

LEADING THE RECOVERY

IMMEDIATE SUPPORT  
FOR TOWN CENTRES  
BUSINESSES



As the lockdown is progressively lifted social distancing restrictions are expected to remain in place for some time. Emerging evidence from Germany is that customers are not returning to high streets when restrictions are lifted; with one of the reasons being cited that while restaurants and bars remain closed the shopping experience is not the same; reinforcing a well understood rationale for high streets. In addition, customers are less likely to travel using public transport so local centres take on an even greater importance.

# CONTEXT

The summer period is vital for businesses in the hospitality sector. Longer days and warmer weather mean opportunities for outdoor dining and drinking, and a subsequent increase in sales. If these businesses can't open in the summer they are far more likely to fail. It is also likely to coincide with the withdrawal of central government business support thereby compounding this challenge.

In addition, many high street businesses will be too small to viably reopen with social distancing measures in force and the public spaces around them too restricted to encourage customers to return in sufficient numbers. This isn't a matter of business' viability but one of premises viability; i.e. the physical spaces are no longer appropriate to support a viable business. Therefore if businesses fail there will not be the normal replacement rate.

So what can Councils do to support their high streets businesses through the period of significant change and disruption?

This document sets out a suite of measures and interventions that Councils could adopt and the business case for doing so.

# SIX STRANDS

We've structured the measures and interventions around **six** interconnected and complementary strands of activity that Councils can undertake to support their town centres.

Councils could take a neighbourhood by neighbourhood approach; targeted to the specific challenges, constraints and business needs of that area.

1. Leadership and community
2. Communication
3. Reclaiming public space
4. Regulation
5. Investment
6. Technology



The measures and interventions that Councils are considering around Leadership include:

- To understand the barriers and where appropriate and possible use their discretionary powers to overcome them
- Hold discussions with significant land/ asset holders in town centres to understand their position, outlook and intentions for the near, short and medium term.
- Launch public communications campaign on the work of the Council to support its town centres to build business and community confidence. Ideas could include a reopening the high street event/ campaign
- Mobilise a coalition of businesses, community groups, BIDs, LEAs and Chambers to shape the offer and provide for ongoing sustainability
- Creation of a town centre charter to demonstrate common commitment



Consumer behaviour and resident sentiment suggests that people lack confidence in social distancing measures, are wary of going outside, and hesitant to spend money again. Councils need to take people on a comms journey so they understand change and they'll be supported to feel comfortable and confident again.

Councils can broadcast this journey by relating the experience on a personal level and sharing stories. They can do this through:

- **SOCIAL MEDIA**

- Showcase interventions through pictures and video
- Use of existing channels to reinforce approach
- Share good news stories and profiles of businesses opening
- Use new tools to reach young audiences, such as Tik Tok and Instagram Live
- Potential Snapchat and Instagram filters
- Instagram Live opportunities of Members in town centre walkabouts

- **EXTERNAL OUTDOOR ADVERTS**
  - Utilise construction hoarding, posters, and billboards for communicating themes and messages
  - Wayfinding, herding - could include one way systems, signage, pavement art
- **PRESS RELEASES AND MEDIA**
  - Engage early with local media, bloggers, and city-wide press ahead of interventions to set the groundwork
  - Focus press releases on innovative measures a council is taking to support residents and high streets

If the UK government were to implement WHO distancing guidelines this would result in a 60% reduction in seated capacity for pubs and restaurants (Industry guidance before the pandemic suggests around 1m<sup>2</sup> per customer in a restaurant. The [Covid-19 WHO guidance](#) recommends 2.5m<sup>2</sup>)

The measures and interventions that Councils could adopt around Reclaiming the Public Realm include:

- Repurposing public space (parking, parks, pavements) in town centres to provide greater physical space for shops, restaurant and bars to viably reopen with social distancing restrictions in place. Council could then install branded temporary decking, serviced coverings and seating to be used by the businesses.
- Advertising and marketing in promotion of local businesses

# PUBLIC SPACE

- Seek sponsorship from larger local businesses to pay for adaptations (such as serviced covered areas)
- Facilitate 'drive by' or 'walk by' collection points
- Provide more cycling storage
- Highways adaptations - temporary partial or full closures and diversions. Safety remaining paramount.

Opportunity – demand for outdoor conferencing/ events structures (decking, marquees, catering) has fallen dramatically therefore providing the Council with the opportunity to secure highly competitive deals and expertise on outdoor trading/ experiences

EXAMPLES - UK

[Click here to read an example from Manchester](#)



Regent Street, Camden



Orford Street, Walthamstow

Brixton, Lambeth



[Click here to read about an example from York](#)



# EXAMPLES - NON UK

[Click here to read about an example from Italy](#)



New York



Milan



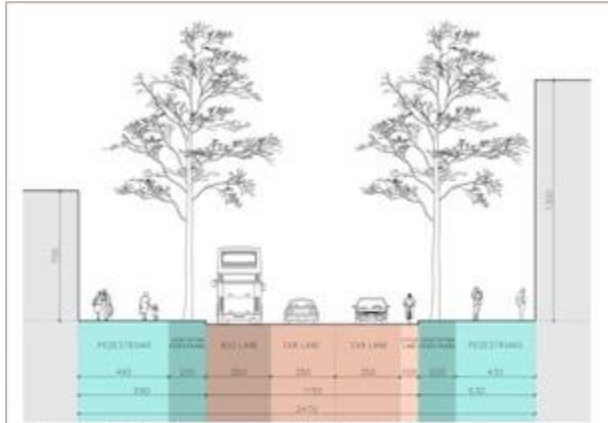
Champs Elysees, Paris

[Click here to read about an example from Lithuania](#)

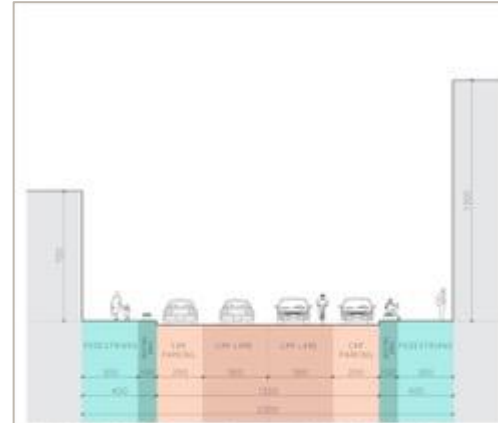


Vilnius

# TYPOLOGIES



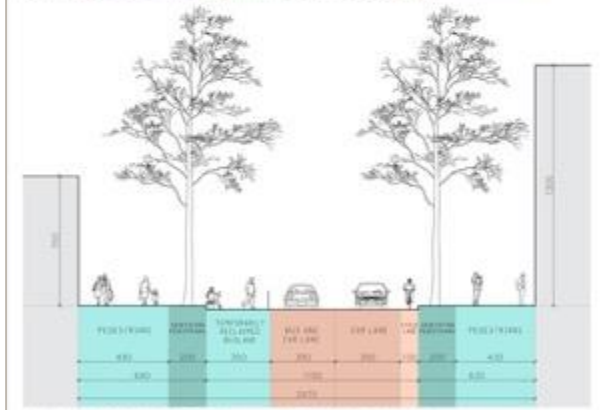
GENERIC STREET TYPOLOGY 1 - CURRENT SCENARIO



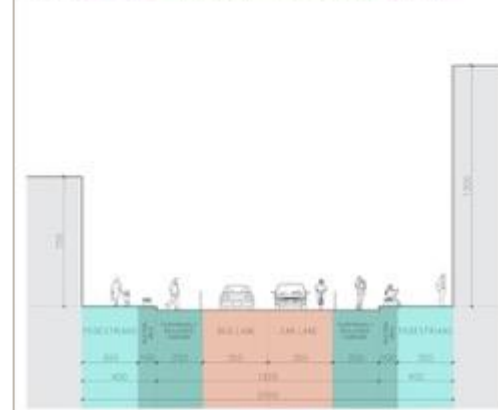
GENERIC STREET TYPOLOGY 2 - CURRENT SCENARIO



GENERIC STREET TYPOLOGY 3 - CURRENT SCENARIO



GENERIC STREET TYPOLOGY 1 - PROPOSED SCENARIO



GENERIC STREET TYPOLOGY 2 - PROPOSED SCENARIO



GENERIC STREET TYPOLOGY 3 - PROPOSED SCENARIO

The measures and interventions that Councils are considering around Regulation include:

- Temporary change to planning policy to facilitate meanwhile/ temporary uses; for example zones of flexible uses so that businesses could switch between different activities. This could include units having a different function during the day and night; facilitating more of a 24-hour culture.
- Temporary changes to licensing to allow for different/longer hours, outdoor seating.



# REGULATION

- Temporary relaxation of enforcement
- Temporary speed restrictions
- Temporary changes to traffic movement; including proactive emergency stopping up powers
- Adaptations to street cleaning and refuse collection regimes
- Creation of hand washing stations (e.g. London Zoo)
- Publicised regular deep cleaning regimes including notifications when an area was last cleaned

The measures and interventions that Councils are considering around investment include:

- Rapid preparation of options appraisal of potential council investment across its town centres. Could include acquisition of freehold/ leases to enable greater control over curation of town centres in medium term.
- Identification of capital fund that could be redeployed to support these investments and potential capital investment in public realm.

- Establishing an innovation fund for local businesses to try to out new operational models such as home delivery ([example from Borough Market](#)), using local suppliers, offering alternative payment terms to customers, purchasing outdoor catering/ shelving etc.
- Lobbying providers of electric bikes to bring/ expand the service in the area
- Regular survey of local developers/ landowners on market sentiment
- Proactive pursuit of all available grant funding
- Explore role of council in providing financing options; complementary to central government programmes
- Use of community crowd funding applications

Use of technology and high frequency data to continually monitor the performance of the town centres and inform decisions on the impact and longevity of the interventions. A variety of tools and techniques are available to gather information and by bringing this together into a single intelligence report the council can make real time informed decisions. The council could also consider sharing this information with residents so they can see how busy town centres are.

Data sources include:

- TfL passenger usage information (including Santander bikes where applicable)
- Google community mobility reports
- Council business surveys: both general on sentiment and outlook and specific on success of interventions

# TECHNOLOGY

- Uber movement reports (where relevant)
- Customer surveys
- Social media data grabs (example Brandwatch)
- Data from footfall counters
- CCTV camera feeds
- Promotion of tracking and tracing
- Use of virtual queueing apps (example Walkin)

This information can be aggregated into a live report (using an AI platform such as PowerBI) to enable the council to adapt the offering and inform medium term plans for their town centres

The indicative business case for councils to deploy the measures and interventions is set out below. Appropriately detailed business cases would be developed for each individual element.

- **STRATEGIC CASE**
  - Supporting local businesses during the downturn
  - Visible demonstration of council's commitment
- **ECONOMIC CASE**
  - Keeping people in employment
  - Maintaining the economic ecosystem of the local area
- **FINANCIAL CASE**
  - Protecting income from business rates (from April 2021)
  - Majority capital investment with potential for revenue return
  - Potential for sponsorship to offset costs

# BUSINESS CASE

- **COMMERCIAL CASE**
  - Potential for partnership working with Chambers, BID, local businesses, public and voluntary sectors
  - Potential for competitive purchasing from outdoor event companies where demand has crashed
- **MANAGEMENT CASE**
  - Teams from public realm, highways , business support, finance, planning and licensing working collaboratively together at pace

We work with councils to deliver complex programmes and projects in dynamic and changing situations. We work closely with our clients and understand how to bring council services and partners together to quickly tackle intricate challenges and we know how to secure decisions. Each solution will be unique to the particular town centre conditions.

Our recent experience across the country on Future High Street Fund projects and our broader experience of regeneration and planning means we also understand the multifaceted nature of town centres and their importance to local businesses and communities.



In summary, our multidisciplinary team can work at pace to help councils:

- Develop robust and deliverable plans to support and protect their town centres
- Develop the systems to gather the data and turn it into intelligence to inform council decision making
- Create a Covid Toolkit for local businesses and restaurants
- Create business cases for interventions and suites of interventions
- Management of the interventions from specification through procurement and implementation
- Developing post completion evaluation frameworks

Within the last year alone we've supported numerous Councils across the country on regeneration and investment programmes and more targeted town centre investment plans as part of the Future High Street Fund. A summary of recent and relevant projects is set out below

- Regeneration Plan, High Wycombe
- Future High Street Fund, High Wycombe
- Future High Street Fund, Trowbridge
- Future High Street Fund, Barnstaple
- Burnt Oak Town Centre, Barnet
- Business case for growth, Hounslow
- Regeneration Delivery Plan, Tower Hamlets
- Inclusive Growth Strategy, Lambeth
- Truro Place Shaping and Vision, Cornwall
- Penzance Town Centre, Cornwall

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