited over 3000 businesses helping them to ensure their premises are compliant with COVID19 guidelines
  - Recruiting COVID19 Marshals to keep the public safe and enforce the COVID19 regulations.

8. All of these were and still are high quality interventions that have kept Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch High Streets and district centres, thriving, enjoyable and safe places, albeit places undergoing significant structural change and associated challenges. However, as a result of COVID 19, this change and the impact of it has sped up. The need for positive action has become more urgent. Collectively, the Council and its partners need to continue or re-start the actions above and do even more to encourage people back.

### Next Steps

9. If we are to help our high streets, town and district centres to bounce back stronger, better and quicker, there is plenty of good advice and best practice on offer and a great platform on which to collectively build an action plan of positive interventions.
10. There have been several attempts by experts and commentators to consider what high streets will become and what they need to keep them thriving, enjoyable places. The High Streets Taskforce <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/> has offered its view since COVID 19, *"The COVID-19 pandemic has delivered a body blow to Town Centre Retailers and businesses, but it's just the latest of their challenges in recent years. They were already under pressure from cautious consumer spending, intense competition from online retailing and 'out of town' retail parks with free car parking"*. It has also proposed a framework for recovery which starts with crisis, then moves to pre-recovery, to recovery and then transformation.
11. Since the summer of 2020, the Council has been running its own equivalent framework with businesses and partners. This is called the R3 Taskforce – Respond, Recover, Re-imagine. This is led by a strong, multi-partner Steering Group and consists of 3 main groups covering general business, one for retail, hospitality, leisure and urban centres, and one for welfare. Each group has representatives from local industry groups, relevant organisations and networks and education and ensure that there is positive and regular communication between each partner about what is really happening on the ground, to ensure interventions happen in the right place and issues can be addressed. Going forward these will be ideal groups who can work together on a clear set of actions that will help our high streets as they emerge from COVID19, bringing together national best practice and guidance with local knowledge and data.
12. In April 2018, Bournemouth Council set up a roundtable meeting of those involved with or operating on the high street. This included landlords, agents, business leaders and other important investors such as the Town Centre BID and the Chamber of Commerce and brought together the main interests on the high street. The aim of these sessions was to provide a forum where key issues can be discussed, to create a joint approach to finding solutions to the challenges faced and to communicate evidence and facts effectively. The key areas of work can be summarised as: Property; Technology; Street Scene and Communications/Marketing (which includes events). Although this group has now evolved into the R<sup>3</sup> Taskforce group, and covers the whole of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, the areas of work highlighted by this original group are still pertinent today.
13. The next steps are now clear, which are to use the time now to work with partners to:
  - swiftly create a simple and clear strategy that has a clear visionBringing a local flavour to Mary Portas' vision is a good place to start

*“to put the heart back into the centre of our high streets, re-imagined as destinations for socialising, culture, health, wellbeing, creativity and learning. Places that will develop and sustain new and existing markets and businesses. The new high streets won’t just be about selling goods. The mix will include shops but could also include housing, offices, sport, schools or other social, commercial and cultural enterprises and meeting places. They should become places where we go to engage with other people in our communities, where shopping is just one small part of a rich mix of activities”*

- Create a list of actions that fall under the four areas outlines in 10, and work with partners to resource and deliver these.
- Use data to inform our decisions and actions, and to continue to monitor and measure success and change.

These steps will help to move our high streets though the four stages as outlined by the High Streets Taskforce highlighted in paragraph 10.

## **Conclusion**

14. At a Towns and City Centres Conference run by the Key Cities Group in 2018, it was said that in the future, successful towns and city centres will have:

- Leadership
- A plan
- Community Hubs
- Residents
- Technology
- Qualitative and quantitative information to measure success

All these relate to the need for a high-quality experience in towns and city centres which will get people interested in visiting them again and spending more time in them. By approving the recommendations in this report, Cabinet will be supporting the continued work by officers, members and partners to positively and swiftly intervene in our high streets to ensure they bounce back stronger, better and quicker.

## **Options Appraisal**

15. Option 1 – do nothing and let the market take control. By taking this option, Council leadership, partnership and resources will not be there to support our high streets, town and district centres.
16. Option 2 – accept the recommendation in this report and support the development of a strategy, action plan and resources required to work with partners in supporting our high streets, town and district centres.

## **Summary of financial implications**

17. Developing a strategy and implementing an action plan will require additional resources and investment. This may be in the form of additional Council funding and/or from external funding from Government and other sources.
18. Fortunately, there is a strong partnership, as already described in this report, between the Council and industry bodies which means the Council does not have to

bear all the responsibility and cost. Partners have already made it clear that they are willing to help, providing there is a clear framework and plan.

19. The Council is already working with partners to deliver several actions through the proposed Town Teams, which was committed to in the December Cabinet "Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring 2020-21 and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update Report".

#### **Summary of legal implications**

20. There are no legal implications in relation to this report, however, should there be legal implications as the strategy and action plan develops, legal colleagues will be instructed accordingly.

#### **Summary of human resources implications**

21. Whilst this is business as usual for teams in the Development and Destination and Culture directorates, further resources will be required as outlined above. It is likely that at least one new role will be required to lead this work.

#### **Summary of sustainability impact**

22. Sustainability will be taken into consideration as part of the development of the strategy and action plan, linking with, for example, the development of the Council's Green Infrastructure Prospectus and promoting the improvements to sustainable transport delivered by the Transforming Cities Fund.

#### **Summary of public health implications**

23. Developing a strategy and action plan that delivers positive interventions to attract people back to high streets and enjoying public spaces will enhance the health and wellbeing of the public. There is now a strong link between the work of the R<sup>3</sup> taskforce and the Council's Health and Wellbeing board which will continue as this work develops.

#### **Summary of equality implications**

24. At this stage, this is about the development of a strategy and action plan and therefore have no equality implications. As actions are being developed, equalities implications will be thoroughly addressed where relevant.

#### **Summary of risk assessment**

25. At this stage when developing a strategy and action plan, there are minimal risks. There will be a risk register for any actions that are developed that require one.

#### **Background papers**

None

#### **Appendices**

None