Vitality and viability in the contemporary English High Street

Understanding the changing relationship between the commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' of town centres in a period of economic transition.

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ABSTRACT

The challenge, and in some places the crisis, facing the English town centre is the focus of much political and academic debate. This research analyses the changing relationship between the social *vitality* and commercial *viability* in the English town centre from 1945 to the early 2020s, and in particular, it asks how town centres might continue to be a *relevant* social and civic, as well as a commercial hubs. This research builds on previous studies about place - in particular town centres, but reviews these in terms of the co-dependence between their commercial *viability* and social *vitality*, identifying the key variables in this relationship. Underpinned by place theory, the research proposes a resetting of the way the challenge facing the town centre should be examined.

The research employs a range of empirical methods, which include a hybrid deductive and inductive approach guided by a conceptual analytical framework – the Adaptive Resilience Model (ARM). This is developed to create a methodical analytical environment for an investigation into the future of town centres and the high street. The conceptual analytical framework guides the research which includes two in-depth case studies of English town centres. The findings from the ARM are interrogated using both a *macro-lens* (to thematically group issues that are likely to impact most, if not all, town centres), and a *micro-lens* (to thematically group those issues specific to the case study locations).

The main findings of the study are first that the town centre has evolved over three distinctive phases from 1945 to the early 2020's: specifically that the challenge facing the *relevance* of town centre has intensified and changed, but that the strategy and policy environment remains remarkably similar from the 1980s to the present, relying on place management strategies and introspective policy, which largely ignores other commercial formats. Second, the research shows that the market in which the town centre now operates has changed significantly, although town centres remain *authentic* and *unique* places that share social and civic importance, the commercial *viability* of many has significantly fallen away. Based on this, the research suggests that there is an opportunity to think-big and re-evaluate the way in which the *value* of the town centre might be gauged – as a social and civic, as well as a commercial and consumption space. A novel concept is proposed, based on these findings, summarised as the *complexity of urban ecology* – and a set of new proposals for the future of the town centre grounded in place theory are presented. The thesis contends that the ARM model of town centre analysis and diagnosis can be applied to other cases of town centres in the UK facing decline, recognising their morphological variety at a range of scales. Finally, the research argues that, the ARM method can be developed as a place analysis tool in practice as well as in theory.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Adaptive Resilience
ARM	Adaptive Resilience Model
ATCM	Association of Town and City Centre Management
BIDs	Business Improvement District
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CPO	Compulsory Purchase Order[s]
CRC	Commercial Research Companies
CV	Commercial Viability
CV/SV	Mix of Commercial Viability and Social Vitality
DA	Desktop Analysis
EZ	Enterprise Zone
HCLGC	Housing, Communities & Local Government Committee
HSTF	High Street Task Force
IO	Interviewee Observation[s]
FEMA	Functional Economic Market Area
FIRE	Finance, Insurance and Real Estate
FO	Field Observation[s]
IPM	Institute of Place Management
LA	Local Authority
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LPA	Local Planning Authority
MG	Macro-Generic
MS	Micro-Specific
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPPG	National Planning Practice Guidance

P1	Phase One: 1945-1979
P2	Phase Two: 1979-2007
P3	Phase Three: 2007-2020
P4	Phase Four: 2020-20??
PARM	Practical Adaptive Resilience Model
PD	Permitted Development (Rights)
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
ONS	Office of National Statistics
O-O-T	Out-of-Town
RDA	Regional Development Authority
RPM	Retail Price Maintenance
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
SEP	Strategic Economic Plans
SPM	Scenario Planning Matrix
SV	Social Vitality
TCM	Town Centre Management
TCPA	Town and Country Planning Act
UDC	Urban Development Corporations
UID	Unique Identifier

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The research presented in this thesis examines and speculates on the potential future role of English town centres. The crisis facing town centres is a real-life issue, which has intensified and evolved in the last decade, but the UK government's response to the challenge to the *relevance* of town centres (3.8), both socially and commercially, has remained consistent in the last twenty-five or so years. The government has sought to manage the challenge to the town centre from emerging formats (Table: 1.1) through place management and introspective planning policy. The government has assumed that the main focus of town centres is retail, supported by the service sector (Marshall 2022). The aim of this research is to create a systematic process, through the development and implementation of a conceptual analytical framework, to: 1) forensically investigate, critically examine and analyse the contemporary challenges facing town centres, and 2) to develop and test a theoretical approach that might be applied in practice to influence and form the foundation of an adaptive resilient response to the current critical situation (Jacobs 1961; Varna 2010; Wrigley & Dolega 2011; Barnett 2012; Montgomery 2015; Teller et al. 2016; Carmona, 2019).

1.2 The Research

This chapter outlines the research problem and summarises the justification for it, and presents the key research question underpinning the study. The chapter is organised into six sections, which are: the research problem (1.2.1) the background and motivation to pursue this area of research (1.2.2); the research aims, questions and objectives (1.2.3); the

research methodology and methods (1.2.4); the research stages (1.2.5); and, sets out the structure of the thesis (1.2.6).

1.2.1 The Research Problem

As indicated above, the subject of this work is a *real-life* problem, which is to say one that affects many people in their daily lives, and which is dynamic and evolving in response to changing economic, policy and other conditions. It is focused on the broad theme of the changing relationship between the commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' (3.3.1), and the consequences of this changed relationship on the *relevance* of the town centre. To guide the analysis of the research problem a 'working' concept for the town centre is proposed: Town Centre - *a place which is recognisable as the social, civic and commercial hub which has provision for the needs and wants of all of the community* (see 2.6.2).

The research focuses on the experience in real places - town centres in England. This research looks specifically at the situation in the contemporary English town centre in order to effectively address, and answer the research question; although it is acknowledged that the challenge facing many urban centres might not be confined to any one geographical entity. It is, therefore, proposed here that there is further opportunity for future research which examines the situation in other international urban centre settings (10.6). As alluded to in the introduction, the challenge, and now in some places the crisis, facing town centres in England has been in the making for at least the last three decades. However, the response of successive governments has remained consistent and essentially the same – to look to place management and introspective policy, to deliver what were traditional town centre uses and to reinstate a traditional vision of the town centre, effectively ignoring the fact that new forms of retail have taken over and become more commercially viable (Table1.1). These new forms represent highly efficient styles of retail, unburdened by the needs or expectations of the conventional town centre – to provide a socially vibrant place, underpinned by commercial viability. This expectation for town

centres to be both vital and viable is articulated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019). The research seeks to investigate further to develop an understanding of whether there has been a fundamental change in the market in which the town centre operates. To examine if there is an opportunity to re-imagine the market to include all formats and reinvent the role of the town centre within it which responds more effectively to the social, civic and commercial needs and wants of all of the community.

Table 1.1: Formats that are commercially 'viable' to deliver traditional town centre uses (in particular office, commercial leisure and retail).

Format	**Typical Characteristics**
Town Centre	Socially 'vital' with civic use and Commercially 'viable'
Edge	Commercially 'viable'
Out-of-Town	Commercially 'viable'
Virtual	Commercially 'viable'

For town centres to have *relevance*, it is argued through this research, requires a balance between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability'. Practically there needs to be a purpose to visit a place, the town centre acted as a commercial hub and shopping was historically a fundamental activity. Therefore, relocation of traditional town centre uses to other formats reduces the need to visit a town centre and this impacts both the social 'vitality' and the commercial 'viability' of the place: there needs to be a reason to dwell in the town centre. Given the context of a mature neo-liberal, essentially free market and capitalist system and that this context is unlikely to change any time soon, it could be concluded that a laissez-faire solution is required to the problem of the increasing *irrelevance* of the town centre. That is to accept that town centres are now just one format capable of delivering traditional town centre functions and to let the commercial market decide which format is most fit for purpose (Dolega et al. 2021). This laissez-faire approach has several consequences.

First, it may require policy makers to accept as inevitable the managed decline of some town centres – respond and adapt to competition from other formats and reduced requirement for space from some sectors of the economy (such as retail, commercial

leisure and office). This might result in the planning for a more compact central area which retains a healthy ‘vital’ and ‘viable’ balance;

Second, it calls for a change in uses or repurposing much of the built environment - where the built environment allows adaptation and repurposing there may be a move to recycle space for other commercial and social uses, such as residential. New homes where well integrated and designed space can have a positive impact for the community, security and offer a relatively quick win to tackle the housing crisis faced in some parts of the country. There is a risk, however, that a lurch from commercial ‘viability’ to social ‘vitality’ could exacerbate the challenge to the town centre as housing (particularly if it is not part of mixed use with commercial uses on the ground floor) will not promote additional footfall (Carmona 2021). It could also complicate the relationship to the public realm creating a presumption that the public realm is the preserve of the residents;

And third, it may in some cases mean that a town centre should be allowed to effectively ‘disappear’ altogether (HCLGC 2019) - this would be a particular risk in a place that was necessary for town centre uses, but has little attraction beyond that; such as tourism due to an historical past or attractive built environment in its own right. This could see the type of urban decay witnessed in the USA donut town phenomena: under different circumstances, and for different reasons, the effect of such an unfettered free-market approach was evident in the United States from the 1960s onwards, where many city centres were effectively displaced by edge of centre and suburban malls. (Montgomery 2013; Warnaby & Medway 2018, p.278).

However, this research is predicated on the view that town centres ought to be more than simply spaces of consumption: and that, as now made explicit in the amended NPPF (2019), they should be ‘at the heart of communities’. That the nature of town centres is such that they add social and civic value over and above other retail formats where these

are very much secondary considerations (Talen & Park 2021, p.2; Rao & Dovey 2021, p.4).

The background work and some of the primary research for this thesis was undertaken from 2017. At that time, although the crisis in town centres was generally recognised, its extent was not fully appreciated or acknowledged in policy response terms. But this situation has changed, and in 2019 the House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee warned that: '*Unless urgent action is taken, we fear that further deterioration, loss of visitors and dereliction may lead to some high streets and town centres disappearing altogether*'(HCLGC 2019, p.3). The '….*deterioration, loss of visitors and dereliction*….' are symptoms and not the fundamental cause of town centre decline. Underpinned by place theory, the research aims to re-set the way the problems facing the town centre are examined.

1.2.2 Background

One motivation for this research comes from the practice and professional experience of the researcher as a former town centre manager and senior planner, of the recent crisis facing town centres. This has, arguably, afforded a privileged opportunity to understand the issues from the inside, as well as, objectively, and in depth, from an academic perspective. Alongside the insights provided from this extensive experience on the current and recent situation, the research looks back to critically examine the changing relationship between the commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' of town centres, through the use of an historical framework (Table 1.2). This framework is intended to allow a retrospective analysis of how the two qualities of vitality and viability and their relationship has changed in the post war period to the present day, as well as the reasons for this change. The division of the post war history into the three periods is based on the fact that there is self-evidently an ideological shift in policy, and governmental terms, as well as in relation to more global conditions (see Chapter Two).

Table 1.2: the Historical Framework (developed by the researcher from the findings of the literature review)

Phase One (P1)	**1945-1979:** Keynesianism and managed capitalism
Phase Two (P2)	**1979-2007:** Neo-liberalism, growth of out-of-town and management by public-private partnerships
Phase Three (P3)	**2007-2020**: 2007 economic crisis, growth of commercially 'viable' virtual space and the new age of austerity.

The historical period covers the establishment and impact of the modern English planning system in 1947, through the Town and Country Planning Act (Moore & Purdue 2014; Hennessey 2000; Ward 2004; Taylor 2003). Moreover, by setting the research problem in the context of this timeframe the changes in the relationship of social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' can be traced across the two dominant political and economic ideologies of the time – Keynesian managed capitalism and neo-liberalism (Ward 2004; Morgan 2001; Harvey 2005; Williams & Ramsden 1992; Wilson 2008; Kynaston 2008, 2009 & 2015; Hennessey 1990, 1992, 2000, 2006, 2019).

It was increasingly apparent, by the end of P1 (1979), that there was growing commercial interest in developing edge and out of centre sites to deliver traditional town centre uses (Guy 2007; Bevan 2005). Although it was not inevitable that space outside the town centre would be permitted for traditional town centre uses (in particular shopping and commercial leisure), and there was already concern that such development could have an adverse impact on the town centre (Development Control Policy Note 13, 1977). The shift in political ideology to neo-liberalism and the move to a service-based economy, together with the 'financialization of built space' and the regeneration focus of the government led to greater pressure for development outside the town centre in P2 (Heseltine 2001; Wrigley & Lowe 2002; Soules 2014; Mazzucato 2015).

By the mid 1980s the challenge to the town centre was recognised by the Secretary of State for the Environment (in a written response):

> *Since commercial competition as such is not a land-use planning consideration, the possible effects of a proposed major retail development on existing retailers is not in this sense a relevant factor in deciding planning applications and appeals. It will be necessary, however, to take account in exceptional circumstances of the cumulative effects of other recent and proposed large scale retail developments in the locality and to consider whether they are on such a scale and of a kind that they could seriously affect the vitality and viability of a nearby town centre as a whole…..*
>
> Hansard: Friday 5 July, 1985.

The Secretary of State recognised that the town centre has a role beyond the economic viability, one which relates to the *'....social life of the community'* (Secretary of State, 1985). Although the Secretary of State tacitly accepted, in the statement, that there had been a structural and functional change in the commercial market in which the town centre is a part there was no explicit attempt to understand the market or adapt spatial planning, concluding that: '….*the planning system can facilitate the development of these new types of retailing, for which there is a clear public demand*' (Secretary of State, 1985). Some commentators writing at the time agreed that out-of-town could not replace the '*High Street*' as the planning authorities '*could stamp*' on other formats 'at *any stage'* (Kay 1987, p.189). However, this was not the case as deregulation and functional shift in the commercial market brought forward significant change in many town centres:

(i) *through commercial competition* - firstly as other physical space became commercially 'viable' for some town centre uses (P2&P3) (Talen & Park 2021, p3); and, secondly with the rapid growth of on-line formats (P3)(Table 2.6) (Wrigley & Lowe 2002; Fernie, 1995; Singleton 2016; Verhoef et al 2015).

(ii) *through decentralisation* – with advances in technology and lifestyles (such as personal mobility due to the growth in car ownership and the virtual economy and community) leading to the need for homes to be within walking distance of the urban core falling away and subsequent reduction in mixed-use, including residential accommodation (Wrigley 1998). The presence of residential mixed-use and the finer urban grain of some areas in

many town centres were influenced and lost as the built form became simplified through big box and mono-use structures, similar to the form of the edge and out-of-town formats (Montgomery 2013, p.268-272).

Reflecting these changes by the early 1990s the relative 'health' of the town centre was the focus of the seminal URBED (1994) study – Vital and Viable Town Centres - in which John Gummer, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, stated that Local Authorities (LAs): '….*should be positive in their approach to planning and managing their town centres*' (URBED 1994: iii). The place management approach to the town centre sought to emulate the practice of privately managed assets, through initiatives such as town centre management (TCM) and business improvement districts (BIDs) (Baldock 1989; Evans 1997; Wells 1991; Stansbury 1997; Oc and Tiesdall 1998; Reeve 2004; Warnaby et al. 2004; Evans 2006; Healy 2006; Oliviera 2018). A number of concepts were introduced into planning policy, through Planning Policy Guidance 6 (PPG6 1996), which remain the basis of town centre planning policies, seeking to manage the growth of other physical formats, but not to prevent them. This led to a dilemma for Local Authorities: face losing inward investment or permit edge and out-of-town schemes to attract employers into the local area (Ravenscroft et al 2000)

The challenge to both the commercial and social *relevance* of the town centre changed and intensified through P3, particularly with the rapid growth in virtual space. None-the-less the planning and place management response adopted remained remarkably consistent through P2 and P 3. Evidence from the literature review identifies a prevailing theory that for town centres to be competitive they *should be better managed through private-public partnerships that focus on the experience of the customer: following a place management approach, adopting the commercial practices of the privately owned assets like the mall, retail and leisure parks* (2.2.5). With change impacting the built environment accelerating and becoming more uncertain it brings into question the continued effectiveness of a

reliance on place management and key concepts in planning policy in the context of the town centre in P3. In particular, the sequential test; and, hierarchies and networks with the removal of the apparatus which was part of the Regional Spatial Strategy (Ellis & Henderson 2016; Larco 2021: p.139) (2.6.2 and see Table 2.3).

The research, therefore, seeks to develop a theoretically place-based and people-centred *adaptive resilience* approach to the problem facing town centres. The underlying premise tested in the research, is that town centres should not be considered in isolation to other physical and virtual formats and in competition with them, but rather be seen as complementary to them (Table 1.1) (Wrigley & Lowe 2002; Bevan 2005; Wrigley & Dolega 2014).

If the shifting equilibrium between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of place is not addressed, it is unclear how some town centres will continue to be considered to be at '*the heart of local communities*' (NPPF 2019, p.25); or, what urban form and role those that do remain *relevant* might take (Montgomery 2015; Varna 2010; Carmona 2021). There is a significant risk that commercial development will be attracted to other simpler built forms outside the town centre, in locations unencumbered by previous development, which provide more commercially focussed and cost-effective space (Kay 1987, p189) than the more challenging town centre environment, a risk that will perpetuate the cycle of decline. This may lead to the development sector predominantly seeking locations for mono-functional commercial space (retail, commercial leisure, office use) where the return on investment is perceived to be highest, rather than in sustainable locations where development is most needed socially as well as commercially (Corfe 2018; Marshall 2020; Ward 2020; de Vaderranna et al 2020; Capasso da Silva et al. 2020; May 2020). Moreover, such a scenario calls into question where the funding and investment for the town centre, private and public, might come from in the future.

The managed approach adopted by successive government policy with respect to town centres, ignores the broader appeal and *value* of the town centre - *as a complex social and commercial ecosystem, or assemblage*. This research asks whether the currently dominant 'managed' approach fully understands the true '*value*' that can be achieved through the social 'vitality' of place. A number of commentators share the view that the '*value*' of a place comes through the quality of design, diversity – social, civic and commercial - through mixed uses (including homes) and identity; and that whilst commercial viability underpins this value commercial viability does not guarantee it (Lynch 1960; Jacobs 1961; Lefebvre 1968; Reeve & Simmonds 2000; Gehl 2001; Butina-Watson & Bentley 2007; Reeve et al. 2007; Gehl 2010; Varna 2010; Schmid 2012; Friendly 2013; Gehl & Svarre 2013; Montgomery 2015; Raworth 2017; Mazzucato 2018; Sim 2019; Carmona 2020).

Informed by professional practice, the research is also guided by a personal set of values, which assumes that all members of society have, or should have unfettered access to the town centre (2.4.4 and 2.6.2), whilst accepting that there may be some private space where access might be controlled (Zukin 1991; Otsuka 2004; Otsuka & Reeve 2007; Zukin et al. 2016; Hubbard 2017; Carmona 2021). This is a key differentiating characteristic of the town centre as a social, civic and commercial space to that of other formats (Table 1.1) which are predominantly commercially focussed and managed space (Dolega et al. 2021).

Research Currency

As noted above, the research question and its aims and objectives were developed originally in 2017. The background to the problem, as well as the rationale for the primary research, were framed by the situation of town centres at that point in time – around 2017 to the early part of 2020. The crisis facing many town centres has rapidly developed since then, not least over the last eighteen months with the Covid-19 crisis, and so there has been a significant challenge in maintaining the currency of the research and of its focus. This issue is, however, addressed where appropriate in key sections, particularly in the second

part of the thesis, Chapters 9 and 10. The significance of the most recent changes to the balance between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' points to an opportunity to re-imagine the role of the town centre as the hub within a new market setting (Mazzocato 2015; Mazzocato 2018).

Finally, here, the gap in both theory and knowledge that the research aims to fill, lies in the absence in the literature, as well as in practice, of a detailed understanding of the relationship between town centres as socially vital places, and the consequences of the over emphasis in planning and management strategies on traditional vison of town centres as commercial entities. The primary intention of the research is to develop a framework of analysis that can be applied as a 'diagnostic' tool, focussing on current issues confronting town centres, leading to prescriptive theoretical solutions based on a realistic appreciation of their capacity for adaptive resilience.

1.2.3 Research Aims, Questions and Objectives

The overall aim of the research is to carry out an investigation which allows a critical assessment of the changing relationship between the commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' of the contemporary English town centre in a period of economic, social and technological change. The second aim has been to develop a method to analyse the conditions (physical, commercial and political) of a town centre in such a way that prescriptive solutions to maintaining commercial viability and social vitality can be posited. These aims have been formulated into three research questions:

1. *How has the relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality', in English town centres, changed in a period of economic transition?*
2. *Has the market in which the town centre now operates changed within the timeframe identified for this research (post 1945-2020)?*

3. *Can the town centre offer additional 'value' that other formats (physical and virtual), which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses, cannot?*

The three research questions are addressed in the research through a set of research objectives, in two stages:

Stage one – development of the research problem, and theory

1: to chart the changing relationships between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' during the period 1945 to 2020.

2: to conceptualise place theory as being fundamental to this research and to define the key concepts that have emerged to respond to the challenges facing town centres: 'vital' and 'viable'; and, 'adaptive resilience'.

3: to develop a conceptual analytical framework, based on a synthesis of the relevant literature, as the basis for primary research – i.e. to guide data identification and collection.

Stage two – the primary research

4: to (i) forensically investigate and assess the impact of the crisis on two town centres; (ii) propose recommendations for the development of a theoretical approach to adaptive resilience in town centres; and, (iii) test the theoretical recommendations and potential effectiveness of the proposed interventions.

5: to make theoretical and practice oriented recommendations for potential further steps to build on the findings of the research programme.

1.2.4 The Research Methodology and Research Methods

The Research Methodology

This research employs a hybrid deductive and inductive approach to effectively address the research problem (Fereday et al. 2006, p.80-92). The research methodology is divided into:

- the deductive approach - based on existing theory (chapters two, three and four);
- the inductive approach - develops new theory and theoretical concepts - following the findings from the case studies (chapters six, seven, eight and nine) (Fig.5.1&Fig.5.2).

The research adopts the widely accepted approach to the study of public life, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian research community, by following empirical methods and a pragmatic approach – building on and adapting the urban design process (3.2)(Gehl & Svarre 2013 p.78; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007, p.237; Carmona 2014 & 2019). The research is set out in the methodology and plan of work diagram below:

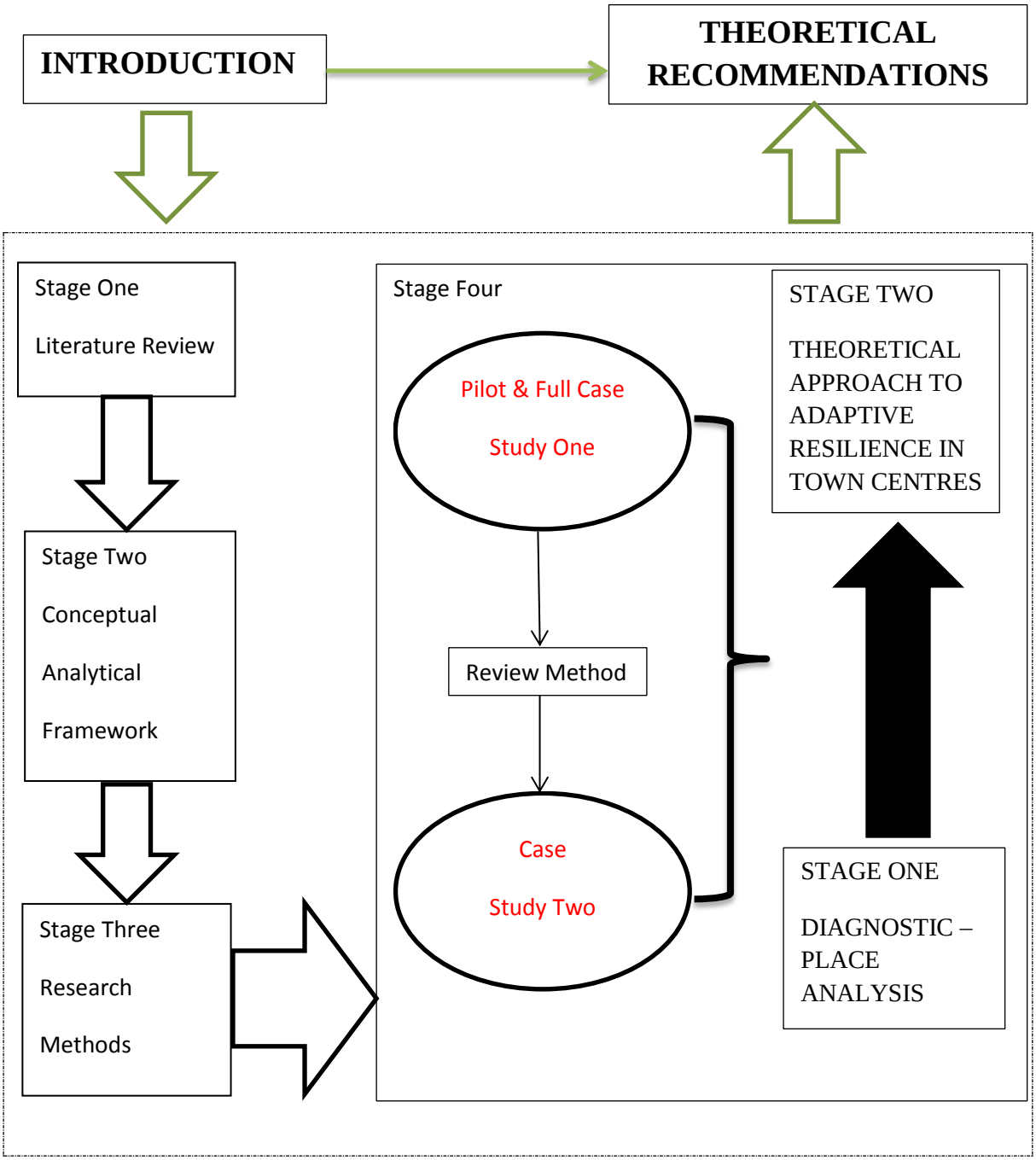
Step One – collection and analysis of the data;

Step Two – key findings;

Step Three – test theoretical recommendations: it is intended that this will include a number of new interviews and follow-up interviews.

Following this step, a set of theoretical recommendations are finalised (Fig.1.1).

Fig.1.1: methodology and plan of the work



Research Methods

The research design uses two in-depth case studies to collect empirical data, interrogating and analysing the data through a research framework – the *Adaptive Resilience Model* (Chapter Four).

A combination of three specific methods were identified as appropriate for the research (Fig.5.8):

(i) field observations, for the purpose of this method of inquiry a bespoke Field Observations Tool was developed (Table 5.7(a)).

The stage included a number of site visits over number of years and at different times of the day (including the evening and night-time).

(ii) interviewee observations, a number of experts in the field of planning and urban design were interviewed within the two stage process of the *Adaptive Resilience Model (*Table 5.7(b)).

(iii) desktop analysis: (i) historical maps; (ii) national legislation, policy and strategic approach; and, (iii) local policy, strategies and plans (Table 5.7(c)).

1.2.5 Research stages

Stage One

To address the first two objectives, a literature review is carried out in two parts:

- Part one of the literature review sets the research within an historical framework in order that the research problem could be interrogated (Table 1.2).

- Part two of the literature review introduced place theory as being at the heart of the research, and then defines the key concepts, to guide the development of a conceptual analytical framework and inform the design of the research methods.

Stage Two

To address objectives three, four and five: design and testing of a conceptual analytical model.

At the heart of this research is the development of a novel method of investigation into the research problem. This stage consisted of the development of a conceptual analytical model as a framework for the research, which for the purpose of this research is called the *Adaptive Resilience Model*. This was designed to be used as a research framework so that a forensic investigation could take place within a case study environment.

1.2.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into ten chapters; the research question and research sub-questions (1.2.3) are discussed and answered through different chapters as presented in the matrix below (Table 1.3).

Chapter One – introduces the research problem, including the background to the study, aims and objectives, research questions, research approach and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two – the research problem is analysed through a historical framework which identifies three distinct phases through which the changing relationship of the commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' of the town centre can be tracked (Table 1.2):

Chapter Three – develops *place theory* as the foundation of the research and then presents the argument that to effectively address the research problem it is essential to define the key concepts relating to the town centre that emerged: through P2, the concepts of 'vital' and 'viable'; and, in P3, the concept of 'adaptive resilience'.

Chapter Four - this chapter introduces the research framework - the adaptive resilience model (ARM) illustrated with examples, which was developed following the key findings from the literature review, and field work experience of the researcher, as a research framework to analyse and address the quandary facing town centres. In essence, the challenge to the social, civic and commercial *relevance* of town centres post 2007 (P3) has been to turn to strategies, policies, and tactics that have been used before, but which are now no longer sufficient, or fit for purpose. The chapter argues that there is a need for a paradigm shift in the way the problem of the English town centre is understood, and if they are to remain in any sense relevant.

Chapter Five - introduces and justifies the research methods and the research methodology, including a description of the key data and explanation of how it is analysed and interpreted. The research strategy and design creates a link with the research objectives and acts as a tool to collect the relevant empirical research data.

Chapter Six –presents the pilot case study, which is then developed into a full case study - Case Study One: Loughborough. The chapter is organised to allow a forensic investigation into the challenges facing Loughborough town centre: (i) findings, (ii) discussion, and then, (iii) micro-specific recommendations.

The case study uses the methodological triangulation process (Denscombe 2017), which consisted of:

- field observations: a series of site visits were carried out by the researcher, data was captured through the Fieldwork Observation Tool, sketch maps, and the findings analysed thematically (Table 5.7a). The fieldwork included participation in both formal meetings (in excess of 50), and informal meetings and engagement (in excess of 100).

- interview observations, which was a two step process: Step One – semi-structured interviews with experts with knowledge of the case study location; and, Step Two – a set of recommendations were presented to the local experts and a number of experts with knowledge of the challenges facing town centres in a broader context and in other locations (Table 5.7b).
- desktop analysis: including historic maps, local and national policy, and included reflections drawn from the researcher's notes of private and public meetings (Table 5.7c).

The chapter concludes with a review of the effectiveness of the conceptual analytical model to address the research problem.

Chapter Seven –explains Case Study Two: Stevenage. The chapter is organised following the same structure as Chapter Six.

Chapter Eight – sets out macro-generic findings, derived from the case studies, and the practice experience of the researcher, illustrated with examples. This chapter shows how the town centre is now moving into the next phase – P4. The findings are used to develop a set of macro-generic theoretical recommendations tested with a group of thirteen experts.

Chapter Nine – the first part of the chapter explains the macro-generic theoretical recommendations, organised around two themes: *Theme One* – market, policy and governance; and, *Theme Two* – funding, investment and management.

Table 1.3: Sequence of the Thesis

RESEARCH QUESTIONS		CHAPTER									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	*How has the relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality', in English town centres, changed in a period of economic transition?*		>				^	^	>	^	^
2	*Has the market in which the town centre now operates changed within the timeframe identified for this research (post 1945-2020)?*		>				^	^	>	^	^
3	*Can the town centre offer additional 'value' that other formats (physical and virtual), which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses, cannot?*								>	^	^
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	to chart the changing relationships between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' during the period 1945 to 2020.		*								
2	to conceptualise place theory as being fundamental to this research and to define the key concepts that have emerged to respond to the challenges facing town centres: 'vital' and 'viable'; and, 'adaptive resilience'			*							
3	to develop a conceptual analytical framework, based on a synthesis of the relevant literature, as the basis for primary research – i.e. to guide data identification and collection				*						
4	to (i) forensically investigates and assesses the impact of the crisis on two town centres; (ii) propose recommendations for the development of a theoretical approach to adaptive resilience in town centres; and, (iii) test the theoretical recommendations and potential effectiveness of the proposed interventions						*	*	*		
5	to make theoretical and practice oriented recommendations for potential further steps to build on the findings of the research programme									*	
THESIS SEQUENCE		INTRODUCTION	HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK	KEY CONCEPTS	CONCEPTUAL ANALYTICAL	METHODS	CASE STUDY ONE	CASE STUDY TWO	GENERIC FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	FINAL CONCLUSION

Fig.1.2: key to Table 1.3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS			
>	DICSUSSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION	^	ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES			
*	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE DISCHARGED		

The chapter then presents a new theory of the *complexity of urban ecology*:

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*The Town Centre - is **the** focal point within a complex ecological system of a network of hubs which meet the civic, social and commercial needs and wants of all of the community*.

A new theoretical concept of the *INTRICATE* town centre is then introduced (9.4).

Finally, due to the shifting and dynamic nature of the research problem, the chapter concludes with a speculative discussion of the changing critical situation facing town centres.

Chapter Ten – the final chapter sets out the main conclusions of the research, through a summary of research findings, and discussion of the limitations of the research; application and limitations of the recommendations; proposes areas for future investigation and research, and discusses the role of the researcher as a 'reflective practitioner' (Schon 1987; Varna 2010; Carmona 2020); and finally, proposes an agenda for future research.

Chapter Two: charting the changing relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality'

2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses research objective one: to *examine and chart the changing relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' during the period 1945 to 2020*. The geographical research focus of this thesis is the English town centre. It is acknowledged and accepted that the challenge to the *relevance* (see Table 3.6) of urban centres is not exclusive to the experience in England. However, in order to fully address the research question it is appropriate to look exclusively at the experience in the English town centre to allow a forensic investigation into the phenomenon. It follows, therefore, that the scope of the literature review, and approaches to address the crisis, are drawn from English examples. However, it is noted here that an opportunity is identified through this research, and as considered in Chapter Ten (10.6), to expand the geographical focus to the European or to an international investigation into challenges faced by other urban centres through a future research agenda. The chapter posits the impact changing political and economic ideologies had on the relationship between the concepts of 'vitality' and 'viability', terms which were coined by the Secretary of State in 1985 and further developed in the seminal work of URBED (1994) (see 2.4.2 and 2.4.3) of town centres in the post war period.

The chapter follows a chronological order, which is organised into a framework of three distinct historical phases, from 1945 to the present day, which allows the relationship of 'vitality' and 'viability' to be tracked and examined (Table 1.2). A historical framework

has been constructed by the researcher, which is informed by the literature review. This chapter presents very much a summary of critical shifts in the policy and economic context of town centres, in order to highlight both the shifting relationship between the key variables of vitality and viability, as well as the complexity of that relationship, and to illustrate that these are not static terms. The account given here is a summary of an extensive literature review which seeks to set the historical context for the research. It is not intended to be a history of planning in the post war period – this can be found in the comprehensive planning history, particularly in the work of Ward (2004) on which this research has used as a guide.

Historical Phases

Phase One, 1945-1979: Keynesianism and managed capitalism (see Table 2.1). (Ward 2004; Morgan 2001; Harvey 2005; Williams & Ramsden 1992; Wilson 2008; Wrigley 1998; Guy 2007; Wrigley & Lowe 2002; Kynaston 2008, 2009 & 2015; Hennessey 1990, 1992, 2000, 2006, 2019).

In the immediate post war period the town centre was a vital place for town centre commercial uses, as there was, de facto, no other commercially viable space. With decentralisation and greater mobility, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, places other than the town centre were becoming commercially viable for what had been exclusively town centre uses. However, this could have been managed through planning and economic strategies to ensure that by the end of P1 the town centre remained vital.

Phase Two, 1979-2007: Neo-liberalism, growth of out-of-town and management by public-private partnerships (see Table 2.2) (Harvey 2005; Taylor 2003; Guy 2007; Wrigley & Lowe 2002; Fernie 1995; Morgan 2001; Reeve 2004; Mazzucato 2015).

In 1979 there was a political and economic ideological shift: from Keynesian managed capitalism to neo-liberalism. Part of the Government policy in the 1980s was to develop

places outside the town centre that would be commercially viable for town centre use, an example being the regeneration in Gateshead through the development of the Metro Centre. By 1985 the potential negative impact of out-of-town development on the town centre was acknowledged and the concepts ‘vital’ and ‘viable’ were coined. In the 1990s the policy was not to prevent out-of-town development, but to manage it through planning policy, and attempts made to improve the management of the town centres, through initiatives such as: Town Centre Management and Business Improvement Districts.

Phase Three, 2007-present: 2007 economic crisis, growth of commercially ‘viable’ virtual space and the new age of austerity (see Table 2.8). (Aalbers 2013; Wrigley and Dolega 2015; Verhoef 2015; Mazzucato 2015; Mazzucato 2018)

The chapter concludes with an analysis of successive Governments’ (firstly the Labour government under Gordon Brown, the coalition government and then the various Conservative administrations) response to the increasing competition to town centres, through the new commercially ‘viable’ formats of physical and virtual space, the development of which accelerated post 2007. The evidence indicates that the response in P3 to the increasing competition to the town centres was remarkably similar to that in P2, albeit the threat to the *relevance* of town centres as socially vital and commercially viable hubs had increased and changed in nature.

It is concluded that the period started with the town centre as a vital space and ended with space being considered only to be appropriate for commercial town centre uses, (whether physically in the town centre or out-of-town or virtual) if it is commercially viable – thus decoupling the link, developed through the seminal URBED study (1994), that for a town centre to be ‘healthy’ it needed to be socially ‘vital’ and commercially ‘viable’ (URBED 1994).

The remainder of this chapter details each of the three periods, and highlights the key policy and other factors which have arguably led to the current crisis facing town centres.

2.2 Phase One, 1945-1979: Keynesianism and managed capitalism

This section examines the changing relationship between the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of the town centre during P1: 1945-1979 (see Table 2.1). Both the Labour and Conservative governments in this period followed the Keynesian economic theory of managed capitalism (Mazzucato 2018, p.138). Although the Keynesian approach was beginning to falter by the 1950s, it only ended with the government of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 (Hennessey 2019, p.143; Webster et al. 2005, p.459). In the immediate, post war period, a new planning system was introduced through the Town and Country Planning Act (1947), which remains the basis for planning in this country to today (TCPA 1947; Moore and Purdue 2014). A review of the literature suggests that the town centre at the start of the historical framework (1945) was 'vital' as a social, civic and commercial hub, for most of society's needs and wants. For example there were few if any alternatives to access and purchase essentials (such as food), civic needs (such as bureaucratic chores) or leisure pursuits (such as places to meet and socialise). As P1 progressed the town centre ceased being a 'vital' hub, as places outside the town centre emerged as having the potential to become commercially 'viable' for some commercial town centre uses. However, it was by no means inevitable that land outside of the town centre would be permitted to deliver what had been traditional town centre functions – in particular shops, cafés, restaurants, office space and some civic uses, such as health providers.

2.2.1 Post-war planning and development of the planning system

The 1945 general election delivered a remarkable result: Clement Attlee's Labour Party achieved a landslide victory (Williams and Ramsden 1990, p.414; Hennessey 2000; Ward 2004, p.92). Following this, the basic principles of the planning system were enshrined in the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) (1947), and remain in place to this day, although accepting that the law has become more disparate in its application (Cullingworth 2010; Moore and Purdue 2014; Ellis & Henderson 2016; Garner 1971). The 1947 Act delivered an effective system for the control of land use (Moore & Purdue 2014). The TCPA (1947) was developed in the context of the reforming post-war Attlee government, as mapped through the Beveridge Report (1942) which was '*….almost a charter of human rights….*' and '*…accepted with enthusiasm by Labour and the Liberals, more guardedly by Conservative ministers'* (Williams and Ramsden 1990, p.411). The impression, therefore, was that the Labour Party was committed to social reconstruction, and that the Conservative Party was at best unsure; in this way the Attlee government became a beneficiary of a new perspective brought forward by the experience and circumstance of World War II (Williams and Ramsden 1990, p.411; Hennessey 2000, p.530). The planning system could have been different had the Conservative Party been successful in the 1945 general election, as the Party leader, Churchill, was less convinced that a formalised approach to planning would be successful when he commented: *"....give me the eighteenth-century alley, where foot-pads lurk, and the harlot plies her trade, and none of this new-fangled planning doctrine*" (Williams and Ramsden 1990, p.414; Kynaston 2007, p.31).

Taylor (2003) asserts that the period 1945-1960 should be considered the 'Golden Age' of British planning: in the post-war period planning was considered to be non-controversial and not a 'political' activity (Taylor 2003, p.35-38; Fee et al.2021, p. 6). The post war period offered an opportunity for planners, generally unencumbered by public opinion, to

deliver schemes. This is illustrated by Lewis Silkin, who, as the Minister for Town and Country Planning in the post war Labour Government, stated: '*I think it is necessary to lead the citizen – guide him. The citizen does not always know exactly what is best.*' (quoted in Ward 1998, p.122; Taylor 2003, p.43). Some commentators have suggested that the impact of World War II on the built environment may have focussed public attention on the possibility for the regeneration of towns and cities; planners were eager to develop spaces without consideration of heritage, custom or the opinion of residents and users (Kynaston 2007, p.48; Taylor 2003, p.43; Smith 2015; Hennessey 2019, p.173-174). To class this period as a 'Golden Age' for planning is therefore problematic. It may well have been a period when planners felt emboldened, and trusted by the national government to develop new towns and redevelop others, but it does not seem appropriate to consider this period as delivering a kind of Utopia (Taylor 2003, p.24).

Indeed, to classify many of the new towns as truly 'new' is a misnomer, as most were developed around existing settlements (Fee et al. 2021, p.1). The new towns initiatives were a product of the time in which they were delivered, within the context of direct government intervention and funding. The new town corporations were local delivery vehicles, which had planning and compulsory purchase powers to deliver a mix of uses and infrastructure; however, they did not deliver higher education establishments, which remained a significant drawback (Fee et al. 2021, p.2-3). By the end of the 1960s the ability of the planning profession to relate to the needs of the community were questioned, most notably in the United States, by commentators such as Jane Jacobs (Jacobs 1961). However, it was Kevin Lynch (1960) who developed a framework to analyse and understand the components and offer some first principles on urban design (Lynch 1960).

2.2.2 The post-war town centre: form and function

The town centre of the post war period was a social leveller. The vast majority of society had limited choice of where to shop or spend their leisure time which meant that the town

centre was a ‘vital’ place and the only commercially ‘viable’ space (Hubbard 2017; Otsuka 2004, p.313). Outside the new towns the town centre of the post-war period was not a product of a planning process, but had organically evolved, adapting and reinventing itself to meet social and economic change. In whatever way the town centre is defined, it is clear that the role of the contemporary town centre – both as a social and a commercial entity – is now quite different to that of the post war period. The following discussion examines the impact that rapid social, economic and cultural change (of the 1950s, 1960’s and 1970’s) had on town centres.

There was a presumption on the part of planners in the post war period that all of society should shop in town centres, and that the development of more remote retailing, accessed only by customers with a private motor car, would have a negative impact (Guy 2007, p.72). The 1960s brought the acceleration of the decentralisation of homes and employment from urban cores into the metropolitan rings, and outer metropolitan rings; which led to places other than town centres emerging as commercially ‘viable’ space for what had traditionally been town centre uses (Wrigley 1998, p.9). Decentralisation meant that the government structure and social-democratic values of the post-war period, which had created an environment in which national and local government control over the process of retail development was considered normal, were increasingly challenged both spatially and commercially (Guy 2007, p.21). The customer increasingly sought convenience and value: the abolition of the Resale Price Mechanism (RPM) (1964) unshackled grocery pricing in the United Kingdom, creating a more competitive commercial market (Bevan 2005, p.49; Parker et al. 2017, p.313). The shift to commercial competition, and the motorway network created a foundation to move shopping in *‘….Britain from corner shop and occasional tiny high-street supermarket to the hypermarket and the shopping mall’* (Hennessey 2019, p.440-441).

The pressure for larger retail units came from the emerging supermarket format - the business model was developed and exported through the experience of the USA, and there was a growing expectation from planners that they would learn, imitate and emulate American trends (Kay 1987, p.38; Wrigley & Lowe 2002, p.76; Cook et al. 2015, p.199). The customer approved of the new retailing model of supermarkets and hypermarkets, which delivered the convenience of a wide range of goods sold in one place and parking availability (Bevan 2005, p.4; Parker et al 2017, p.313). Many town centres are constrained by historic street patterns, conservation areas, existing buildings and listed buildings, which, it was argued, could not easily be converted for new retail trading formats – such as the growth of the supermarket (Kay 1987, p.52). In addition, there was a `move away from mixed-use, with decentralisation and a reduction in residential uses above the shop in town centres. However, there were some exceptions to this in historic centres which were remodelled, such as in Oxford West End.

By the end of the 1970s, there was pressure from developers and operators for new sites, outside the boundary of the traditional town centre, to be made available for town centre uses. Criticism of what some considered to be an excessively bureaucratic planning system increased: developers and retailers felt that there was little opportunity to influence the location or type of development required to respond to new commercial opportunities (Ward 2004, p.97; Guy 2007, p.23). The supermarket format developed slowly in the UK, with self-service first being introduced by J. Sainsbury's in 1950s, and the first large free standing supermarket being opened by ASDA in 1964 at Bridgford. It was not, therefore, until the 1960s and 1970s that the larger format food retailing began to transform the industry in the UK (Wrigley & Lowe 2002, p.76; Kay 1987, p.16). The new retail concept required larger sites with free car parking - land outside the town centre was cheaper to buy, develop and use - unencumbered by previous development (Kay 1987).

2.3 Summary

By the late 1970s the town centre was no longer a 'vital' place in the literal meaning of the word (see discussion in Chapter Three, 3.3). Space outside of the traditional town centre was regarded as commercially 'viable' and appropriate for town centre uses, which led to the beginning of concerns that development in edge or out-of-town locations could have a negative impact on existing town centres (Development Control Policy Note, 1977). By the end of P1 only a limited amount of development had taken place on the edge, or out-of-centre, and the government could have decided to protect the town centre as an important place for social and commercial activity, and ensure that they were accessible to all of the community. By the end of the 1970s there was a fundamental change in the way the country was governed: the Keynsian managed economy was swept away by neo-liberalism – introducing a laissez-faire approach to capitalism and deregulation. The ideological approach of neo-liberalism transformed the relationship between the social 'vitality' and the commercial 'viability'. The free-market approach to the economy and shift to the service sector in P2, combined with the government's policy permitted space outside the town centre, resulting in new formats and competition to the town centre (Table 1.1).

Table 2.1: Phase One, 1945-1979: Keynesianism and managed capitalism

Period	**1945-1951**	**1951-1955**	**1955-1957**	**1957-1963**	**1963-1964**	**1964-1970**	**1970-1974**	**1974-1976**	**1976-1979**
Government	Attlee	Churchill	Eden	MacMillan	Douglas-Home	Wilson	Heath	Wilson	Callaghan
	Labour	Conservative				Labour	Conservative	Labour	
	Managed Capitalism – Keynesianism								
Secretary of State	Dalton (50-51)	Macmillan (51-54)	Sandys (54-57)	Brooke (57-61) Hill (61-62)	Joseph (62-64)	Crossman (64-66) Greenwood (66-70) Mellish (1970)	Walker (1970-1972) Rippon (72-74)	Crosland (74-76)	Shore (76-79)
Planning	TCPA 1947			Urban Planning Group set up by MHLG (1961)	Planning Bulletin No. 4 (1963)	Planning Bulletin No. 1 (1965)	Development Control Policy Note 13: out-of-town shops and shopping centres (1972)	Development Control Policy Note 13: large new stores (1977)	
				Town Centres: approach and renewal (1962)	Town centres: cost and control of development (1963) & current practices (1963)	Development Plans (1964) Parking in town centres (1965)			
Economic Cycle	AUSTERITY		Q2 1956 – Q3 1956 RECESSION	Q3 1961 – Q3 1956 RECESSION	1964 Abolition Of Resale Price Mechanism		Q3 1973 – Q1 1974 RECESSION 1973 Oil Crisis	Q2 1975 – Q3 1975 RECESSION	1978 – 1979 WINTER OF DISCONTENT
Retail Wave		J. Sainsbury's introduced the first self-service supermarkets.			Wave One: Supermarket Development (Fernie 1995)				
	By end of 1950s only 175 food stores out of 150,000 met the criteria as a supermarket.					ASDA first out-of-town supermarket, Bridgeford. (1964)			

2.4 Phase Two, 1979-2007: neo-liberalism, the growth of out-of-town and management by public-private partnerships

This section examines the changing relationship between the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of town centres in phase two.

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher was elected, following the economically tumultuous 1970s, bringing a radical change in the socio-economic and the political environment through a new political ideology - neo-liberalism (Harvey 1995). The Thatcherite market-orientated policies of the 1980s enabled space to be made available for development on the edge or out-of-town locations, for uses that would previously have been provided in a town centre (Fee et al. 2021, p.6). By the mid-1980s it was acknowledged by the Government that this was creating competition to town centres, reducing their commercial 'viability', and having a negative impact on their socially 'vital' role. With the economic downturn of the 1990s the government commissioned URBED (1994) to look at the 'health' of town centres, and to develop the concepts of 'vital' and 'viable' (see Chapter Three). This section concludes with an analysis of the government's response, which was to seek to manage the competition to town centres through planning policy/guidance and to promote the operational management of town centres through private-public partnership bodies, such as Town Centre Management (TCM) initiatives and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).

2.4.1 Neo-liberalism and the emergence of commercially viable space for town centre uses, outside of the traditional town centre

1979 was a decisive year. The post war period of social democratic consensus politics and managed capitalism ended; there was a significant change in political and economic ideology - it was the '*big time*' for neo-liberalism (Taylor 2003; Raworth 2017, p.67). Deregulation through the neo-liberal approach had a direct impact on the role of the town

centre, and the relationship between the town centre as a 'mixed-use' socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' hub shifted. Locations outside the town centre were permitted to operate as commercially 'viable' space, as new physical formats delivering what were traditionally town centre uses, mainly for the retail and later other sectors of the economy, such as office and commercial leisure (Fee et al. 2021, p.4). It was not only in fiscal policy, but also ideology that the change in direction came, in relation to social 'vitality' (a concept explored in greater depth in Chapter Three) became apparent. As Thatcher explained that in her opinion: *'There is no such thing as society'* (Interview with Margaret Thatcher by Douglas Keay, Woman's Own, 23 September, 1987).

Hesletine (2001) stated that by the spring of 1981 the government's commitment to urban regeneration was set - the rhetoric was clear: pro-market and anti-planning (Hesletine, 2001, p.241; Taylor 2003, p.129; Guy 2007, p.32). Under Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative government did not seek to alter the planning system, it chose to work around it, and largely ignored it (Taylor 2003, p.137). The government implemented regeneration bodies, such as the Urban Development Corporations (UDC) and Enterprise Zones (EZ), which operated outside the normal planning framework, a move that was met with resistance from local authorities (Hesletine 2001, p.399; Hennessey 1989, p.704). Hesletine (2001) argues that the principles, and idea of the UDC, threatened the cosy monopoly of the local authorities, and their assumption of inevitable decline to which they had become accustomed (Hesletine 2001, p.213).

The move away from traditional industry in the early 1980s, towards a more service orientated economy, created the environment for a consumer-led boom and the 'retail revolution' of the middle years of the 1980s (Wrigley & Lowe 2002, p.23). In P1 (1945-1979) the financial sector trundled along at the same rate, however the deregulation of the financial sector transformed the role of finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) (Pitt & Mason 2009; Mazzucato 2015). The role of asset management, the creation of profit from

investment in liquid financial assets and property, became the fastest growing financial activity in the period 1980-2008 and continued through P3 with the *'financialization of built space'* (Soules 2014; Mazzucato 2015). The commercialisation of assets combined with the deregulation of planning, and the regeneration agenda of the government, led to space outside the town centre becoming commercially 'viable' for traditional town centre uses (specifically shopping) (Hubbard 2017). Regeneration projects, such as the Metro Centre (1986) and Meadowhall (1990), delivered '*hyper-real*' shopping experiences, and were part of the transformation of shopping from a chore to a leisure activity (Reeve & Simmonds 2000; Warnaby & Medway 2018, p.280).

2.4.2 The Challenge of New Formats to the Town Centre

By the middle of the 1980s members of parliament felt that the growth of new formats, for retail and leisure opportunities on the edge and out-of-town locations, were having a detrimental impact on town centres. In this context, and alluding to this realisation, the terms 'vital' and 'viable' were coined by the Secretary of State for Environment in a response to a parliamentary question on 5 July, 1985:

> *Since commercial competition as such is not a land-use planning consideration, the possible effects of a proposed major retail development on existing retailers is not in this sense a relevant factor in deciding planning applications and appeals. It will be necessary, however, to take account in exceptional circumstances of the cumulative effects of other recent and proposed large scale retail developments in the locality, and to consider whether they are on such a scale and of a kind that they could seriously affect the vitality and viability of a nearby town centre as a whole…..*
>
> (Hansard Friday 5 July, 1985)

The statement suggests that the Secretary of State consciously linked the 'vitality' and 'viability' of town centres. Although there is general ambiguity surrounding the definition of the terms within the statement: not least, the meaning and the relationship of 'vitality' and 'viability', which are at the heart of this research (see Chapter Three). The ambiguity in relation to the phrases, arguably, took on more significance when they were adopted in

planning policy guidance in 1988. The concepts of 'vital' and 'viable' became and remain a key material consideration in relation to planning policy or determining an application for planning permission (see also 2.6.2). Moreover, the statement of the Secretary of State does not address out of centre development per se, although it can be inferred that it refers to that as the developing '*commercial competition*' and the potential impact on the 'vitality' and 'viability' of '….*a nearby town centre*….'.

The statement by the Secretary of State (1985) is the first time that the concept of 'vital' and 'viable' was used in this context in relation to the 'health' of town centres, and this had some, but very limited, weight in planning law. It took another three years before the concepts were afforded greater weight, through the inclusion of the statement in Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 in January, 1988. This suggests that an issue had been identified, but was not thought to be significant enough to require more rapid action to resolve it. By way of contrast, the Government were much more robust in their approach to Green Belt land, where they set out that development should only be permitted in '*very exceptional circumstances'*. The principle behind the approach to the town centre is opposite to that of the Green Belt policy – that intervention should only occur in '*exceptional circumstances'* and where the *'cumulative effects….**could** seriously affect….the town centre as a whole'*. It can be interpreted that the Secretary of State's statement accepts that there will be competition to the town centre, from new and emerging formats, and that this new competition will have an impact both on the commercial 'viability' as well as the social 'vitality' of the town centre.

A number of commentators argue that the stock market crash of 1987, and not planning policy response, that slowed speculative development on edge and out-of-town locations (Fernie 1995, p.4; Hillier Parker 1993 & 1994). However, the retail geography changed not only through shopping centre development but also, in the late 1980s, with the major food

retailers in the UK seeking larger out-of-town sites for superstores, which could operate at lower cost and, therefore, higher profit (Kay 1987, p.16; Wrigley & Lowe 2002, p.32).

It was not inevitable in 1985 that new formats would be permitted, and arguably the town centre could have been protected through more robust planning policy. Indeed, some commentators writing at the time considered that this would be the case; that out-of-town could not replace the high street and town centre as the planning authorities '….*could stamp*….' on the new formats '….*at any stage*' (for example Kay 1987, p.189).

2.4.3 The URBED (1994) Report

John Major became the leader of the Conservative Party in November 1990, and succeeded Thatcher as Prime Minister. Major spent his tenure in office: feeling in the first term that he could not embark on large projects - that he was '….*living in sin with the electorate*….' and, then after the 1992 election, embroiled in crises management (Hennessey 2000 p.437-475). None-the-less, his impact on the town centre is notable through the seminal URBED (1994) study.

The economic downturn and recession in the early 1990s heightened the pressures that many town centres were facing. There was concern that British town centres could become similar to the 'doughnut' cities in the USA: blighting the centre and surrounding it with soulless shopping malls, and other ribbon development (Fernie 1995, p.7). The government, sought to protect the provincial High Street from the USA experience, through the creation of new regulations that would stop the development of new edge and out-of-town superstores (Bevan 2005, p.100). In 1992 John Gummer MP, the environment minister, commissioned the URBED study which developed the concept of 'vital' and 'viable' further, as well as an approach to determine the relative 'health' of a town centre (URBED, 1994). URBED recommended that local government should '*manage*' the challenge to the town centre, by adopting a 'town centre focus': '….*devise town centre*

strategies, implement town centre management' (URBED 1994, p. xi). The emphasis was now on the management of place, and there was a tacit acceptance that the town centre should compete with other formats, rather than introducing additional regulation of space. The approach adopted by the government was not strategic, or a fundamental change in practice. The government focussed on the operational management of town centres, through Town Centre Management initiatives, as well as on introspective planning policies which sought to safeguard town centres, to an extent, but which did not set out to prevent competition from edge-of-centre and out-of-town formats. By the end of the Major premiership, planning policy in relation to the town centre afforded it more recognition as an important space, developing the '*town centre first'* principle, although not protecting it entirely from competition with other formats.

2.4.4 The Public-Private Partnership approach: emergence of Town Centre Management and Business Improvement Districts

The normalisation of the Public-Private Partnership approach

The Thatcher government disliked and challenged the concept of 'big government', but also distrusted local government: the ability and the agenda of local politicians (Steger & Roy 2000; Hennessey 1989; Davies 2000; Rao 2003). From 1979, for the first time in the post war period, local government was not seen as offering a solution to British problems – it lost the trust, respect and support that it once had, terminating the State's reliance on local government as its partner in delivering important services at a local level (Hennessey 1989, p.439).

Successive national governments from the late 1970s, perceived the private sector as superior to, and more effective, than the public sector: enabling the development of public-private partnerships (public-private partnership), along with a blurring of the distinction between what was public and what was a private concern (Flynn 1997, see also: Cochrane

1993; Morgan 2001, p.576; Mazzucato, 2015). Moreover, the central conundrum of the public-private partnership is that the government wants more investment and jobs, whilst the private sector seeks out 'leaner' ways of production to increase profit (Zukin 2020, p.103). The 'New' Labour government (1997-2010) embraced the public-private partnership model, and 'partnership' became a favourite word in its lexicon (Falconer et al. 2000). Whereas Thatcherism became an ideology, 'New' Labour and the 'Third Way' was a tool to make the Labour Party electable, whilst adopting the principles of neo-liberalism, and discretely burying socialism (Mandelson 2010; Morgan 2001, p.527&542; Steger & Roy 2010; Harvey 2008).

There was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy by describing the private sector as an innovative force, but depicting state as an inertial one - '*necessary for the 'basics'*, but too large and heavy to be the '*dynamic engine*' (Mazzucato 2015,p. 5). Indeed, in P2 (1979-2007) it can be argued that this was the case; as Cochrane (2005) observes, there was an '*explicit and clear-cut*' move to borrow from the private sector and to become more '*business-like'* (Cochrane 2005). Flinders (2007) called public-private partnerships a "*Faustian bargain*", which may have delivered efficiency gains, and service improvements in some policy areas, but at the cost of substantial political and democratic loss and accountability (Flinders 2007, p.215). More precisely, there was concern that public-private partnerships involve a trade-off between managerial notions (such as efficiency), and democratic notions (such as accountability and legitimacy) (Flinders 2007, p.224). The role, or potential role, that the public sector could take was misunderstood, and this impacted the type of private-public partnerships which were created – often being parasitic rather than symbiotic (Mazzucato, 2015, p.207).

Neo-liberalism not only created an environment in which a deregulated market place undermined the *relevance* of town centres, the same neo-liberal orthodoxy created an opportunity for the private sector to manage public space and responsibilities (Reeve 2004,

p.135; Evans 1997). The response to the challenge to the town centre, was that the time was right to change the nature of, and expand the management of, the town centre through the 90s and the noughties. The growth of edge and out-of-town alternative commercial space was now threatening the *relevance* of town centres (see Baldock 1989; Wells 1991; Stansbury 1995; Evans 2006; and, Oc & Tiesdell 1988).

Town Centre Management (TCM)

TCM developed rapidly in the 1990s, based on the public-private partnership approach and influenced by the 'Main Streets' campaign in North America (Oc & Tiesdell 1998). The focus of TCM initiatives was primarily based on economic objectives, and the commercial 'viability' of the town centre (Pal et al. 1997; Oc et al. 1998; Schiller 1994; Reeve 2004; Warnaby et al. 2004). As such, it took its lead from shopping centre management, and attempted to borrow many of its concepts, derived from a false analogy in management thinking between the town centre and the mall (Oc et al 1998; Reeve 1996; Pitt & Musa 2009; Parker et al. 2017, p.313; Osada & Fayas 2022, p.49).

The town centre is significantly different, and more complex in spatial and land ownership issues. The territory of TCM is made up of private property and public places, as well as multiple ownership and tenancies in contrast to the shopping centre, which is typically managed as one asset and space (Pal et al. 1997; Oc et al. 1998; Pitt & Musa 2009; Varna & Tiesdell 2010). Stakeholders in the town centre can be varied and wide, including retailers, landlords, investors, shoppers, the community, special interest groups, local police force, local politicians, bus companies, etc. (Pal et al. 1997 & Beck et al. 1995; Medway et al. 2000; Healey 2006; Oliviera & Hersperger 2018: p.625). Public accessibility to the town centre is highlighted here as an important difference between the characteristics of town centres and other formats (see Table 1.1) – physical and virtual – where access is 'controlled' (Zukin 1991), with an emphasis on acquisition and/or consumption as retail and hospitality agglomerates (Lynch 1960; Dolega et al. 2021; Osada

& Fayas 2022, p.48). In theory all of society might be considered to have unfettered, and universal access to the town centre as the 'potential use' is only limited by law, ethics, custom and social norms. It is this myriad of interests from potential users and stakeholders which create further complexity in relation to the way in which the town centre operates. However, the right to spend time in the town centre goes beyond the physical, visiting rights and ability to access a place (Lefebvre 1967).

In P2 TCM partnerships and initiatives were financially supported by some of the major retailers who operated in the town centre, and who had a vested commercial interest in the 'health' of the town centre, notably Marks and Spencer, Boots the Chemist, Debenhams and J Sainsbury (Parker et al. 2017, p.313) . The motivation to invest in TCM schemes was nuanced: enthusing and engaging a cross-section of operators, including the independent sector, was problematic (Medway et al 2000). The interest and commercial investment from the retailers has decreased as their business model changed, and they moved to other formats, which suggests that their interest was commercial and not part of a 'social responsibility' approach, but motivated to increase profitability (Friedman 2002, p.133). Where the town centre maintained interest for the major retailers the public private nature of the space was blurred with the introduction of the concept of hybrid consumption space, through the development in urban centres of 'malls without walls' (Warnaby & Medway 2018, p.280-281).

Some commentators consider TCM to be a loose and fuzzy concept, one which can mean different things to different stakeholders (Pal et al. 1997; Forsberg et al. 1999). Securing funding and participation form the private sector in town centre management schemes was not helped by this lack of clarity of purpose, of accountability, or of the absence of uniformity of TCM and TCM objectives during the P2 (Pinkney 2004 p.33). Two reasons for this reluctance in the private sector to become involved in TCM schemes has been: (i)

lack of a demonstrable contribution to profit and level of turnover; and, (ii) freeloading (see Stansbury 1995; Guy 1993; Forsberg et al. 1999; Warnaby and Medway, 2006).

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

Primary legislation in 2004 introduced BIDs as a formal system to deliver financial resources for a specific area, and to deliver additional services or outcomes as set out in a pre-agreed Business plan. In effect, BIDs were created as a 'flexible tool' to enable the public-private partnerships and rationalise the way that TCM was funded (Reilly 2004, p.20-22; Cook 2009). The BID model in practice in the UK meant that participation in the BID is less a question of co-operation, and more one of coercion, albeit, democratically legitimated (Forsberg et al. 1999). In effect, the BID was an attempt to start managing town centres holistically and with a commercial trading budget, made up from private and public bodies (Grail et al. 2020). It signalled a further move to the 'privatisation', and commodification of the public realm, with private business, and not the citizen able to vote to create a BID in a specific area, usually a town centre or part of it (Rao & Dovey 2021, p4; Grail et al. 2020). However, in reality in many town centres the BID budget is relatively low due to the level of funding that can be achieved through the BID levy. In general, BIDs sought to support the commercial 'viability' with limited, if any, focus on the social 'vitality' of the town centre.

2.4.5 'Management' of the town centre through planning policy and guidance

The spatial planning approach to emerging formats in P2 and new competition to the town centre was, in effect, to seek to manage the impact through planning policy and guidance. The planning policy and guidance differed in emphasis For example:

- Planning Policy Guidance 6 (1988): Major Retail Development – reproduces the statement of the Secretary of State from 1985 (para. 7-8), introducing the concepts of 'vital' and 'viable', although it does not elaborate on them or define them. The

PPG brought a managed policy approach, and did not seek to prevent the development of new formats outside the town centre that could be commercially 'viable' for town centre uses: a determination that competition should not be inhibited by planning regulation (Cheshire et al. 2011, p.5).

- Planning Policy Guidance 6 (1993): Town Centre and Retail Development – tightened policy relating to large format out-of-town development (Fernie 1995, p.5; Alzubaidi 1997, p.79; Cheshire et al. 2011, p.5). The PPG introduced the potential role of TCM to promote 'vitality' and 'viability' (Warnaby et al. 1998, p.17).
- Planning Policy 6 (1996): Town Centres and Retail Development – introduced the principle of 'town centre first', which was linked to the sequential test (see Table 2.3) (Parker et al. 2017, p.313). Cheshire et al. (2011) consider this PPG to be a radical change in policy and that it followed many of the recommendations of the URBED (2004) study (Cheshire et al. 2011, p.4)
- Planning Policy Statement 6 (2005): Planning for Town Centres – to a large extent the key concepts were retained, and the silence on any definition of 'vitality' and 'viability' maintained.

National planning policy has been consistent, following the introduction of PPG6 in 1988, in the use of the terms 'vital' and 'viable'. Although the terms the 'vital' and 'viable' developed further, and were accepted as a fundamental part of national planning policies, they were introduced without planners having a real understanding of their meaning (Pal et al. 1997, p.71; Oc et al. 1998). Planning policy acknowledged other formants, but set the town centre in isolation. There was no strategic plan led approach to the development of edge or out-of-town formats. Indeed, the town centre was the only place where it was a requirement, through successive planning policy, for them to have the qualities of a socially 'vital' as well as a 'commercially' viable place (Table 1.1). Ravenscroft et al (2000), neatly acknowledged, that planning policy was developed to withstand a negative

impact on town centres, but that this represented Local Planning Authorities and Council's with an ongoing "*serious spatial dilemma*": face losing out on key inward investment generated by retailers and leisure operators, or endorse out-of-town development. The decision makers invariably chose to endorse the decentralisation of town centre uses (Ravenscroft et al. 2000: p.1362; Marshall 2022). Despite the 'town centre first' principle for the location of town centre uses, retail sales in the town centre continued to decline: falling from 50.7% in 2003 to 45% in 2013 (Wrigley & Dolega 2014, p.8).

2.5 Summary

In P2 there was a critical change in the relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability', which can be attributed to the political and ideological shift to neo-liberalism. The successive governments' economic and regeneration policies led to new space outside the town centre to be commercially 'viable' for town centre uses, without guaranteeing social 'vitality'. The challenge that new space posed to the 'vitality' and 'viability' of the town centre was acknowledged by the Secretary of State in 1985, and the recession of the 1990s highlighted that some town centres were under greater threat economically. The response of the government was to move away from the local authorities, whom they distrusted, and turn to a market-led approach of private-public partnerships, with TCM initiatives increasing rapidly, (as commercially focussed interventions supported by (mainly) retailers with assets and a vested interest in the commercial 'viability' of the town centre), and later BIDs. Spatially, the government sought a 'managed' approach through planning policy, with varying levels of regulatory strength, throughout P2. Significantly planning policy did not prevent other formats seeking and securing a planning permission outside the town centre. The tactics of applicants became such that even where the LPA resisted development that would be harmful to the town centre, it was difficult and costly to defend that position through the appeal process.

The problem, it is argued in this thesis, is that the market fundamentally changed as new retail formats emerged in the 1980s. Indeed, by the mid 1980s it was evident that these new formats would offer alternative space for uses that had traditionally been delivered in town centres, and that a catchment area would support a finite level of commercial trade, and that therefore there would be an inevitable challenge to the role of the town centre in the future, if this was not acknowledged. Moreover, experience from the USA with the '….*fundamental spatial shift*….' of commercial activity resulting in '*donut*' towns, could have pointed to a different approach (Warnaby & Medway 2018, p.278). Town centres are more than a place of consumption, but the town centre as a commercial market place was, and arguably still is, a fundamental characteristic of the place. There was, arguably, an opportunity in P2 to protect the character and status of the town centre as a social and civic hub, as well as a commercial one. Or, even to imagine a new market in which the town centre was a key component: where there is a symbiotic, supportive relationship to a network and hierarchy of centres that respond to the needs and wants of all users. The strategies and tactics followed in P3 are analysed in the following section.

Table 2.2(a) - Phase Two, 1979-2007: Neo-liberalism, growth of out-of-town and management by public-private partnerships.

Decade	**70s**	**1980s**										**1990s**		
Year	**79**	**80**	**81**	**82**	**83**	**84**	**85**	**86**	**87**	**88**	**89**	**90**	**91**	**92**
Government	THATCHER											MAJOR		
	Conservative													
	Neo-liberalism													
	Heseltine (79-83)				King (83)	Jenkin (83-85)		Baker (85-86)	Ridley (86-89)		Patten (89-90)		Heseltine (90-92)	
Planning							Secretary of State V&V			PPG6				PPG6
Economic Cycle		Q1 1980 – Q1 1981 RECESSION										Q3 1990 – Q3 1991 RECESSION		BLACK WEDS 16 SEPT
Retail Wave	Wave Two: Supermarket Growth (Fernie 1995)						Wave Three: growth in comparison shopping – superstore and mega-mall (Fernie 1995)							
Supermarket Development # of stores (Fernie 1995)		22	23	32	28	30	32	40	50	72	82	72		
Mega Mall							Merryhill	Metro Centre				Meadowhall Lakeside		
Town Centre Management									1st Town Centre Mgmnt Schemes				ATCM Est.	

Table 2.2(b): Phase Two -1979-2007: Neo-liberalism, growth of out-of-town and management by public-private partnerships.

Decade	1990s							2000s						
Year	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06
Government	MAJOR				BLAIR									
	Conservative				Labour									
	Neo-liberalism													
	Gummer (93-97)													
Planning		URBED										Structure Plan Abolished RSS In place		
	PPG6			PPG6								Planning & CPO Act	PPS4	
Economic Cycle										DOT COM BUBBLE BURSTS				
Access to Internet (% Pop)(ONS)						9	13	25	36	42	46	49	55	57
Retail Wave	Wave Four: warehouse club; factory and outlet shopping; and, airport retailing (Fernie, 1995)							Wave Five: e-commerce and multi-channel retailing						
On-line			AMAZON Books EBAY	EMAIL		GOOGLE								SOCIAL NETWORK FACEBOOK
Town Centre Management											BIDs			

2.6 Phase Three, 2007 – Present: economic crisis, growth of commercially 'viable' virtual space and the new age of austerity

This section critically analyses the impact other physical and virtual formats had on the *relevance* of the town centre as the social, civic and commercial hub within the community. By the start of P3, edge and out-of-town locations were well established as being commercially 'viable' locations for traditional town centre uses. The emerging virtual format for social and commercial interaction grew rapidly post 2007; for example, online sales as a percentage of overall retail sales increased from 3.4% in 2007 to 27.9% by the beginning of 2020 (ONS) (Table 2.6). Following the 2010 general election there was a significant policy shift with the introduction of self-imposed 'new' austerity, which had a disproportionately negative impact on the town centre, as it reduced funding to local authorities, and the ability of the public sector to manage and maintain environmental quality (May et al. 2020). Although the challenge faced by the town centre from other formats changed and intensified, the response remained remarkably similar to that developed through P2 – to 'manage' the town centre in isolation to other formats.

2.6.1 Continuation of neo-liberalism, self-imposed 'new' austerity and deregulation

The following summarises the economic and political context of P3, with the financial crisis at the start of the period and the increasing influence of neo-liberal ideology on policy (Marshall 2020; Marshall 2022). Deregulation and the self –imposed 'new' austerity era had a direct impact on the ability of the town centre to meet the challenge from other physical formats, and increasingly from the 'virtual' format.

A Continuation of neo-liberalism

2007 was the start of a new phase (P3) in the changing relationship between the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' in the town centre. P3 was a period of crises, and political flux, dominated in the first part by the financial crisis and then Brexit. Gordon Brown took over the premiership from Tony Blair in June 2007: Brown was less presidential in style than Blair, but did not move away from the neo-liberal ideologies introduced by Margaret Thatcher, or the principle of public-private partnerships (Hennessey 2000). Cross-party acceptance of the neo-liberal approach was demonstrated further by the remit of the revised PPS4 (2009), which was extended to include economic development, and was renamed 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth'. By the end of the Labour government the approach was more aligned to the interest of business and economic growth at any cost (Marshall 2009, p.2).

The general election of 2010 (the first of nine major election contests in a decade), was inconclusive, with no party gaining a majority. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats formed the first coalition government for sixty five years. The coalition government and then successive Conservative governments adopted neo-liberalism, an attitude of distrust of the public sector and 'Big Society', which continues as a common theme running through Government since 1979 (Wenban-Smith 2011; Cameron 2011; Wheeler 2011; Mazzucato 2015, p.xxiii; Marshall 2022, p.107). The political backdrop remained one of a commitment to self-imposed austerity. The Brexit referendum result (23June, 2016) brought forward a '*tumultuous period*' in British politics and the subsequent Brexit negotiations dominated government business (Ross & McTague 2017, p.16; Cutts, et al. 2020).

'New' Austerity

The financial crisis of 2007/2008 was, Raworth (2017) argues, caused by neo-liberalism, which '….*whipped us into a perfect storm of extreme inequality, climate change and financial crash*' (Raworth 2017, p.63; see also Aalbers 2013, p.1053; King 2014). The challenge to the economic 'viability' of town centres was not the focus of the crisis, but a symptom of it. The strategic message from David Cameron in the 2010 general election, was that the recession was not caused by the financial crisis, but by excessive public spending by the Labour government and that it was time to stop the '*age of irresponsibility*' (May et al. 2020, p.210). The 'new' austerity approach misdiagnosed the cause of the financial crisis, introducing a futile policy of cutting spending in the hope of delivering economic growth (Mazzucato 2015, p.xxi). This period witnessed a reduction in public finance, especially local government: the result of cuts to government spending led directly to a shortage of everything from affordable housing to health care (May et al. 2020, p.208).

Deregulation

Localism Act

The Localism Act (2011), brought forward by the Conservative led coalition, dismantled regional government and removed Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). The Localism Act left England in a unique position in Northern Europe, as the only country without spatial planning policy at either a national or regional level (TCPA 2015, p.3; Ellis and Henderson 2016, p.51). Focussing strategic spatial planning on an arbitrary LPA area reduced the opportunity to respond to trends impacting town centres, at a functional economic market area (FEMA) level and above. Significantly, the abolition of regional government removed the governance mechanism around which the network and hierarchy of town centres was

structured – although, accepting that the apparatus was flawed, as it only covered town centres and did not include other formats (Marshall 2022, p. 67) (2.6.2).

A national, strategic plan-led, approach might have shaped the form and function across all formats (Table 1.1) to deliver a mixed-use solution which offers greater resilience to shock and crisis (2.6.2). The absence of a spatial plan, or strategic planning, above that of the arbitrary boundaries of the LPA accentuated the priority for space to be commercially 'viable', and the need for social 'vitality' and access to every day needs of all of the community being neglected. The concept of hubs and networks, such as the 15 or 20 minute neighbourhood - where residents are able to access essential and daily activities within 15 or 20 minutes – might have been part of that solution, as well as a practical approach to tackle health and environmental issues (de Valderrama et al. 2020, p.653-660; Capasso Da Silva et al. 2020, p.129).

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills replaced regional government with business-led Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). LEPs had an 'accountable body', but had no requirement for members of the LEP to be elected, or directly answerable, to the public (Fee et al. p.4). The LEPs followed the principle of public-private partnership, and became the conduit for Government funding, through the Growth Funds, and other regeneration delivery models, as in the re-establishment of Enterprise Zones (EZs) with their ability to circumvent the planning process. The coalition government sought broader commitment to 'localism', with a view to polarise decision-making between the national and neighbourhood levels, bypassing local authorities (Wenban-Smith 2011; Marshall 2022).

2.6.2 'Managed' response to the challenge facing town centres

'Management' through planning policy

The Ministerial foreword to The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), introduced on 27 March, 2012, celebrated the fact that the fifty or so pages of the NPPF replaced over a thousand pages of national policy (NPPF 2012, p.ii). The NPPF promised to streamline the planning process, and sweep away red tape and bureaucracy. Alternatively, a different interpretation is possible - planning regulations were increasingly ideologically motivated, being used as a political and '*neoliberal scapegoat*' for the financial crisis, and weaker market position (Marshall 2020; Tulumello 2020, p.2; Marshall 2022). The message was clear: this was a resurgence in neo-liberal politics, with a focus on business growth through deregulation of the planning framework, and a reduction in the potential for intervention of local government, including the planning powers of the local planning authorities.

Table 2.3: The key planning policy concepts remain constant through in P3 (PPS4 2009; NPPF 2012, revised in 2018 and 2019) to those introduced in P2 in PPG6 (1996):

The Sequential Test	Follows the principle of 'town centre first': *main town centre uses* should be located in the town centre and allocated in *an up to date plan.* When considering edge of centre or out of centre proposals a town centre location should be sought first. Only if it is found that there is not a suitable site, or it can be demonstrated that a suitable site will not become available within a *reasonable period*, should edge of centre be considered and, if not appropriate, only then out of centre be permitted.
Impact of proposed edge or out of centre development on the 'vitality' and 'viability' of a town centre	This policy, on the face of it, seeks to protect the town centre (including the catchment area) as the location for *main town centre uses*, by assessing: a) the potential impact the proposal might have on *existing, committed and planned public and private investment*; and, b) the potential impact a proposal might have on the *town centre* (including catchment area) *vitality and viability*.
Networks and Hierarchies of Centre	Local planning policies should: *define a network and hierarchy of town centres.*

The Communities and Local Government Committee (CLCG) (2014) questioned whether the NPPF (2012) allowed clarity to give way to brevity (CLGC 2014). Chapter 2 of the

NPPF consisting of a mere five paragraphs, focuses on 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres', further distancing the policies from issues of commercial 'viability' (NPPF 2012, Chapter 7). Although, the NPPF (2012) was revised in 2018, and again in 2019, it remains closely aligned to the principles of the previous policy (NPPF 2019, p.25) which can be traced back to key ideas introduced in the mid-1990s (see Table 2.3) (Dolega et al. 2021, p.133). Although the NPPF (2019) links the concepts of 'viability' and 'vitality', seeing town centres as the 'heart of local communities', it does not define what it means by 'vitality' and 'viability' (see Chapter Three). It is a moot point, in a quasi-judicial system, whether this lack of definition of the key phrases in the policy allows flexibility, or ambiguity in the way the terms are interpreted and used.

The challenge facing town centres intensified and changed in P3, meaning that introspective planning policies, and a 'managed' response were having little impact in a period of economic restructuring of key town centre uses (in particular retail, commercial leisure and the office sector) (HCLG 2019). The intensification and changing character of the challenge facing the town centre can be illustrated through two examples of concepts that have remained consistent and can be traced back to PPG6 (1996), for example:

The Sequential Test – the type of development proposals for edge and out-of-town space has evolved and changed since the 1990s (Dolega et al. 2021). Retail parks, for example, which include big box retail form, and a mix of commercial leisure, are unlikely to be suitable for a town centre location due to the need for significant floorspace, and have a commercial 'formula' which does not offer '….*flexibility on issues such as format and scale*….' (NPPF 2019, p.25, para 87).

Networks and Hierarchies of Centre – due to the localised nature of the planning system (see 2.6.2) defining a network and hierarchy of town centres is of questionable value. A Borough or District (which forms the arbitrary borders of the LPA), is unlikely to have a sufficient number of town centres for the process to be meaningful. The policy seems to be

a left-over of the 1990s, and has little, if any, purpose in the context of P3 (2007-20??) (Mumford et al. 2019). Moreover, the policy is silent on other formats, and how they might fit within the network or hierarchy.

'Management' of Place

Although the 'management' of place is frequently referred to in the grey and academic literature, it is difficult to identify who or which organisation has practical responsibility or accountability for the town centre (Otsuka & Reeve 2007; Zukin et al. 2016, p.1; Carmona 2021, p.23). The NPPF (2019) tacitly distinguishes the role that the town centre has in relationship to society, setting out that town centres are at the heart of local communities. This creates a unique position in the universal access to the town centre as a place, which is not evident in the other physical and virtual formats (table 1.1) (NPPF, 2019). However, as set out below, the 'management' approach was revisited in P3.

Portas Review (2011)

The Coalition Government sponsored 'independent' Portas Review was published as a response to the perceived pressures that the High Street was under following the 2007/8 economic crisis (Portas 2011). Although welcomed by some commentators, its lack of rigour or analysis has been criticised (Wrigley & Dolega 2014). Many of the recommendations (for example: developing 'town teams' to manage town centres), were similar to the findings of the URBED (1994) study, and in line with the TCM/BID approach to the management of town centres (explored above, 2.4.3). Significantly, Portas sought a complete ban on out-of-centre development, but in the report this element was watered down to a recommendation for '*exceptional sign-off*' by the Secretary of State, which was not implemented, and indicates the government's reluctance to regulate (Guy 2012).

The Portas review (2011) did little to move the debate on the challenge facing the town centre forward (Dobson 2012, p.112-121). However, Portas altered the terminology used to frame the problem: moving away from a focus on the town centre, to one in which the term 'High Street' came to the forefront of debate. It is posited here that this was an intentional shift to a focus on the commercial health of the urban centre (the term high street is frequently used as a metonym for the concept of retail and commercial uses, for example: high street shops, high street name, high street fashions, high street brands) (Carmona 2021, p.4). Although, it might be argued that this is merely a matter of semantics; often the terms 'town centre' and 'high street' are used interchangeably (ONS 2019). The potential impact on the use of terminology in relation to urban centres, and the impact on the key concept of the town centre is considered below.

The Town Centre

It is suggested here that the introduction of the specific term High Street into the terminology used by the government in the way that they frame their response to the crisis facing the town centre is problematic spatially and conceptually (Marakakis et al. 2022; MacDonald et al. 2022).

Spatially

From a spatial perspective it might be that the terms are intended to mean the same thing and that they are interchangeable, but there remains ambiguity. The 'High Street' is the most common street name in the UK. The High Street, in contrast to urban centres, is often a subsidiary component of a wider spatial entity being the town or city centre. The Concise Oxford English dictionary defined the high street as: '…*the main street of a town*' (OED 2005, p. 477).

Whilst the 'High Street' can be (and often is) the main street, it will be amongst a number of other streets that make up the town centre. As town centres evolve and adapt the High

Street might not remain the main focal or most important street in the town centre, this is illustrated in the following examples (see Appendix I): (i) in Stevenage the High Street is located in the 'Old Town' and not in the area which is described as the town centre; (ii) in Loughborough only part of the High Street is located within the Town Centre; and, (iii) Durham City Centre where there are no streets called the High Street.

Thurstain Goodwin and Unwin (2000) find that the town centre in spatial terms is essentially a '*fuzzy'* concept and they argue that the edge of the town centre is '*indeterminate*' (Thurstain Goodwin and Unwin 2000, p.307; Marakakis et al. 2022; MacDonald et al. 2022). For the purpose of this research a pragmatic approach is taken to identify the spatial entity of the town centre. The research question is addressed through the academic fields of urban design and planning it seems logical, therefore, to seek a spatial definition through the planning policies of the case study locations (see chapter six and seven). The spatial definition of the respective town centres will be taken directly from the appropriate maps in the adopted local plan policies, at the time that the case studies were carried out, which set the boundary of the town centre. However, this only resolves the practical issues relating to a geographical definition of the town centre and not the more nuanced problem of what the town centre is perceived to be emotionally and psychologically, which is discussed below.

Conceptually

Although, the interchangeability and merging of the terms 'Town Centre', 'City Centre' and, more recently, the 'High Street' can arguably be accepted as referring to an urban centre hub providing 'town centre uses'. It is, non-the-less, worthwhile investigating whether there is a tension when considering the contemporary definition of the 'Town Centre' in the context of the research question. The following section examines the contemporary concept of the town centre in relation to the research question.

There is a tacit convention in planning policy, and by extension, planning law to accept that the term 'town centre' relates also to both town and 'city' centres, as they can both be identified as having 'town centre' uses. Albeit that the hierarchy of urban centres means that the 'city centre' will often play a primary role as a regional centre with a larger catchment area to the town centre (although this might not always be the case). The Association of Town Centre Management found it necessary to re-brand the organisation as the Association of Town & City Management (ATCM) to extend their appeal across types of urban centres. Furthermore, the ATCM now styles itself as: '….*membership body that supports those who manage high streets, town centres and city centres*' (ATCM, 2022). This suggests that the interchangeability of the terminology is not universal, as the ATCM felt the need to clarify the distinction for members and potential members.

Turning to the NPPF (2019), which states that: '*Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of communities*' (NPPF 2019, para 86). However, there is ambiguity in relation to the meaning of 'heart' of the community or whether the town centre has a unique 'role'. The NPPF talks about the importance of a mix of uses in town centre the policy relating to 'ensuring' the 'vitality' of town centres is dominated by their commercial 'viability' – meaning the retail sector, in particular, was central to urban planning policy (Dolega et al. 2021, P.146). However, places outside the town centre, both physical and virtual (see Table 1.1), are now commercially viable locations for what were traditional town centre uses, emerging as commercial leisure and retail 'agglomerations' (Mumford et al. 2019; Dolega et al. 2021). Whilst the town centre can be identified as part of that retail 'agglomeration', other physical and virtual formats delivering town centre uses, cannot be classified as being within the concept of the town centre, the reasons for this are considered next.

The town centre is the only format that local planning authorities are required through planning law to promote '….*long-term vitality and viability*….' (NPPF 2019, para 86(a)).

This research defines ‘vitality’ as relating to social matters and ‘viability’ as relating to the commercial attributes or potential commerciality of a place (see Chapter Three for a full definition of the concepts ‘vital’ and ‘viable’). Whilst other physical a virtual formats might, to varying degrees, seek to create a ‘social’ aspect to enhance their commercial offer they remain primarily consumption spaces (Dolega et al. 2021).

As set out at the start of this chapter the research question is addressed within an historical framework which began in 1945. It is clear from findings in this chapter that the form and function of the town centre has evolved and changed over the three phases – becoming more retail orientated in function and taking on a big-box mono-use form (Mumford et al. 2019). The perceived *relevance* (see Table 3.6) of the town centre is analysed through the lens of place theory in chapter three and is tested through the primary research in the case studies (see chapters six and seven). In order to guide the analysis of the research problem a ‘working’ concept for the town centre is proposed: Town Centre - a place which is recognisable as the social, civic and commercial hub which has provision for the needs and wants of all of the community.

Furthermore, for the purpose of this research it is accepted that there is a general contemporary practice, in both the academic and grey literature, that the terms High Street and City or Town Centre can be used interchangeably. Indeed this is playfully acknowledged in the title and subtitle of the thesis where ‘High Street’ and ‘town centre’ are used synonymously. However, for clarity the term ‘Town Centre’ is preferred in this thesis. Moreover, the new theory and theoretical concepts described in Chapter Nine (9.4.1) relate to the town centre explicitly, rather than the High Street.

High Streets Task Force

In July 2019 the Government announced that it had awarded a £8.6 million contract to a consortium led by the Institute of Place Management (IPM), to deliver the Future High

Streets initiative. The High Streets Task Force (HSTF) is a public-private partnership and, arguably, publicly moves responsibility for the response to the challenge facing the town centre away from central government (although it reports progress to the Department for Levelling Up Homes and Communities (DLUHC). As part of this approach the IPM created a new Task Force which will form the Government's Plan for the High Street to '*….strengthen local leadership in high streets and town centres in England', it aims to achieve this by: (i) boosting local authority capacity; (ii) build place making skills; (iii) co-ordination; and, (iv) information sharing and data sharing'*.

The HSTF describes itself as: '*….a professional body capable of developing and supporting the creation of sustainable structures of place management and ensuring professional standards amongst those involved in managing, developing and marketing places*.' The approach to the response to the challenges facing the town centre seems to mirror the general approach of the government to the planning system. That is to follow a neo-liberal ideology that seeks to deregulate, to seek to 'privatise' the response, and remove the role of national or local government (Marshall 2022). It is unclear from the literature, and therefore not possible to identify with any certainty, how much influence on national policy the HSTF has. Nor is it possible to gauge the level of political influence on the approach of the HSTF to the challenges facing town centres; through the government directly, or through civil servants interpreting the will of ministers indirectly. However, it is clear that the direction of national policy and ability to legislate ultimately remains with the government, and cannot be delegated to a public-private partnership.

Although the majority of content on the HSTF is only available to members of the IPM, behind a pay wall, the strategy and tactics of the HSTF appear to be based on a place-management response relating to the influence of the vitality and viability '*….of the High Street or other traditional, retail agglomerations, like town centres*'. The approach continues to focus on place management, and ignores, to a large extent, the complexity of

the town centre within the wider commercial market in which it operates. The close alignment to place management is notable in the joint response of the IPM (the delivery body for the HSTF), ATCM and BID Foundation to the House of Commons Select Enquiry into the High Street (Quinn et al. 2019). This means that the current ability to effectively analyse and develop proposals to respond to the crisis is limited; looking at the town centre in isolation to the wider unrecognised market skews the way in which an effective response can be considered. This research seeks to develop ideas relating to the response to the challenge facing the town centre; to probe further, and seeks to move the debate forward to consider how places can follow an 'adaptive resilience' model.

BIDs - Experiential and Marketing

Grail et al (2020) assert that BIDs are an important part of the formal infrastructure of place management, although they also highlight the paucity of academic literature relating to the development of BIDs (Grail et al. 2020) The changing character of the challenge facing the town centre in P3 from other formats (Table 1.1), has led some commentators to propose that the town centre must be an experiential place (Coca-Stefaniak et al. 2015; Coca-Stefaniak et al. 2016; Stocchi et al. 2016, p.17-18; Portas 2011; Hart et al. 2014). The concept of the 'experience economy' was coined by Pine and Gilmore in 1999, and was not new in P3, nor was the practice of marketing places as shopping destinations or 'selling places', which has changed little since P2 (Pine & Gilmore 1999; Ward 1998; Coca-Stefanaiak et al. 2015). Stocchi et al (2016) assert that there is a need to understand the town centre customer environment (TCCE) to develop experiential town centres, and suggest that in this way the town centre can remain competitive (Stocchi et al. 2016, p.17-18). The *experience* of a town centre is important, but the experiential is not an independent factor that can be used to respond to the challenges facing the town centre. It may be more appropriate to consider the experiential as a variable within the ephemeral and complex concept of place 'atmosphere' (Steadman et al, 2021). Moreover, marketing a

town centre as a commodity is nebulous – as seen in the many generic campaigns of 'Love' X or Y town or 'shop local' types of campaign – without a link to an inclusive vision of place (see Table 2.4) (Ward 1998, p.240; Subbs et al. 2002; Zenker & Braun 2017; Ntounis & Kavaratzis 2017).

Table 2.4: 'Love GENEREIC TOWN' marketing, four examples

PLACE	MARKETING SLOGAN	EVIDENCE
Loughborough	'Love Loughborough'	www.lovloughborough.co.uk - BID
Leamington Spa	'Love Leamington' and #love leam	www.loveleamington.com - BID
Stevenage	'Love Stevenage'	Twitter.com/lovestevenage?lang=eng - TCM
Banbury	'Love Banbury'	www.banbury.com/love-banbury-town-centre & Twitter - BID

Source: GOOGLE, accessed 29/01/2021

High Streets and Town Centres in 2030

The Select Committee in 2019 proposed a more interventionist approach: large-scale structural change is called for, and it recommends that this should be led by the local authority. However, the Committee acknowledged the financial pressures faced by local authorities and suggested that finance should be made available through:

(i) central government funding - the Future Hugh Streets fund is limited to £675m, of which £55m has been allocated to the Architectural Heritage Fund, so unlikely to be sufficient to support 'large scale structural change and, in any case, this is not the mandate; and,

(ii) '*…significant private sector investment'* - the report anticipates that retail investment will fall away from many town centres. Although shopping is only part of the offer of a town centre, it was an important aspect, and was used as a proxy for the 'health' of town centres. The focus on the retail sector of the economy shaped what was considered to be the necessary response to edge and out-of-town competition through local management

initiatives, such as TCM and BIDs (see Pal & Sanders 1997, p.70; Stubbs et al. 2002, p.318). In P2, a number of retailers were key to the development of TCM, at a local and national level (for example, Boots, J.Sainsbury's and M&S) (2.3.4); in P3 retailers adapted their business models, moving away from the traditional town centre stores and with it investment and financial support for town centre initiatives. Thus it would seem unlikely that '….*significant private sector investment*…' will become available in the current economic climate (HCLG 2019 p.62, para 3).

As noted above, the HCLGC (2019) focus is on the high street, and this has led to a perverse position in which the committee suggest that retail will take a more limited role in town centres, but does not set that in the context of other formats, or that there should be a managed decline in retail floor space across physical formats. Most significant is that the HCLG Committee's report finds that there is a lack of equilibrium in the market, suggesting that the relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' in town centres is the root cause of the problem they investigated (2.6.3) (HCLGC 2019).

2.6.3 Changing and Increasing Challenge to the town centre

The following charts the rapid growth of online and non-store retailing and the competition this is now posing to 'bricks and mortar' retailing in all physical formats (see Table 1.1). The impact of the increased competition faced by town centres has not been uniform, across place or retail types and services (Millington et al. 2014; Singleton et al. 2015, p7; Mumford et al. 2019; Dolega et al. 2021). Whilst some places have thrived, and might benefit from an experiential approach, others have struggled to maintain their *relevance* as the social and commercial hub of the community. This suggests there is not a simple formula that can be implemented, raising the question whether the response to the challenges faced by increasing competition to the town centre, developed in P2, remain appropriate in P3?

Rapid Growth of on-line

The rapid growth of the virtual format in P3 has created a significant challenge to all physical formats, with an estimated 25% surplus space designated for retail use (Chapman-Cavanagh 2021, p.62*).* The commercial 'viability' of the virtual format has in turn created a particular threat to the retail sector, resulting in reduced demand for traditional 'bricks and mortar', leading the Chief Executive of Tesco in 2013 to declare an end to the supermarket '*space race*' (Singleton et al. 2015; The Economist 2013; LDC 2015 p.6&8; Dolega et al. 2021). In the period 2007-2020 (P3) the percentage of the population with access to the internet rose by 47%, to 97% (Table 2.5). More significant was the acceleration in the proportion of on-line sales, which accounted for 20.1% of all retail sales by 2019, increasing by 16.7% compared to 2007 (Table 2.6).

Table 2.5: % of the population with access to the internet

1998	2007	2020
9%	50%	97%

Source: ONS

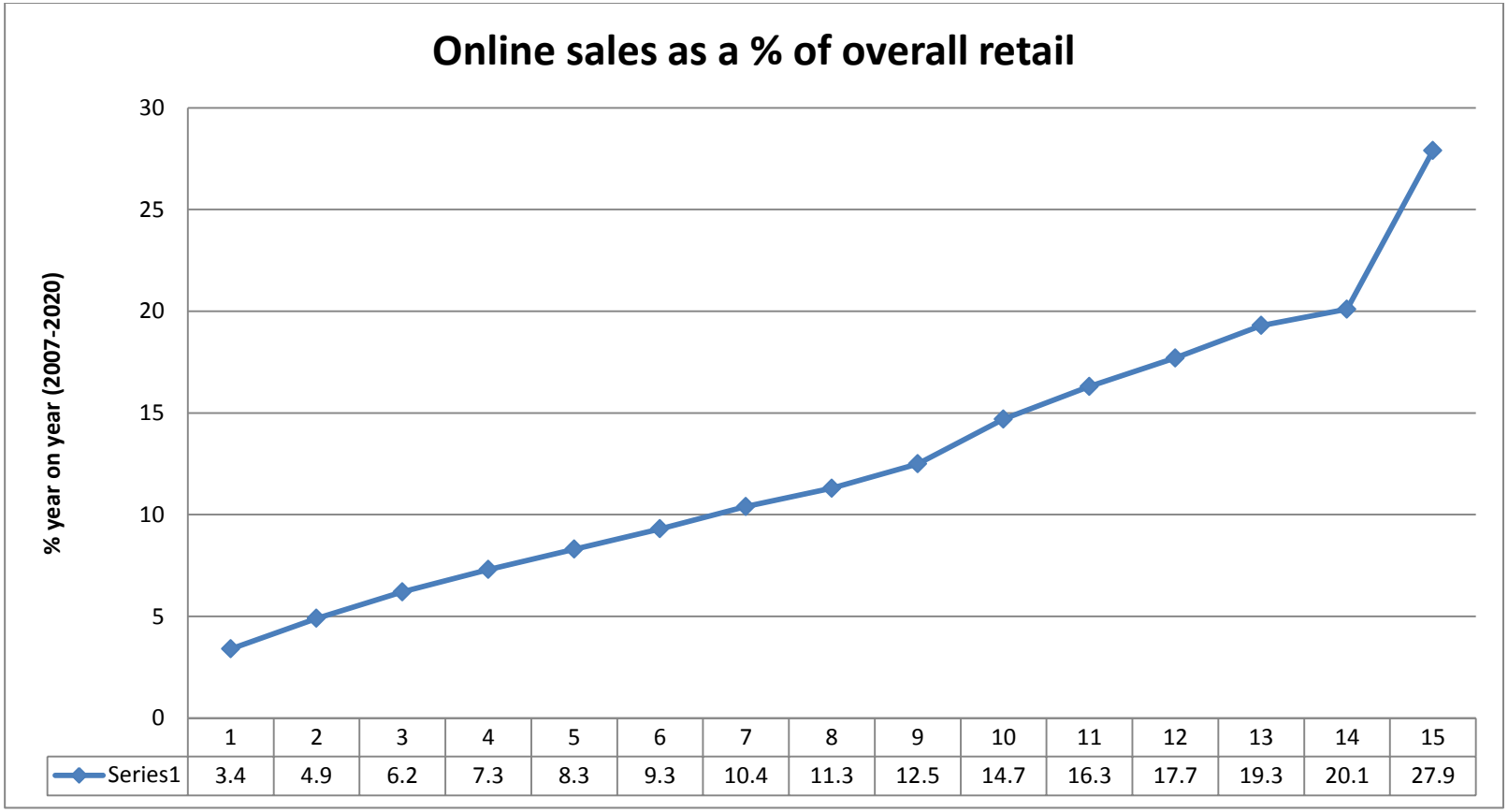
Singleton (2016) argues that to understand the disruption to the retail sector, and the challenge to the *relevance* of the town centre, calls for an investigation into 'consumer behaviour' (Singleton 2016; Mumford et al. 2019). Whilst it is clear that there has been a shift in such 'consumer behaviour', the phrase is problematic in terms of this research, as the town centre is more than a commercial space – a space of consumption. Furthermore, it seems somewhat misleading to diagnose a shift in part of the town centre use, in particular retail, to other physical and virtual formats as driven by 'consumer behaviour'. It is more accurate to say that the move to other formats was driven by a commercial model to drive down costs and increase profit.

In P3 a natural saturation point, at which customers are shared around the formats (town centres, edge and out-of-town locations and virtual), was reached as the physical formats did not create new business and sales, but cannibalised existing commercial activity (LDC 2015; Verhoef et al. 2015; LDC 2016). The impact of the virtual on physical formats was not uniform and is difficult to gauge (Hart & Ekkis-Chadwick 2018). It is not as simple as concluding that the virtual emerged as a new format, and that it will take a share of the market, which will have an impact on other established physical formats equally.

As set out in Table 2.7, the disruptive impact of the virtual format has created complex new 'types' of retail with nuanced characteristics, which can transcend the physical and virtual (Mumford et al. 2019). It may even be that there is a movement between the virtual to the physical and vice versa, for example: Amazon moving from the virtual to experiment with the physical; Debenhams as a mainly physical presence acquired as a brand for the virtual format; and, the omni-channel.

A specific threat to the *relevance* of the town centre as shopping destinations comes from the non-store retail, which is the strongest growth sector within online, and by definition requires no physical sales space (ONS 2016; ONS 2018). However, the impact of the rapid growth of online retail might not be so severe across all traditional town centre uses, where, for example, the interaction of face-to-face retains some importance, or where the 'human touch' is valued (Reades & Cookston, 2021, p.217; Rao & Dovey 2021, p.14). Furthermore, the internet and social media could drive footfall through good reviews to business where the sense of place is essential, such as some restaurants, cafés, pubs and tourist destinations (Zukin et al. 2016, p.6; Quelch & Jocz 2012).

Table 2.6: Online sales as % of overall retail (ONS, 2020)



DATA POINT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
YEAR	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020

Table 2.7: Format -Bricks and Mortar, omni-channel and Virtual

TYPE	CHARCTERISTIC
Bricks and Mortar only (Traditional retail)	Physical presence only - retailers selling goods that can be easily digitised (for example: music, videos, computer games, books, etc.) are amongst the most vulnerable (Zetner et al. 2013; Wrigley & Dolega 2014). (Examples include: Primark and the Arcadia Group)
Bricks and Mortar with on-line presence	Physical presence and on-line offer, could include delivery or '*click and collect*' or *'brick and click'* - major retailers have successfully embraced and benefitted from new technologies (Singleton et al. 2016). (Examples include: John Lewis, Next, Boots, Argos, etc.)
Omni-Channel	Distinction between physical and virtual retailing disappears; channels are interchangeable and seamless: ▪ *Showrooming* - researching purchases in physical space and buying online; and, ▪ *Webrooming* - researching purchases in virtual space and buying at a shop (Verhoef et al. 2015). (Examples include: OASIS, BarkShop, Neiman Marcus).
Non-store with some or intention for Bricks and Mortar	Some virtual retailers have opened traditional bricks and mortar venues or have shown an intention to do so, such as Amazon.
Bricks and Mortar with intention of Non-Store only	Closure of Bricks and Mortar presence and move to on-line only. (Example include: acquisition of Debenhams by Boohoo and closure of shops)
Non-Store (virtual)	On-line only – no bricks and mortar presence, strongest growth sector within on-line (ONS 2018). (Examples include: Ebay, ASOS , Zalando).

Functional Obsolescence

The fact that town centres largely survived the growth of new physical formats in P2 and P3, accepting that some were more successful than others, does not mean that all town centres can or will survive the on-line revolution (Carmona 2021, p.12). Some commentators warn that the place (town centre) or spaces (individual units and or part of a retail centre) might become obsolete, due to increased competition from other formats (Hughes & Jackson 2015, p.238). The risk is greatest where the built-form in the town centre (through P2 and P3) followed the bland design of the malls, and out-of-town formats. Some developments in the town centres took on a mono-use and big box form to maximise financial return whilst minimising operational complexities. In some cases the simplified big box form will make adaptation or repurposing more challenging, as there will be a limited number of end users or intervention will be physically more complex (Montgomery 2015; Hallsworth & Coca-Stefaniak 2018, p.138; Kay 1987; Rao et al. 2022).

De-regulation through wider permitted development (PD) rights (such as PD from office to residential), could see repurposing of ground floor uses that do not attract significant numbers of visitors, or promote a flow of people (Carmona, 2021). To focus policy and strategy on one sector of the town centre economy, therefore, could have a negative impact on economic growth and resilience to obsolescence or long-term vacant property (Swinney & Sivaev, 2013; Wrigley & Dolega 2014, p.5; Carmona 2021, p.16). Swinney and Sivaev (2013) identify that urban centres are strongest where there is sustained footfall throughout the week from a number of generators, for example work, education, residential, tourism, retail, etc. (Swinney & Sivaev, 2013) However, there is a significant risk that a *de-facto* zoning of space will inhibit the ability of town centres to offer a mix of uses. This is of particular concern in traditional town centre commercial use, such as the major retailers that might seek to focus investment on other less complex formats on the edge or out-of-

town. It is likely that space will become less identifiable as a town centre with a mix of social and commercial uses, in a similar way to the central space of the donut town phenomenon in the USA, and that town centres will lose *relevance* as a commercial, civic and social hub (Warnaby & Medway 2018, p.278). In the context of this research, it seems problematic to label space as obsolete, and more appropriate to investigate: how town centres can adapt to new uses or a mix of uses to remain *relevant* – the adaptive-resilience approach (Chapter Three) (Rao et al. p.18).

2.6.4 Emergence of a new market?

The policy to address the challenge facing town centres ignores the complex social and commercial eco-system of the town centre, and the context of the wider commercial market in which it now operates. Looking at the town centre in isolation to the wider market, with formats outside the town centre and virtual space, skews the way in which an effective strategic, policy or practice response can be developed. It seems that there is now an opportunity to recognise that for the challenges facing town centres to be effectively addressed it is necessary to start 'Thinking Big Again': to reimagine, actively create and shape a new market (Mazzucato 2015; Mazzucato 2018).

2.7 Summary

The commercial challenge to the town centre intensified in P3 from other formats, including the rapid rise of virtual (see Table 2.6). The response to the challenge was similar to P2, being one of management: (i) to emulate the approach to privately managed assets – the malls and the out-of-town destinations; and, (ii) to simplify design and form - so that space is developed to deliver a commercial operation (Millington et al. 2014; Mumford et al. 2019). This approach largely ignores the 'value' of social 'vitality': the quality of design, diversity through a mix of uses (including homes), and identity of place (Butina Watson and Bentley 2007). Therefore, this indicates that the way town centres are

evaluated and analysed needs to be adapted to include all commercially ‘viable’ formats, including physical (edge and out-of-town) and virtual formats (Table 1.1).

Table 2.8(a) Phase Three, 2007-2020: 2007 economic crisis, growth of virtual space and new age of austerity

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Government	BROWN (June 2007-May 2010)			CAMERON (May 2010-July 2016)						MAY (July 2016-July 2019)			Johnson (July 2019-)	
	Labour			Coalition: Conservative & Liberals(10-15)						Conservative				
	Neo-liberalism													
Legislation: Planning & Economic Development			PPS4		Localism Act	NPPF		NPPG				NPPF (Rev 1)	NPPF (Rev 2)	Planning for the Future
					LEPs	RDAs abolished								
							PD Office to Residential							
Economic Cycle	Banking Crisis & Credit Crunch	Recession Q2 2008- Q2 2009												Recession Q2 2000
										Brexit				
				Austerity										
Retail Wave	Wave Six: rise of the deep discounters (for example, Aldi and Lidl), growth of the 'pound shop' concept and omni-channel.													

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Online Sales as % of overall retail	3.4 I Phone Launch	4.9	6.2	7.3	8.3	9.3	10.4	11.3	12.5	14.7	16.3	17.7	19.3	20.1
Natural Crisis	CLIMATE													
														COVID-19
Access to Internet (% Pop)	61	65	70	73	77	80	83	84	86	89	90	90	93	96
Town Centre & Place Management					Portas Report 2011	Grimsey Review I			200 BIDs (UK)	BIDs UK combined LEVY £65.5m		Grimsey Review II	Future High Streets	

2.8 Conclusions and Discussion

This chapter has attempted to chart the changing relationship between social vitality and commercial viability in town centres within a historical framework, and to critically evaluate the effectiveness of policy and support the development of future policies (Mazzucato 2018 p.278). However, the challenge of capturing the key issues in contemporary history is not insignificant: distilling the frenzy of the current crisis to develop a potential response for the future *relevance* of town centres (Hennessey 2012).

In the immediate, post war period, the town centre was an essential and 'vital' place, both commercially and socially (Hubbard 2017). This changed as physical space outside the town centre, and virtual formats became commercially 'viable' for traditional town centre uses, in particular retail and commercial leisure. The literature reviewed in this chapter finds that the challenge to the town centre from other formats was tacitly accepted and even endorsed within a neoliberal and increasingly deregulated system. The literature review points to an accepted and prevailing theory, which emerged in P2 and continued in P3: *Town centres should be better managed, through private-public partnerships that focus on the experience of the customer: following a place management approach, adopting the commercial practices of the privately owned assets like the mall, retail and leisure parks.*

Town centres are dynamic places, and are more than a consumer destination, with the government telling us that the town centre should be the 'heart of local communities' and offer a 'suitable mix of uses' (NPPF 2019, p.25, para 85). However, there needs to be a reason to visit them, with shopping being an important element, as not all town centres will attract visitors on non-vital errands (Gehl 2001, p.11-13; Montgomery 2015; Mumford et al. 2019; Carmona 2021, p.23; Rao & Dovey 2021, p1). The commodification of space (consistent in P2 and P3) created a de-facto zoning approach, based on commercial drivers, operating outside the planning system (Ward 2020; Talen & Park 2021, p.3). The out-of-town format tends to be aesthetically bland with big box, mono-use built form, and a

cartel-like business model, favouring established high street names – thereby suppressing innovation and competition (Warnaby & Medway 2018; Friedman 2002 p.131-132). The contemporary 'management' approach to the challenge facing town centres (Carmona 2021 p.15) ignores the complexity of the town centre within the wider commercial, but undefined, market that it operates in.

This chapter has set the background to the research. The next chapter sets the place theory approach which underpins this research, and then analyses the concepts that were proposed in P2 ('vital' and 'viable') and P3 ('adaptive-resilience') to respond to the challenge facing the town centre; and, chapter four introduces the conceptual analytical framework designed as research framework as a method of investigation to address the research problem (1.2.1).

Chapter Three: Place Theory Approach to the Research and Conceptual Frameworks: (i) the concepts 'vital' and 'viable'; and, (ii) the concept of adaptive-resilience

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second of the research objectives guiding the thesis: *to conceptualise place theory as being fundamental to this research and to define the key concepts that have emerged to respond to the challenges facing town centres: 'vital' and 'viable'; and, 'adaptive resilience'.*

The first part of the chapter sets out place theory as the foundation for the conceptual empirical research into the changing relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' in the town centre. The second part of the chapter analyses the significance of the concepts: (i) 'vital' and 'viable' (P2); and, the concept of 'adaptive-resilience' (P3) (Wrigley & Lambrini 2014, p.78). Following a review of the literature a definition of the concepts is proposed for the purpose of this research, which can be used to effectively address the research problem (1.2). A clear definition of theories and terms is central to this research to reduce the risk of confusion in the field, and to establish a 'roadmap' to analyse and unpack the changing relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' in the town centre (Caplan & Nelson 1973; see also: Schon & Rein 1994; Forsyth 2012). It is important for empirical research that there are adequate and unambiguous definitions of features and concepts, ensuring that there is clarity in the definition of terms that are at the heart of the research.

3.2 Place Theory Approach to the Research Problem

This research adopts the widely accepted approach to the study of public life, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian research community, by following theoretical concepts, empirical methods and a pragmatic approach (Gehl & Svarre 2013, p.78; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007, p.237). The focus of this research is place – the town centre: the way in which the town centre is defined and spatially captured can be problematic as it is a shifting, changing and evolving phenomenon (Thurstain-Goodwin & Unwin 2000; Marakakis et al. 2022)(2.6.2). For the purpose of this research, as indicated, a pragmatic approach is adopted: each town centre falls within the jurisdiction of a local planning authority (LPA) which has a statutory responsibility to adopt a Local Plan – it is the LPA definition which is broadly accepted (2.6.2). However, identifying the physical location that defines a town centre is only one part of the challenge, as there is a second and more elusive element: '*sense of place*'. The '*sense of place*' relates to the physical and psychological perception of place. The research seeks to understand if the nature of the town centres is such that they possess greater social and civic value, compared with other retail formats, and that they have a more meaning in the collective psyche.

Jane Jacobs (1961), writing about the emerging situation in the USA, in the middle period of P1 (1945-1979), pointed to the danger of focussing too much on the commercialisation of place as a '*zoned*', abstract entity, through the lens of a bureaucratic planning system (Jacobs 1961, p.186). The '*kind of problem a city [or place] is'*, Jacobs (1961) concluded, could be identified as a problem '*….in organised complexity…*', i.e. a problem with too many variables to isolate (Jacobs 1961, p.433; Hirt & Zahm 2012). However, Jacobs (1961) proposed *four condition*s to '*….generate exuberant diversity in a city's streets and districts*….', which are: 1. primary mixed uses 2. small blocks 3. aged buildings 4. Concentration (Jacobs 1961, p.152-177). The value or even the ability to follow this recipe for successful urban spaces is unclear, although the theory offers an attractive proposition

and they have been applied elsewhere (Talen 2012). Indeed, Jacobs pointed out problems, but did not to seek to create and develop tools for *'....systematizing observations*' (Gehl & Svarre 2013 p.51).

3.2.1 Morphological Period Concept

The previous chapter introduced an historical framework, used to track the changing relationship between the commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' in the town centre, particularly with respect to changes in policy, location of commercial activity, and technological 'innovation'. The following section sets out the importance of '*place theory*' to respond effectively to the research question. It takes the position that urban design is a process, situated in place and time (Lynch 1972; Carmona 2013).

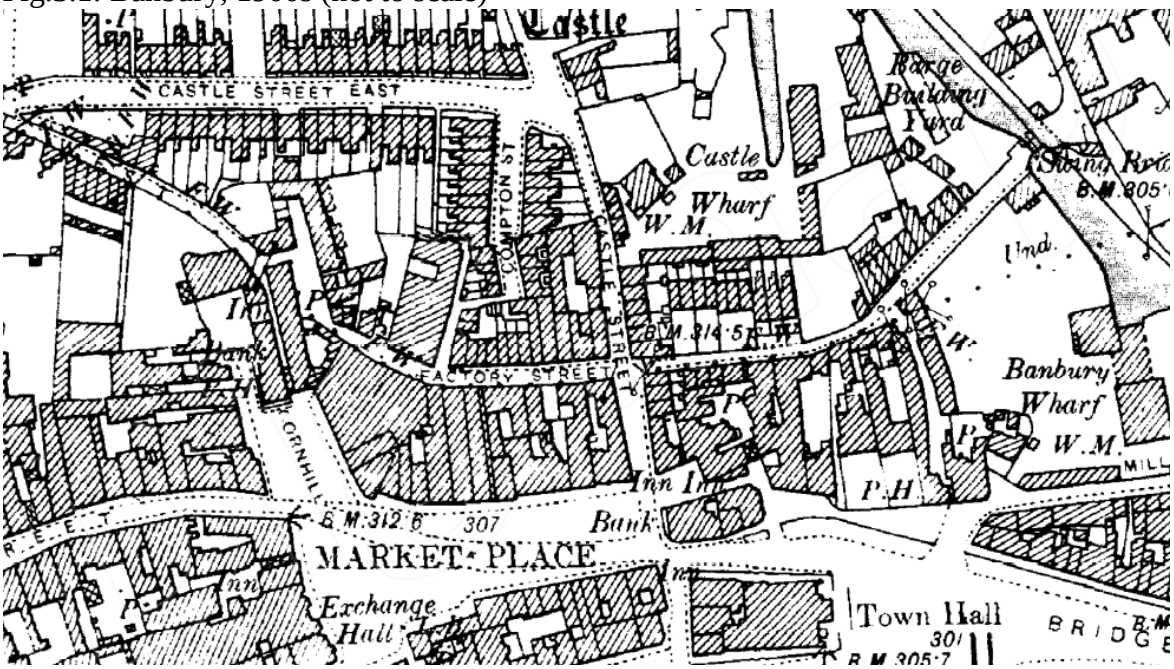
To illustrate this, the town centre of Banbury is used here to demonstrate the way a typical town centre has changed, over a timeframe of around 120 years. The analysis of Banbury shows the effectiveness of morphological description and analysis to identify trends and constraints in the development of the built environment, some of which will be unique to a place – *micro-specific* - (for example street structure and a myriad of ownerships), whilst others will be common across town centres – *macro-generic* - (for example the big box, mono-use form) (Table .4.7)

Banbury as an illustration of morphological change

Banbury has been chosen to illustrate morphological change as it is a typical example of an established sub-regional town centre, with a population of c. 46, 853 (2011 consensus). The central Market Place and environs are the focal point for the purpose of this discussion. By the 1900s (Fig.3.1) the street structure and key places (such as the Market Place and Cornhill) and the location of civic buildings (like the Town Hall) are well established and consistent in the first part of the twentieth century. The urban character has a fine grain and granularity to the built form, which appears to be at a human scale with a

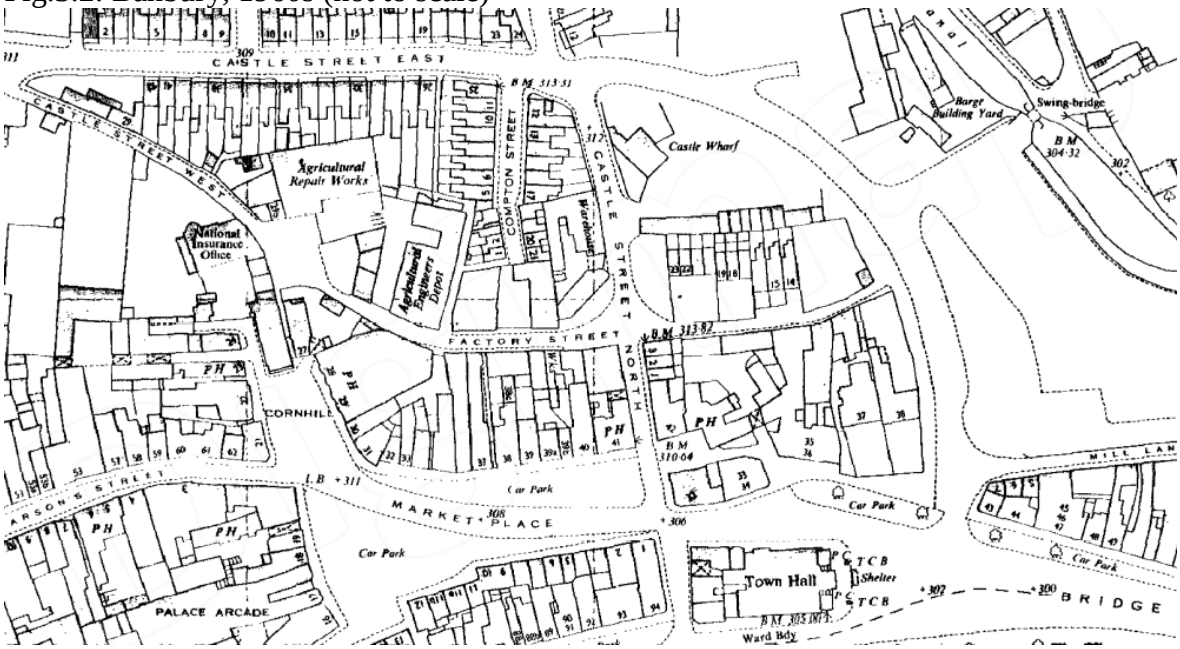
permeable and legible street structure. There is evidence of commercial activity in the central area, in particular around the canal area (for example: Castle Wharf and Banbury Warf).

Fig.3.1: Banbury, 1900s (not to scale)



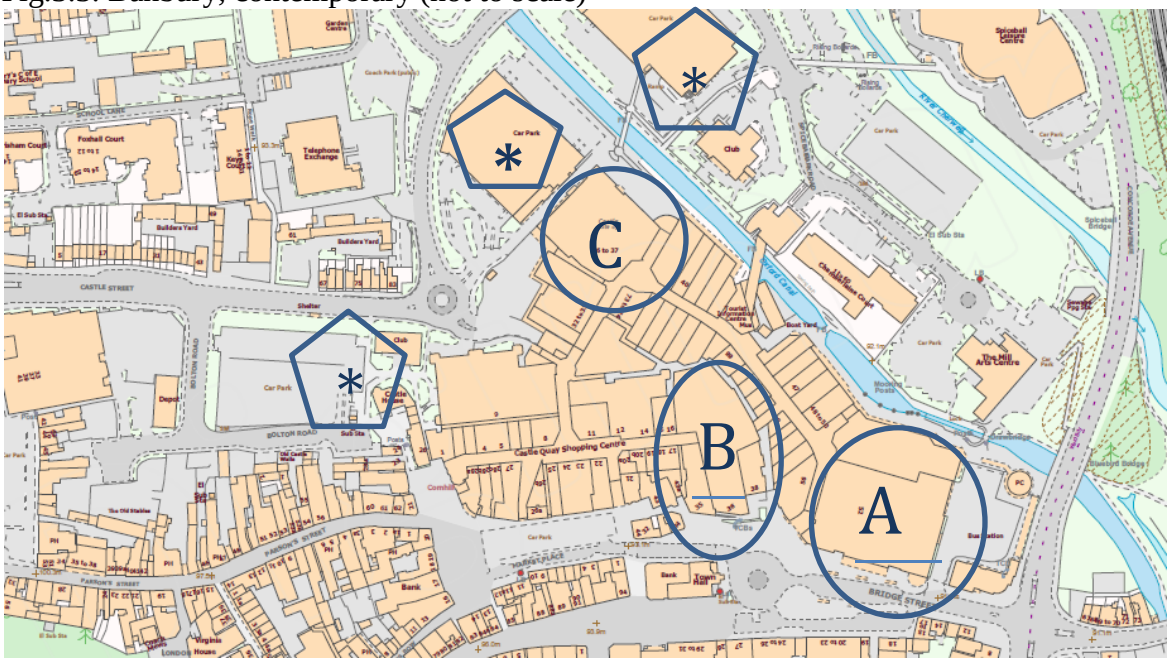
Source: Digimap

Fig.3.2: Banbury, 1960s (not to scale)



Source: Digimap

Fig.3.3. Banbury, contemporary (not to scale)



Source: Digimap

Table 3.1: example of big box, mono-use form

A	Debenhams	Brand bought by Boohoo an on-line only retailer, which acquired the intellectual rights but none of the assets of the group. Expected to close 2021 (Table 2.7).
B	Marks and Spencer (M&S)	M&S invested in a store in an out-of-town location close to the M40 motorway and closed the town centre store in 2020. The unit remains empty.
C	British Homes Stores (BHS)	Group collapsed and the Banbury store was closed in 2016 and partially repurposed, by the local authority and branded as Lock29, as an indoor market and new toilet facilities in 2020.

The fine grain form remains identifiable in the 1960s (Fig.3.2), with evidence of a mix of commercial and civic uses. The growth in car ownership, and the requirement for car parking, areas appears to have changed some of the character of key spaces, such as the Market Place.

The contemporary map (Fig.3.3) illustrates morphological and typological change at various scales; for example: plot, street, district, town centre and the built form (Butina Watson & Bentley 2007, p.127-153). This is most noticeable in the move to big box, and mono-use built form designed to meet the commercial retail requirements of operators. The

Castle Quay shopping centre was extended significantly in P2 (1979-2007). The ‘anchor’ stores of the centre are highlighted, all of which are now vacant (Table 3.1).

Market disruption and the increasing challenge to the town centre accelerated in P3 (2007-2020), with major retail moving to other formats and locations (2.6). Furthermore, the built format of big box, and mono-use units, mean that there is over-reliance on one sector of the economy (in this example retail), and makes adaptation or repurposing problematic, but not impossible.

The areas highlighted by the symbol * show the impact in this part of the town centre of multi-storey car parks as mundane built form, and inefficient land use – replacing what were mixed use or residential properties, and active spaces throughout the day. The car parks generate commercial ‘viability’, as well as social ‘vitality’, by bringing visitors from the catchment area to the town centre; however they have been poorly designed as large, utilitarian and mono-use structures.

3.2.2 Place Theory: qualities for analysing and designing place

The following section identifies quality variables for designing and analysing place. This research draws on the theoretical concepts, and analytical methods developed by urban design researchers (including: Bentley et al. (1985), Gehl (2001, 2011), Gehl & Svarre (2013), Reeve et al. (2007), Butina-Watson & Bentley (2007), Lynch (1960 & 1984), Montgomery (2015 & 2019), and practice guidance (for instance Urban Design Compendium I (2000) & Urban Design Compendium II (2013)). A literature review offers a basis for analysis of place, using established tools and techniques of urban design (as set out briefly in Table 3.2). These approaches and tools are used in Chapter Four to identify the research variables and the process followed to construct the research framework – the ARM.

Table 3.2: quality variables of 'place' in the public realm

Lynch 1960	Lynch 1984	Bentley et al 1985	Reeve et al 2007	Gehl 2011	Carmona 2019
A1 Imageability	B1 Vitality	C1 Permeability	Townscape Qualities –	E1 Spaces:	F1 Evolving
A2 Legibility	B2 Sense	C2 Variety	D1 Streetscape: Quality	*Walking*	F2 Diverse
A3 Visibility	B3 Fit	C3 Robustness	and Maintenance	*Standing*	F3 Free
A4 Key Components:	B4 Access	C4 Visual	D2Private Space in	*Sitting*	F4 Delineated
(i) Paths	B5 Control	Appropriateness	View	E2 Sensory:	F5 Engaging
(ii) Edges	B6 Efficiency and	C5 Richness	D3 Heritage in View	*Seeing*	F6 Meaningful
(iii) Nodes	Justice	C6 Personalisation		*Hearing*	F7 Social
(iv) Landmarks				*Talking*	F8 Balanced
				E3 Soft Edges	F9 Comfortable
					F10 Robust

Fig.3.4: Scatter diagram showing quality variables of ‘place’ across the physical/psychological characteristic spectrum

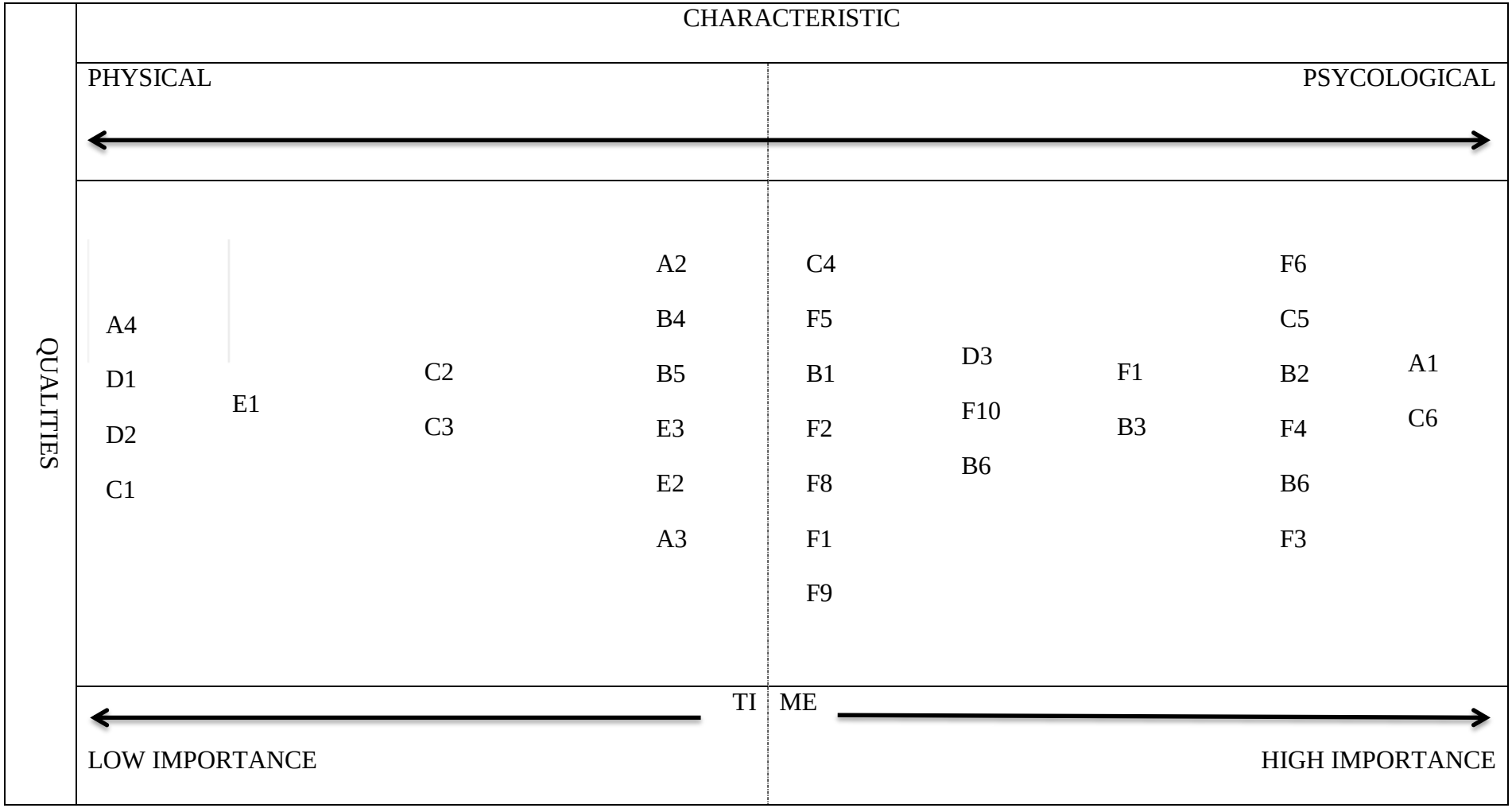


Table 3.3: qualities organised by general classification

QUALITIES	GENERAL CLASSIFICATION
B4: Access B5: Control	Manage space
A4: Key Components: (i) Paths. (ii) Edges, (iii) Nodes & (iv) Landmarks D1: Streetscape: Quality and Maintenance D2: Private Space in View C1: Permeability E1: Spaces C2: Variety A2: Legibility A3: Visibility E2: Diverse F3: Free	Physical and sensory
A1: Imageability B2: Sense B3: Fit C5: Richness C6: Personalisation F1: Evolving	Image of place
C4: Visual Appropriateness F4: Delineated F6: Meaningful F10: Robust	Unique qualities
B6: Efficiency and Justice F1: Evolving F: Diverse F3: Free F5: Engaging F9: Comfortable	Social elements and inclusivity

The quality variables are mapped above, and sorted into those that are predominantly physical and those which are predominantly psychological, although there may be some cross over in characteristics of some qualities – for example, 'legibility' (A2) or 'engaging' (F5) (Fig.3.4 and Table 3.3). This is then used to identify potential qualities that might be suitable for use in the research, to analyse place through the research framework and the case study process.

Further qualities have been identified through studies, such as the Project for Public Space (Project for Public Spaces, 2019) work and their findings on 'what makes a great place?' are set out in Fig.3.5. The qualities follow the place theory approach of the physical and

psychological and, to an extent, can be organised in a commercially ‘viable’ and socially ‘vital’ split (Fig.3.4).

Fig.3.5: diagram - what makes a great place?



Source: Project for Places

However, there is some confusion between the qualities and the indicators where elements that might be considered psychological, (and influenced by personal perception and experience), are allotted an indicator based on the physical (practical, functional and objective), for example: the indicator for ‘Spiritual’ and ‘Charming’ is Building Condition; and, the indictor for ‘Attractive’ and ‘Historic’ is Environmental Data.

The diagram is a useful tool to inform the way that urban development is considered, and designed, but it does not address two specific questions in relation to this research:

(i) how '*well-designed'* places can be delivered for the benefit of all in the community, and at what point and time? (see Lefebvre 2003; Friedmann 2000; Harvey 2006; Fainstein 2010); or,

(ii) what governance framework (across the public and private sector) is required, if any, for the management/stewardship and maintenance of '*great places'*? (Carmona, 2014).

It is also unclear from the diagram whether there should be intervention, to rectify where places are found not to be 'well designed', or if there is a continuous cycle.

Carmona (2014) proposes a *place-shaping continuum* in which delivery mechanisms, including commercially 'viable' development, and the management of space, are essential elements of the urban design process which is a journey where '….*places are continuously shaped and re-shaped*….' (Carmona 2014, p.34). However, the pace and speed of the continuous 'shaping' and 're-shaping' of place is ambiguous as are the factors that influence them. For example, what is the impact on the continuum of a place that is not attractive for investment? The challenge of the '*day-today and long-term guardianship*' of place is acknowledged within the *place shaping continuum* theory, through four main components: design, development, space (or place) in use, and management (Carmona 2014)(Table 3.4).

The four components (in Table 3.4) capture the theoretical importance of good design to attract people across Gehl's (2001) use spectrum (see Chapter Four, Table 4.5), and a process to deliver economic activity and investment within a well 'manged' environment (Gehl 2001; Carmona 2014).

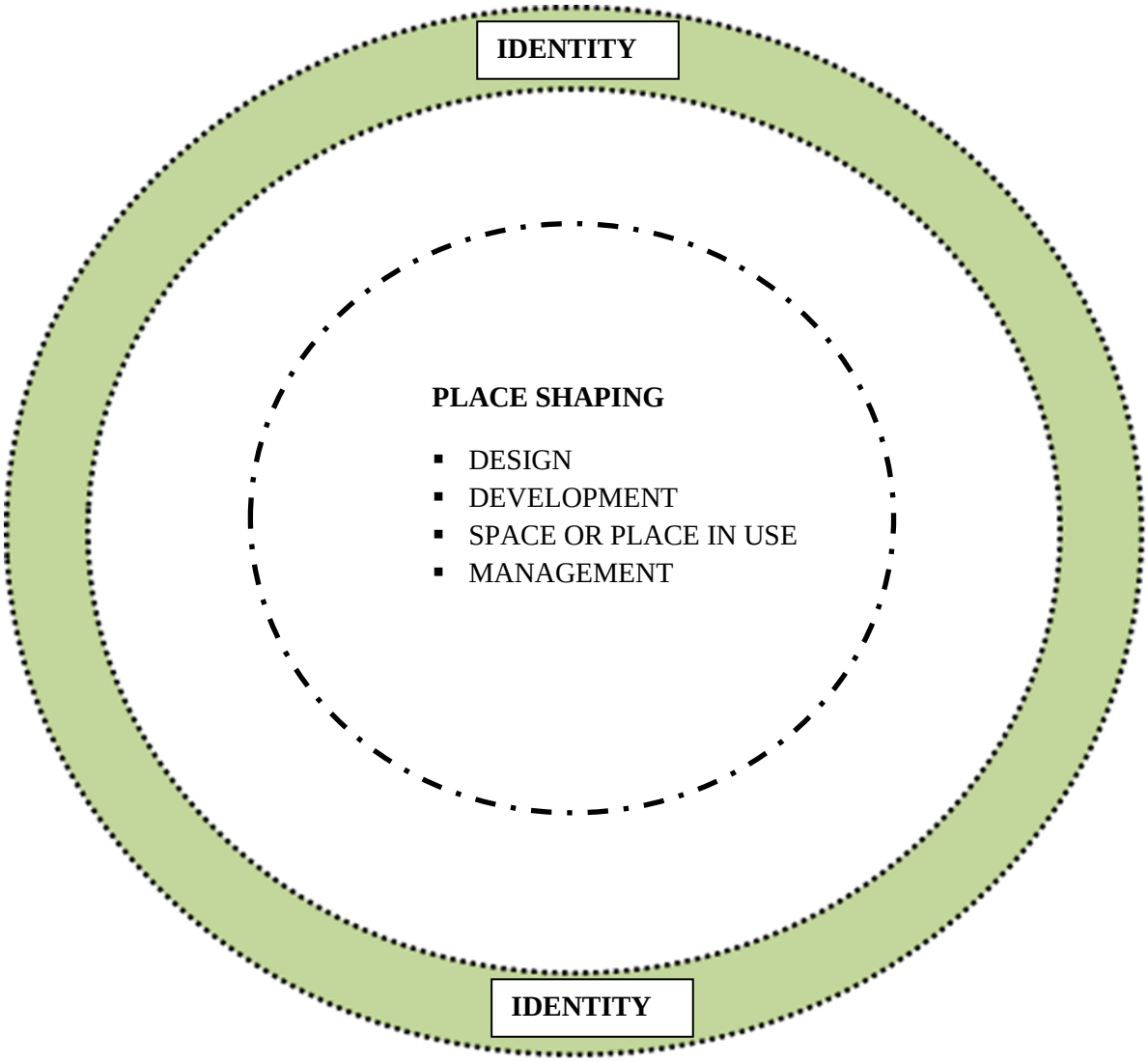
Table 3.4: Place Shaping Continuum – four main components (Carmona 2014)

DESIGN	the key aspirations and vision, and contextual and stakeholder influences for a particular project or set of proposals
DEVELOPMENT	the power relationships, and processes of negotiation, regulation and delivery for a particular project or set of proposals
SPACE (OR PLACE) IN USE	who uses a particular place, how, why, when and with what consequences and conflicts
MANAGEMENT	the place-based responsibilities for stewardship, security, maintenance and ongoing funding

Building on Carmona's (2014) Place Shaping Continuum it is proposed that there is a further all-encompassing element that relates to the actual, or perceived identity, and therefore, '*sense of place*' (Butina Watson & Bentley 2007) (Fig. 3.6). Whilst image comes from the identity of place, it should not be thought of or treated simply as a superficial marketing or 'image making' approach (Butina Watson & Bentley 2007, p.262).

The identity of place is interpreted on a number of morphological levels: there is the reflected image of the place on an individual, as Zukin (1991) demonstrates, people '*like to consume; they seek their identity in shopping, comparing goods, and talking about consumption*' (Zukin 1991, p.254). Zukin (1991) argues that there is evidence of places adapting, and becoming resilient. However, this has often been an economically driven form of regeneration, leading to the gentrification of places and the alienation of parts of society that had previously identified with that place. Zukin (1991) concludes that market culture has emphasised consumership over citizenship, which is reflected in the design and use of space (Zukin 1991, p.261-275; Fainstein 2010; Carmonara 2019 p.52-55). The identity of place, therefore, is of constant importance: the concept of identity by design can be employed to understand the past and influence future change and adaptability (Butina Watson & Bentley 2007)(Fig.3.6).

Fig.3.6: place shaping within the identity concept



Place identity in this context is not categorised as a component in the model: the physical and psychological perception of the quality and identity of a place is evident through time, morphology and the process of change (Carmona 2014; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007; Whitehand, 2001). Following the characteristics of place analysis above, and for the purpose of this research, a blend of qualities across the physical and psychological elements of place theory are used - the preliminary qualities of place are organised around four activity themes: social, economic, civic and functional (see Fig.3.8). A tentative and preliminary list of the qualities for analysing and designing place can now be developed, and set-out within the context of the place making model (Fig.3.7).

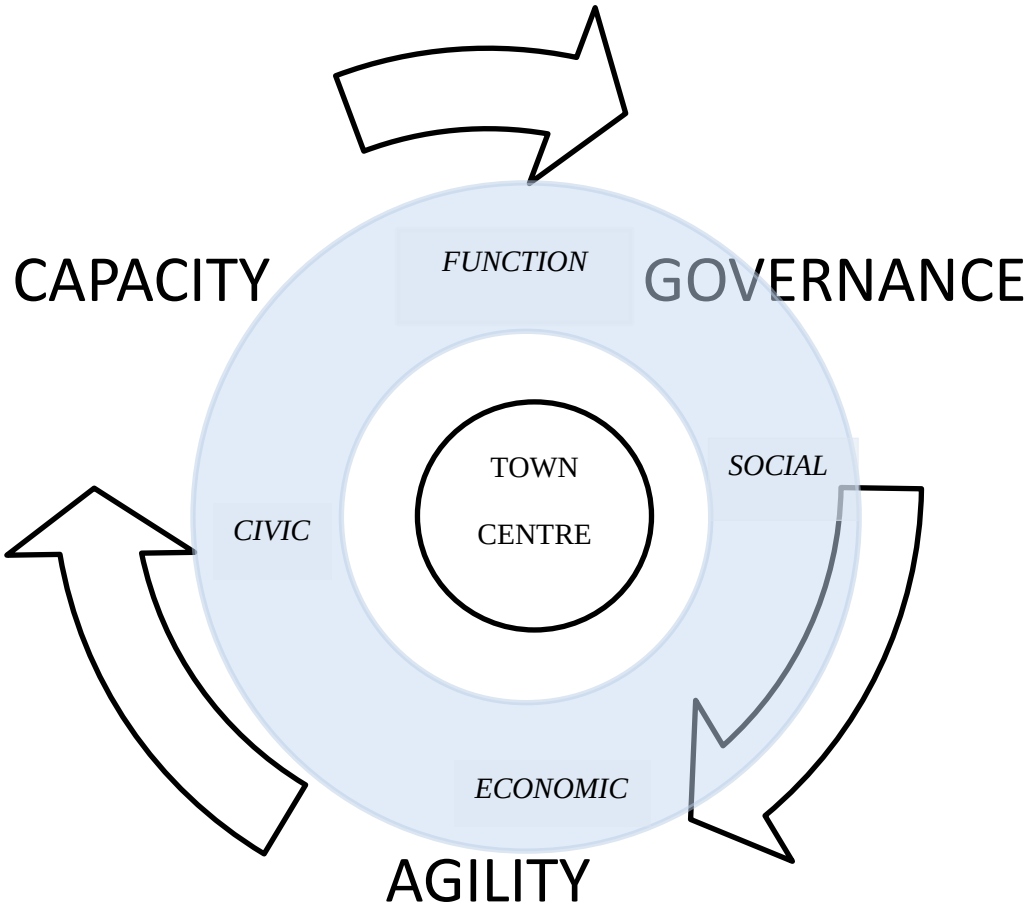
Fig.3.7: preliminary list of qualities for analysing and designing place, organised by activity.

SOCIAL	**ECONOMIC**
○ Sense of place – identity ○ Locally distinctive ○ Unique features and landmarks ○ Safe and welcoming - active throughout the day and evening ○ Community involvement ○ Stakeholder engagement ○ Partnership working ○ Vision * Strategy ○ Active stewardship and operational management	○ Mix of commercial uses ○ Essential goods and services ○ Homes – mix of tenure and types ○ Places for collaboration ○ Active frontages ○ Variety of building types and sizes – flexibility of use ○ Space to experiment, and artisans ○ Support for business - space for growing businesses ○ Place for new and emerging businesses
CIVIC	**FUNCTIONAL**
○ Identifiable hub for the community and ceremony ○ Space for public events and markets ○ Quality of built environment and home for public art ○ Space open, free and available to all ○ A space for learning ○ A space for health and well-being ○ Well integrated blue and green infrastructure ○ A social and integrated space ○ Historical significance	○ Choice & hierarchy of movement ○ Sense of arrival – gateways form a transition into the town centre ○ Cohesive street patterns and legibility ○ Permeability and walkable surroundings ○ Space to live ○ Space to work ○ Various stakeholders and agenda ○ Complex asset ownerships ○ Quality and well maintained public realm

The preliminary list of qualities for designing and analysing places have been developed following the literature review, that there is an expectation that the town centre functions as a (i) '*vital*' space - one which has a social and civic role; as well as a, (ii) '*viable*' space – one which has an economic and a commercial role. A tentative list of the type of social and commercial activity that might be found in the town centre is proposed. The concepts of 'vital' and 'viable' are investigated further and the preliminary list of qualities for designing and analysing place will be revised in the next chapter, and form the basis for the conceptual analytical framework,

Changes impacting the built environment appear to be accelerating, and becoming more uncertain (2.6) (Larco 2021, p.137). Given this, one challenge for this research is to analyse the place as it is at the time that data is collected, and then use that knowledge to speculate on theoretical and practical options to formulate an adaptive-resilience response to change and/or crisis (Larco 2021, p.139; Carmona 2020).

Fig.3.8: qualities for analysing and designing place by activity



The following sections critically examines the concepts that emerged in P2 (1979-2007): the concepts of ‘vitality’ and ‘viability’; and, the concept of ‘adaptive-resilience’.

3.3 The Conceptual Framework of the Concepts 'Vital' and 'Viable' in Relation to the 'Health' of the Town Centre

The following section critically examines the concepts of social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability'. The phrases emerged in P2 (1979-2007), as we saw in the previous chapter, and have been accepted as part of national planning policy and guidance since 1988 (2.4.2). However the terms have not been defined in relation to the town centre within planning policies or guidance; indeed, some commentators consider that they were adopted and integrated into national planning policies without planners having a real understanding of the meaning (Pal et al. 1997, p. 71; Oc et al. 1998). The following seeks to define the terms so that they are researchable.

3.3.1 The Concepts of 'Vital' and 'Viable'

PHASE	CONCEPT	INDICATOR
TWO (1979-2007)	SOCIAL VITALITY	▪ HEALTH
	COMMERCIAL VIABILITY	

In order to effectively address the research question, it is necessary to begin by seeking the literal meaning of the terms; as it is acknowledged in English law that phrases should have a literal meaning, unless that would deliver an absurd result (see Kavanagh 2004, p.262). The concise Oxford English Dictionary defines the terms as:

Vital adjective 1 absolutely necessary; essential. **2** essential for life; the vital organs. **3** full of energy; lively. **Noun (vitals)** the body's important internal organs.

- DERIVATIVES **vitality** adverb.
- ORIGIN Latin vitalis (Compact OED 2005, p.1162).

Viable /**vy**-uh-b'l/ **adjective 1** capable of working successfully: *the belief that there are no viable alternatives to formal schooling*. **2** (of a plant, animal or cell) capable of surviving or living successfully.

- DERIVATIVES **viability** noun **viably** adverb.
- ORIGIN French (Compact OED 2005, p.1157).

A natural conclusion, from the dictionary definition of the words, is that the term 'vital' takes precedence over the term 'viable', as 'vital' is 'absolutely necessary' whereas 'viable' is 'capable'. This research adopts the Jacobs (1960) theory that the city, or in this case the town centre, is a living organism within an ecosystem (Jacobs 1960). It would seem logical in the context of the town centre, theoretically at least, that a place should only be considered commercially 'viable', having the ability to deliver town centre uses, when it can sustain a socially 'vital' role. Therefore, within the complex town centre ecosystem social 'vitality' is 'absolutely necessary'.

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the literature suggests that the commercial 'viability' of town centres became their driving characteristic, with social 'vitality' significantly less important through P2, and accelerated in P3. Using the historical framework (see Chapter Two), the changing relationship between the town centre as a 'vital' and 'viable' space can be tracked: in Phase Two (1979-2007) the town centre ceased being a 'vital' place for many in society, as new physical (edge and out-of-town), and virtual formats emerged. It is, therefore, necessary to consider the evolution of the meaning of the terms from the perspective of planning and urban design theory and practice. Following the ecosystem theory a tentative definition can be posited:

- '**vital**' refers to the very being of something, that it is 'absolutely necessary' for life to exist; whereas,
- '**viable**' is subservient to 'vital', it enables something to 'work successfully' or for a living organism to be '*capable of surviving*' (Jacobs 1960; Hirt & Zahm, 2012,p.24-26).

The URBED (1994) study accepted the notion of 'vital' and 'viable' town centres, as introduced by the Secretary of State in 1985 (2.4.2), proposing the following rudimentary definition:

- **Vitality** – *refers to how busy an urban centre is at different times and locations*;
- **Viability** – *the continuing ability of a centre to attract continuing investment, not only to maintain the fabric, but also to allow for improvement and adaptation to changing needs* (URBED 1994, p.55).

This broad definition was adopted by many commentators, including Ravenscroft (2000), to mean that a town centre requires both social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' to be successful, or in URBED's (1994) phrase, to be 'healthy' (Ravenscroft 2000; URBED 1994). Ravenscroft developed (2000) a tacit hypothesis that the terms are linked or dependent and this shapes a symbiotic relationship within an inferred cycle of vitality supporting viability of place (Schiller 1994, p.46-59; Ravenscroft 2000) (Fig.3.9).

The cycle posited by Ravenscroft (2000) describes a virtuous circle: each element is reliant on the previous one, and in theory each part of the cycle will have an increasingly beneficial effect on the next element (Ravenscroft 2000). The sequence identifies two cycles of 'vitality' and two cycles of 'viability' and vice versa. The model gives equal weight to 'vitality' and 'viability'.

The sequencing is problematic as it is rare that a genuinely new town centre is created (accepting some examples of the post-war new towns, 2.2): the cycle may relate to a town centre which has already passed through the cycle a number of times; at what point the cycle would, should, or even could focus is unclear. For instance, a place could have 'new facilities', which following the theory, would improve its 'vitality', and would in turn become an 'enhanced attraction for visitors', which would further increase 'viability'. This in turn would have a positive effect on the 'vitality' of the place, through increased busyness, which would lead to 'attract inward investment' and enhance the 'vitality' of the place - and on the cycle goes. This theoretical sequence ignores the wider complexities of an operational urban centre. Moreover, the rigidity or simplicity in the model appears to imply that all town centres are assumed to react in the same way, and that all town centres can attract 'new facilities', and deliver an 'enhanced attraction for visitors', although experience suggests they do not.

The link between 'vitality' and 'viability' is re-sequenced in the revised model (Fig.3.10). The model points to an equilibrium between 'vitality' and 'viability; that the town centre will maintain elements of social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability'. It treats the town centre as a dynamic and complex organism; the model is a useful tool to look backwards and reflect, rather than for forward planning. The cycle can be used to demonstrate the circumstance when a town centre was essential for the needs and wants of a community, in the early part of P1 (1945-1979), when there were few if any alternatives for the majority of the community.

Fig.3.9: ‘Vital’ and ‘Viable’ cycle, based on the findings of Ravenscroft (Ravenscroft 2000, p.2534)

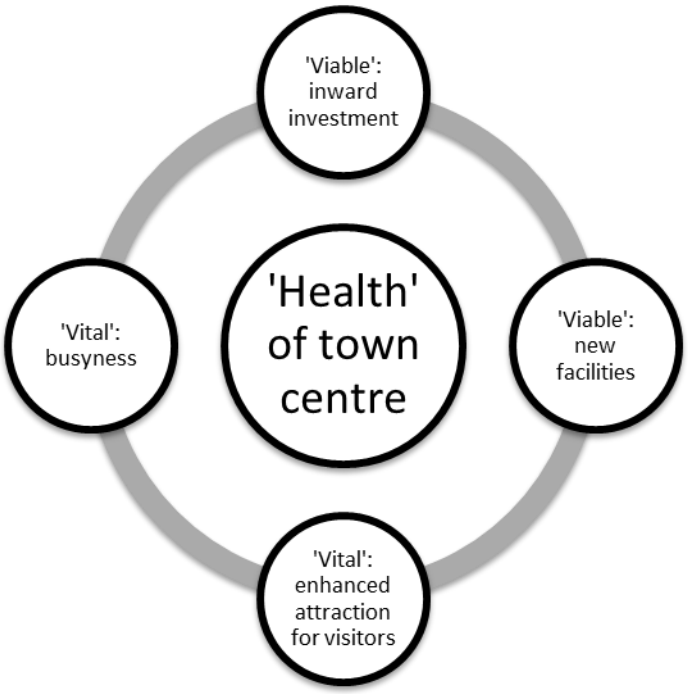
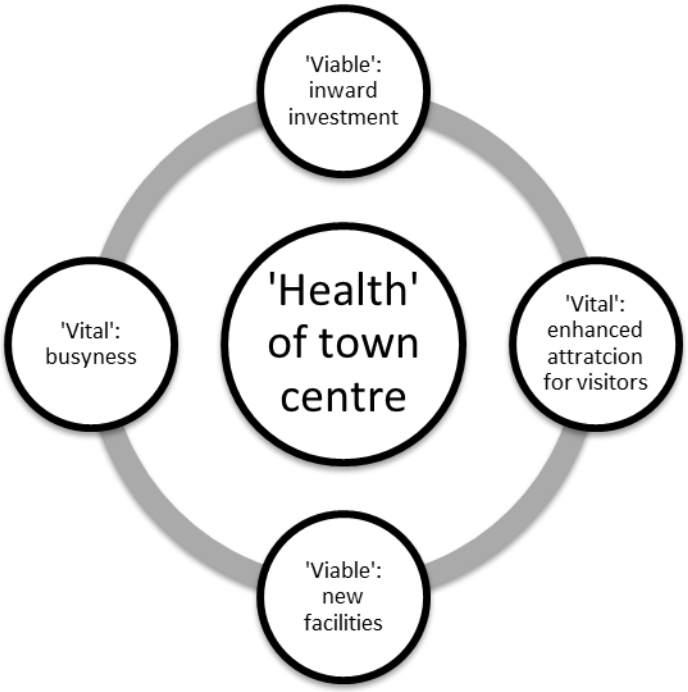


Fig.3.10: Developing ‘Ravenscroft’s Cycle’ - ‘Vital’ and ‘Viable’ cycle (Ravenscroft 2000 p.2534).



The orange arrows (Fig.3.11) are used here to indicate that there was a constant, and an essential need for people to visit the town centre, which protected its characteristics as a socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' place: the sequencing of 'vital' and 'viable' did not matter in this phase. Through P2 and P3, this constant and essential need to visit the town centre fell away as other physical and virtual formats became commercially 'viable' for what had formerly and exclusively been town centre uses.

The commercial 'viability' of the town centre was challenged and, if the cyclical nature of the framework is accepted, this had an impact on the social 'vitality' of the town centre (in particular the 'busyness' of the place).

What is not clear is the impact that disruption of the 'vital' and 'viable' variables would have on the relative health of a town centre, for example if inward investment in the town centre ceased due to shock or change (Fig.3.12).

For the purpose of this research, the terms 'vitality' and 'viability', in relation to the town centre, can be tentatively defined, as:

'**Vitality**' – *the Town Centre is an essential place which is socially focussed. People create a place with life: offering opportunity for a wide variety of activities and a place people want to visit for a number of purposes. The town centre is an attractive, safe and welcoming environment accessible to all sectors of the community.*

'**Viability**' – *to be successful a Town Centre needs to be capable of supporting and attracting a wide range of commercial, public transport, leisure and residential uses. It is a physical and virtual hub accommodating activities which are spread throughout the day, evening and night-time.*

Fig.3.11: Phase One - Orange arrows: the *constant* and *essential* need for people to visit the town centre, when there were few, if any, alternatives.

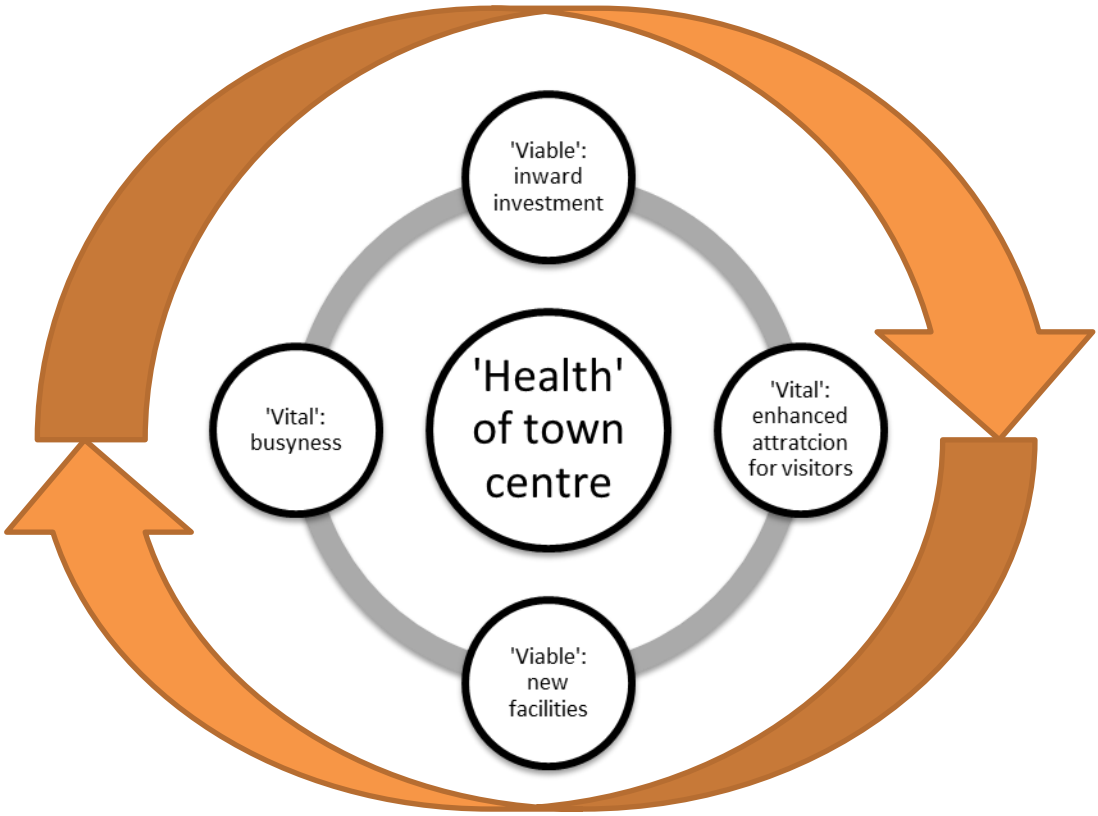
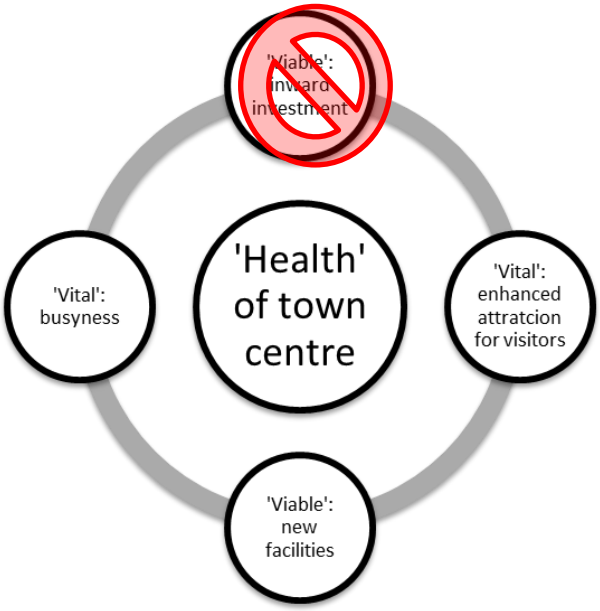


Fig.3.12: How far the town centre can remain a healthy place if the commercial 'viability' reduces in importance is unclear.



3.4 Using Indicators to Monitor the 'Health' of the Town Centre

The seminal URBED (1994) study advocated the use of 'healthchecks' to 'provide an indication of how particular aspects of a centre are performing' (URBED 1994, p. 166). In parallel with the development and adoption of the concepts of the 'vitality' and 'viability', a 'healthcheck' process to monitor the relative 'health' of the town centre is advocated in Planning Policy Guidance 6 (PPG6) (1996) which deals with town centres (2.4.5). The 'healthcheck' process was adopted by the government through successive Planning Policy Guidance (PPG), and Planning Policy Statements (PPS). However, the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) does not include 'town centre health check indicators' as part of the Policy Framework, but 'healthecks' are captured in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), which was introduced in 2014 (NPPG 2014). NPPG suggested indicators which '….*should be used to determine the 'health' of town centres*….' (NPPG 2014). The NPPG was revised in 2019, and the 'healthcheck' was omitted, replaced with a number of '….*indicators, and their changes over time, may be relevant in assessing the health of town centres, and planning their future*….' (NPPG 2019).

Fig.3.13 shows that the adopted indicators (Table 3.5) are focussed on the commercial 'viability' of the town centre, although there are some indicators which are identified as being related to both commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality', none relate specifically to social 'vitality'. Table 3.5 demonstrates consistency in the type of indicator from their introduction in 1996. Three new indicators were introduced in 2019, which are categorised as relating the commercial 'viability' of the town centre. The indicators relate either to commercial 'viability', or to a mix of commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality', with none of the indicators relating only to social 'vitality', which suggests that they are intended to measure the commercial health of a town centre (Table 3.5).

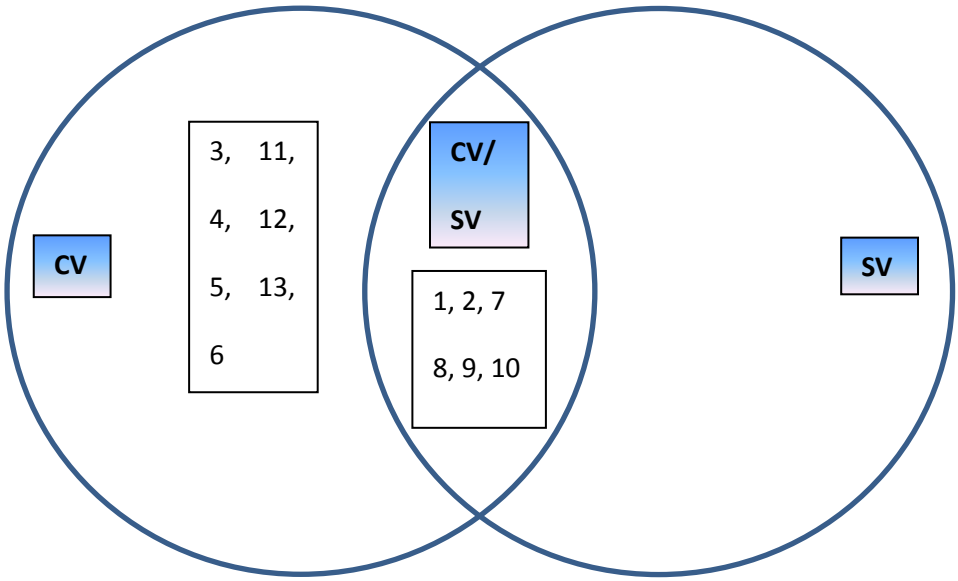
Table 3.5: comparison of indicators (updated indicators in italics)

Measuring vitality and viability (PPG6, 1996)	Town centre health check indicators (NPPG, 2014: para 005, Ref ID: 25-005-201403060)	Which indicators are useful when planning for town centres and high streets? (NPPG 2019: para 006, Ref ID: 2b-006-20190722, Revision date: 22/07/2019)
▪ diversity of uses ▪ retailer representation and intensions to change representation ▪ shopping rents ▪ proportion of vacant street level property ▪ commercial yields on non-domestic property ▪ pedestrian flows ▪ accessibility ▪ customers views and behaviour ▪ perception of safety and occurrence of crime ▪ state of the town centre environmental quality	▪ diversity of use ▪ proportion of vacant street level property ▪ commercial yields on non-domestic property ▪ customers' views and behaviour ▪ retailer representation and intensions to change representation ▪ commercial rents ▪ pedestrian flows ▪ accessibility ▪ perception of safety and occurrence of crime ▪ state of town centre quality	▪ diversity of uses ▪ proportion of vacant street level property ▪ commercial yields on non-domestic property ▪ customers' *experience* and behaviour ▪ retailer representation and intentions to change representation ▪ commercial rents ▪ pedestrian flows ▪ accessibility ▪ perception of safety and occurrence of crime ▪ state of town centre *environmental* quality ▪ *balance between independent and multiple stores* ▪ *extent to which there is evidence of barriers to new businesses opening and existing businesses expanding* ▪ *opening hours/availability/extent to which there is an evening and night time economy offer*

Table 3.5: town centre indicators as set out in NPPG (2019), sorted int Commercial Viability and Social Vitality (CV/SV), and Social Vitality (CV) (National Planning Practice Guidance (2019) Which indicators are useful when planning for town centres and high streets? Para:006, Reference ID: 2b-006-20190722, Revision date: 22/07/2019)

#	CV	CV/ SV	SV	Indicator
1		X		Diversity of uses
2		X		Proportion of vacant street level property
3	X			Commercial yields on non-domestic property
4	X			Customers' experience and behaviour
5	X			Retailer representation and intentions to change representation
6	X			Commercial rents
7		X		Pedestrian flows
8		X		Accessibility, including transport accessibility
9		X		Perception of safety and occurrence of crime
10		X		State of town centre environmental quality
11	X			Balance between independent and multiple stores
12	X			Extent to which there is evidence of barriers to new businesses opening and existing businesses expanding
13	X			Opening hours/availability/extent to which there is an evening and night time economy offer

Fig.3.13: Venn diagram showing the distribution of indicators between commercial 'viability' (CV) and social 'vitality' (SV) of the town centre



Wrigley et al. (2011 and 2014) find that the evidence base relating to the crisis facing town centres is notable for the sparseness of data and empirical enquiry (Wrigley & Dolega 2011; Wrigley 2014). Findlay and Sparks (2014) agree that there is a significant gap in current research on English town centres: no methodology has been adopted that would enable the analysis of data from longitudinal studies (Findlay and Sparks 2014) and, therefore, this work is focussed on developing a research framework to fill the knowledge gap through the development of a novel new method of inquiry.

3.5 The Conceptual Framework of 'Adaptive-resilience' in Relation to the 'Health' of the Town Centre

PHASE	CONCEPT	INDICATOR
THREE (2007-??)	ADAPTIVE-RESILIENCE	▪ HEALTH

This section presents the concept of adaptive-resilience, how it has evolved from an emerging research topic to mainstream research, its use to interpret the consequences of unexpected shock and change on town centres (Wrigley & Dolega, 2011; Wrigley and Lambiri 2014; Dobson 2016, p.340; Zhang & Li 2018, p.141). There is no agreed definition (academic or in practice), of the phrase in relation to the town centre, or how strategies can be developed so that they evolve and 'bounce forward' (Teller et al. 2016: 1553; Zhang and Li 2018: p. 142; Wrigley & Dolega 2012). The section concludes with a proposition regarding the way in which the concept of 'adaptive-resilience' can be employed, by proposing a working definition to address the research question (Martin and Sunley 2015).

3.5.1 The Concept of 'Adaptive-Resilience'

Adaptive-resilience, as a concept, emerged within the humanitarian and economic development research community to evaluate the impact that an unexpected shock (such as terrorism, economic, environmental and/or political instability), could have on the health of an economy, at a national or regional level (Bailey and Turok 2016). The concept of adaptive-resilience relating to the town centre emerged in P3, following the impact of a number of shocks, for example the economic downturn (c.2007); increased physical (edge and out-of-town venues); and, virtual competition (e-commerce, click and collect) (Peel & Parker, p.407). As with the concepts of 'vitality' and 'viability' it is important to first seek the literal meaning of the terms. The concise Oxford English Dictionary which defines the terms thus:

adapt verb 1 make something suitable for a new use or purpose. **2** become adjusted to new conditions: *older workers are struggling to adapt to change*.

- DERIVATIVES **adaptive** adjective.
- ORIGIN Latin adaptare (Compact OED 2005, p.10).
- **resilient adjective 1** able to recoil or spring back into shape after bending, stretching, or being compressed. **2** (of a person) able to recover quickly from difficult conditions.
- DERIVATIVES **resilience** noun **resiliently** adverb.
- ORIGIN from Latin *resilire* 'leap back' (Compact OED 2005' p.875).

The meaning of adaptive, in the context of this research, is that the town centre should have the ability to adjust to change, making sure that space is appropriately managed for new uses. The literal meaning of resilience, as set out above, is not helpful in the context of this research. However, the second definition offered (2) is more useful, as it is important for a town centre to be able to recover quickly from difficult conditions in order to remain

a social, civic and commercially *relevant* hub. In the context of the challenge and change that the town centre has faced in the period from 1945, therefore, it is useful to examine the concept of adaptive-resilience through the development of an adaptive-resilience Model for the town centre (see Chapter Four).

The economic shock and transition following recession, austerity, and the changing competitive dynamics is the contextual landscape in which the research question is considered. For adaptive-resilience as a concept to effectively address in theory the research question it is a necessary to understand how anticipatory policies and strategies, rather than reactive and policies and tactics, can be developed. Moreover, the concept has to be refined so that it can be used to reflect on both the specific micro-spatial level as well as a thematic macro-generic level.

The current research position, with regard to the town centre, has focussed on two dimensions of 'adaptive-resilience', which are the:

(i) **resistance** – *or, conversely, the degree of fragility or vulnerability of such economies to macroeconomic shock*; and,

(ii) **recovery** – *in particular its speed and extent plus the way it relates to the degree of resistance*.

The opportunity for this research is to move on from the position described above to analytically examine the next two dimensions, as put forward by Wrigley and Dolega (2011), which are the:

(iii) **reorientation** – *the nature of reconfiguration and adaptation in response to the degree of resistance*; and.

(iv) **renewal** – *the extent to which economies resume their pre-shock growth path* (Wrigley & Dolega 2011).

The ability of a town centre to develop 'adaptive-resilience' is complex and challenging. The potential for 'reorientation' and 'renewal' is constrained by a number of factors. These include, the variety of land interests (such as the interests and agendas of stakeholders), the constraints of the built environment (not only but including listed buildings, conservation areas and street patterns), and planning law and planning policy.

Unlike the concepts of 'vitality' and 'viability', the concept of 'adaptive-resilience' has not become a part of planning guidance or planning policy, although paragraph 86 of the revised NPPF (2019), recognises the importance of 'adaptation' to ensuring the vitality of town centres (NPPF 2019, para 86, p.25, para 86). Furthermore, the revised NPPF (2019) acknowledges the need for policy and decision making to take '….*a positive approach to their [town centre] growth, management and adaptation*', however it does not promote 'adaptive-resilience' as a key concept (see NPPF (2019) para. 85). The literature indicates that there has been a tendency to use the concept of resilience to describe rather than create a framework to analyse the challenge to the relevance of town centres as places, and how they are perceived by people (Dobson 2016). Wrigley (2014) calls for a shift from descriptive to analytical research to develop an understanding of town centres as complex adaptive systems, arguing that they will not return to pre-shock status (Wrigley 2014; Pearson et al. 2014).

3.5.2 *Relevance* as a Potential Indicator of the Adaptive-Resilience of the Town Centre

The metaphor of the 'health' of town centres was proposed in P2 as a method to evaluate the condition of the town centre as defined within the concepts of 'vitality' and 'viability'. As discussed in Chapter Two, the challenge or the crisis facing town centres has changed and intensified through P3 (2.6). It is suggested here that the concept of 'adaptive-resilience' relates to the ability of the town centre to maintain *relevanc*e as a civic, social

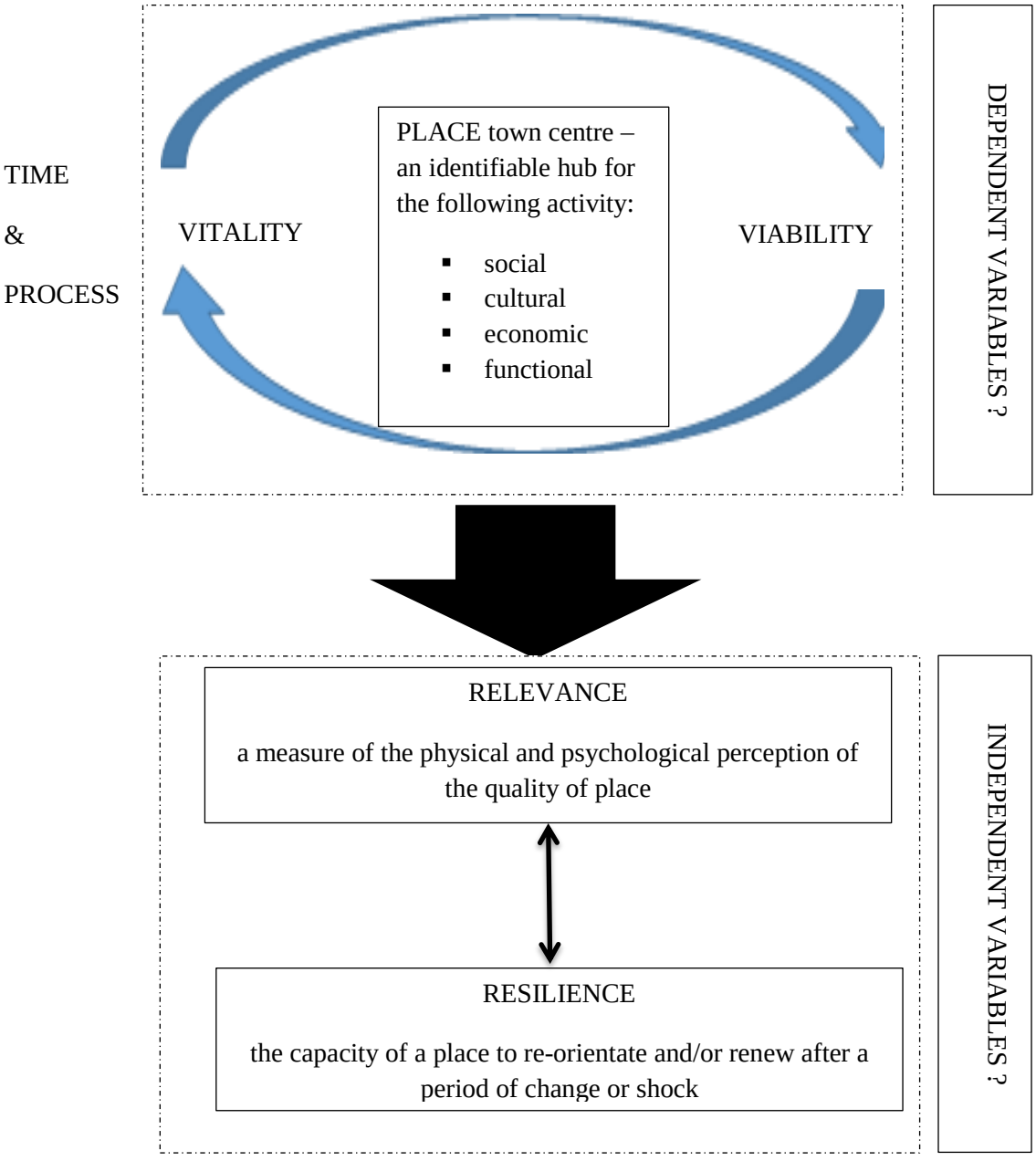
and commercial space with a distinct identity (see Table 3.6 for a definition of relevance in the context of this research).

Table 3.6: In the context of this research, relevance of the town centre is defined as:

RELEVANCE

The physical and psychological perception of the quality of place: that has to do with its usefulness, meaning, and attractiveness to people as an identifiable hub for cultural, social, functional and economic needs and wants.

Fig.3.14: the relationship between the resilience and relevance of place.



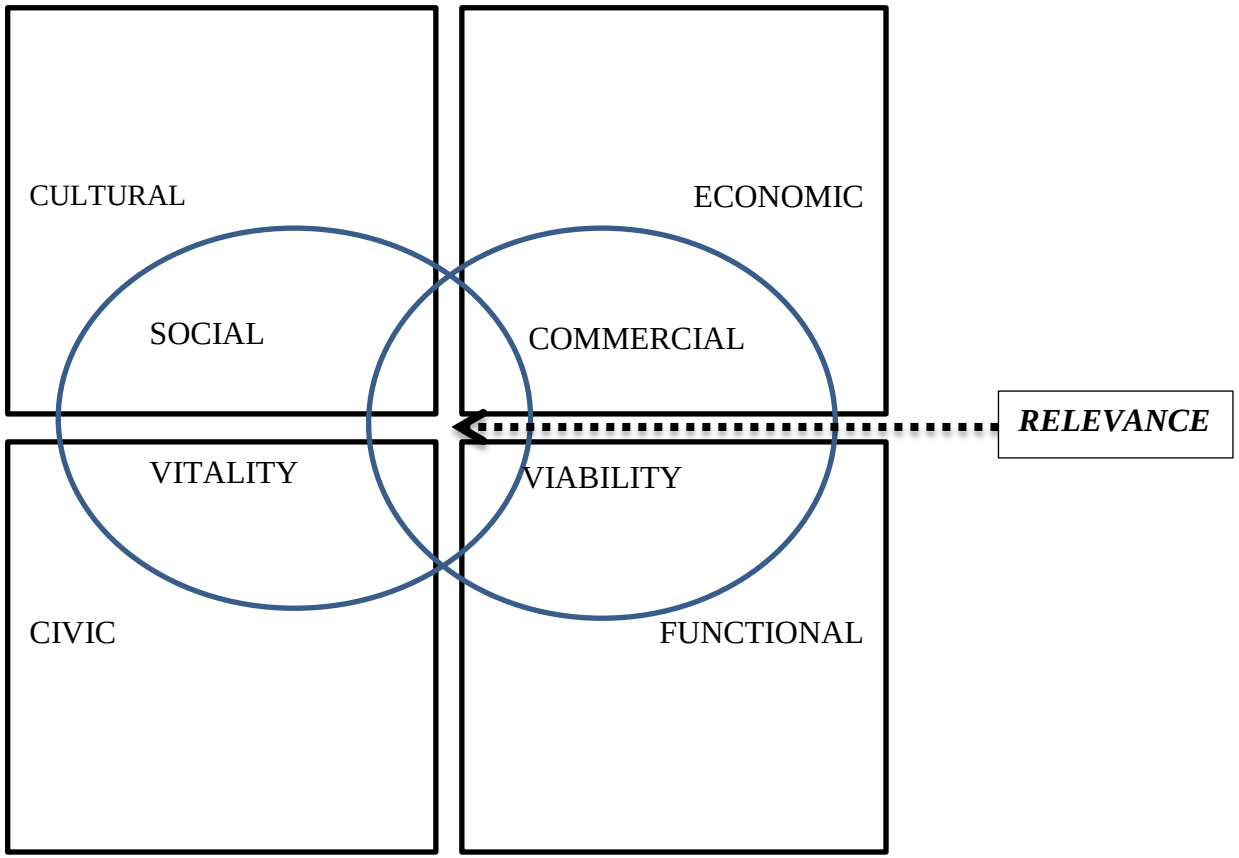
Therefore, the ability of a place to remain *relevant* is at the heart of the concept of 'adaptive-resilience', in relation to the continued 'vitality' and 'viability' of the town centre (this is conceptualised in the relationship between the resilience and relevance of place diagram, see Fig.3.14). The *relevance* and resilience of place is of particular salience to this research and the real-life problem of the town centre if the necessity to visit the town centre to access shops and to carry out chores continues to fall away (Gehl 2001).

At this stage of the development of resilience in this thesis, in relation to urban centres, the academic focus has been on the evolutionary economic geography progressed by Martin (2011) (see Martin 2011; Martin et al. 2016; Wrigley & Dolega 2011; Teller et al. 2016). The proposition that places are complex ecosystems clearly links with urban design concepts discussed earlier in this chapter, as being a *living organism*, and a '*system of organised complexity*' (3.2) (Jacobs 1961; Zhang and Li 2018, p.147). Place, in the context of the town centre, is theoretically an identifiable hub for a number of activities which can be categorised as: social, civic, economic and functional (Fig.3.14). The activity categories can be further defined as relating to:

- Social 'vitality' – social and civic activities; and,
- Commercial 'viability' – economic and functional activities.

As Fig.3.15 demonstrates, in theory the *relevance* of the town centre requires a combination of the 'vital' and 'viable' functions. This theoretical positon is refined in the following chapter and forms the basis for the development of the conceptual analytical framework.

Fig.3.15: theoretical representation of the requirement for town centres to have a mix of commercial and social activities to remain relevant as an identifiable hub.



3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has summarised and offered a brief critique of the key concepts that emerged to respond to the challenges facing the town centre, these are:

PHASE	CONCEPT
Two (1979-2007)	Vital (social)
Two (1979-2007)	Viable (commercial)
Three (2007-present)	Adaptive-resilience

The concepts 'vitality' and 'viability' were conceptualised through the seminal URBED (1994) study, and adopted into planning policy (PPS6 1996). Ravenscroft et al. (2010) demonstrated a tacit relationship between the requirement for town centres to be a socially 'vital' as well a commercially 'viable' spaces in order for them to remain *relevant* and be 'healthy' (Ravenscroft et al. 2010).

The continued crisis to the *relevance* of town centres has led some commentators to propose that an 'adaptive-resilience' approach be adopted, but what this might mean in practice has not been tested. 'Adaptive-resilience' is posited in the academic literature as a conceptual framework that if correctly interpreted, and informed by research, might be helpful in addressing the crisis faced by town centres. The basis of the concept, in relation to the town centre, is that there is a mechanism that could be developed by which stakeholders can identify change and/or crisis, so that town centres can react and adapt to remain *relevant* spatial entities for the future, both socially and commercially. Town centres are complex spaces, with numerous stakeholders and often diverse and sometimes conflicting agendas. There are a number of elements that could prevent or frustrate adaptation, for example: there may be restrictive covenants or planning policy such as a conservation area or listed building status; a land owner might not want to adapt the use of their site or building or they might be an 'absentee landlord'; there might not be an agreed approach or that there are a number of differing agendas. There is a further layer of complexity based on the morphology of a town centre, which might affect the ability for

the place to adapt as a whole, as an area, as a street or as a plot. Moreover, evidence from the previous chapter demonstrated that a ‘one size fits all’ solution cannot resolve the complexity of challenge faced by places which are unique with locational variability (Talen & Park 2021. p.2). There needs to be caution that the adaptation of place is not considered a panacea, and can resolve the crisis in all town centres. It is necessary to construct a bespoke model to respond to the real life problem facing town centres at a generic and specific level. The need for town centres to deliver change, and to adapt has accelerated through P2 with the growth of viable space outside the town centre and in particular P3 with the growth of virtual space leading to a change in consumer behaviour.

It is evident that there is a gap in the knowledge - the ability to analyse the challenges facing town centres (Findlay and Sparks 2014. p.18; Wrigley & Dolega 2011, p.2338; Wrigley 2014; Brookes 2014). The following chapter introduces a bespoke analytical-conceptual framework, referred to here as the ARM, designed to guide the investigation of the research problem.

Chapter Four: Research Framework - Developing an 'Adaptive-Resilience' Model for Town Centres

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four addresses research objective three*: to develop a conceptual analytical framework, based on a synthesis of the relevant literature, as the basis for primary research – i.e. to guide data identification and collection.*

This chapter sets out a conceptual analytical framework to guide the research, and will be referred to as the adaptive-resilience model (ARM) in this thesis. It is derived from the key findings from the literature review, and professional experience of the researcher. The literature review found that the response to the challenge to the *relevance* of town centres post 2007 has been to turn to strategies, policies and tactics, that have been used in the past, but which are now no longer sufficient or fit for purpose; indicating that there is the need for a shift in the way the problem is understood, and addressed if town centres are to remain *relevant* and identifiable as a community hub for social, civic, leisure and commercial uses. This chapter explains the construction of the model - the ARM as the research framework (see Fig.4.2 the Research Framework).

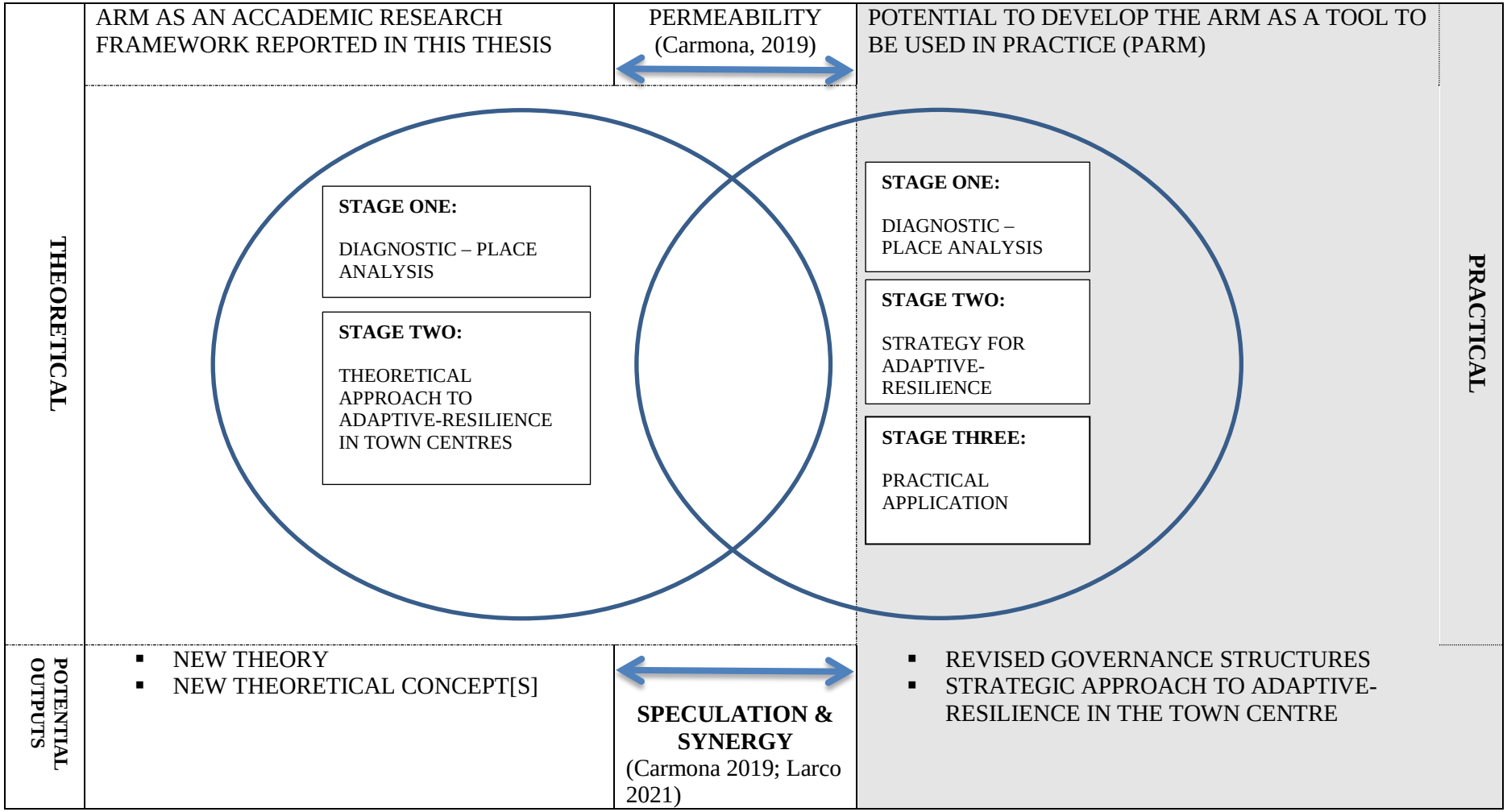
4.2 Research Framework – Adaptive-resilience Model (ARM) (see Fig.4.2)

The ARM is a method of investigation designed to acquire new knowledge in relation to the changing relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' which has led to the crisis in relation to the role and *relevance* (see Chapter Three, Table 3.6) of town centres, now and in the future.

The ARM is a tool used in the research to identify and then unpack the characteristics of the town centre, that offers an agile response, and enables an adaptive-resilient approach, and those characteristics that constrain the ability of place to be adaptable to change or crisis.

The ARM builds on the concept of adaptive-resilience (3.5); it is designed to address the research question, creating an analytical as opposed to a descriptive understanding of the real–life challenge facing the town centre by creating a research environment for the systematic collection of data and analysis. The ARM allows the research methods to be replicated across a number of town centres (and other formats), setting the foundation for wider empirical and longitudinal research at various morphological scales and formats (Table 1.1). In addition, the research framework, the area in white in Fig.4.1, has been designed with the potential to be developed into a tool that could be used in practice (see Fig.4.1 below and discussion 9.7.1 PARM).

Fig.4.1: division of ARM as a research framework and potential to develop ARM as a practice tool



4.2.1 Implementation of the ARM as a Research Framework

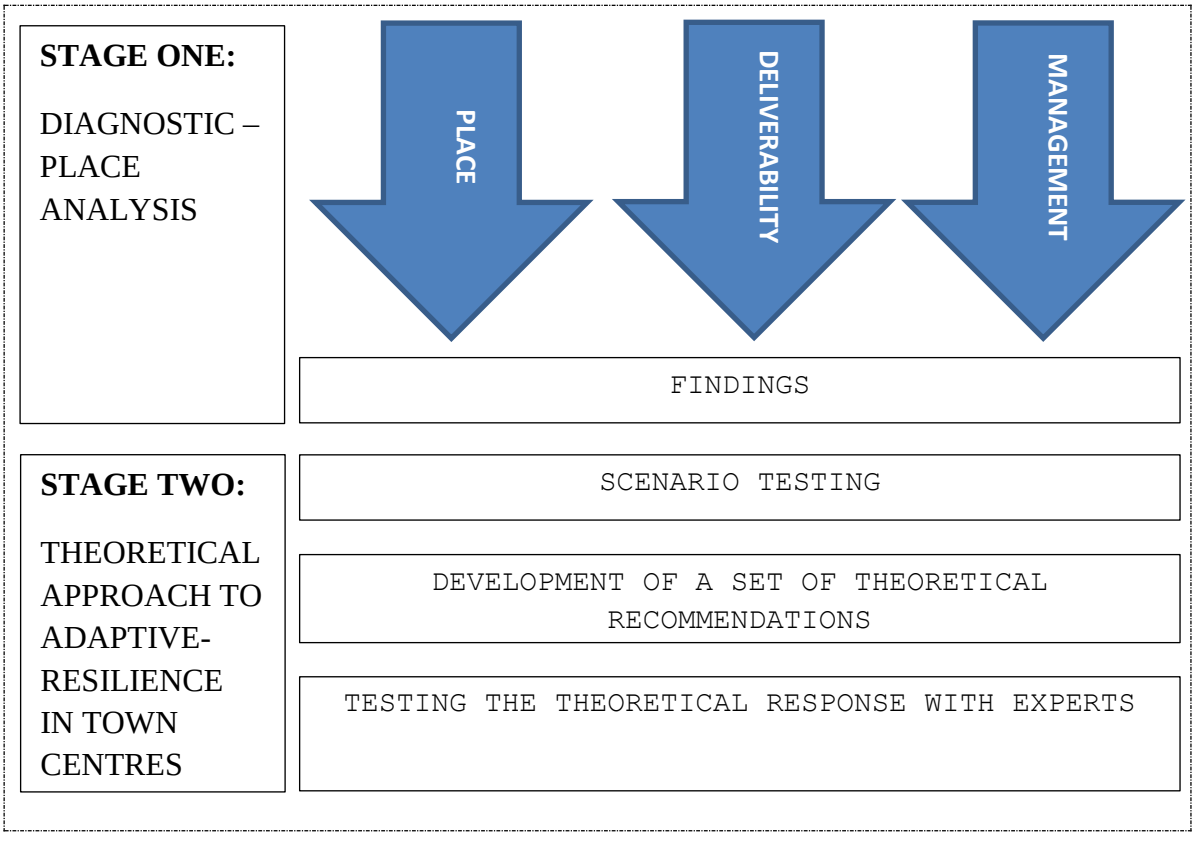
The following section sets out the research framework to address the research problem: it is a bridge between the theoretical concepts developed in Chapter Three, and the research methods set-out in the Chapter Five. It provides an explanation of the stages followed through the ARM in the case studies.

The research framework (Fig.4.2) - the ARM consists of two stages:

STAGE ONE: Diagnostic – Place Analysis

STAGE TWO: Theoretical approach to adaptive-resilience in town centres.

Fig.4.2: Research Framework - Adaptive-resilience Model



Notes on the implementation of the research framework – STAGE ONE

Stage One, the Place Analysis consists of three themes, of which there are a number of components (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Place Analysis – components

THEME	COMPONENT
PLACE	1. FORM AND FUNCTION 2. URBAN FABRIC 3. KEY SPACES AND PLACES 4. CONNECTIVITY AND MOVEMENT 5. TIME AND TYPE OF ACTIVITY
DELIVERABILITY	6. POLICY 7. COMPETITION 8. OWNERSHIP
MANAGEMENT	9. LOCAL STRATEGIES AND PLANS 10. FUNDING AND INVESTMENT 11. PARTNERSHIPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The Diagnostic – Practical Implementation

For each component a table sets out the approach to collect and analyse a set of variables, which are informed by the preliminary theoretical qualities for analysing and designing places: Social, Economic, Civic and Functional (Fig.3.7)

A commentary on the anticipated variables in the case studies is included, as well as an illustration and images from a real-life setting informed by the experience of the researcher (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: example of the theme and component table

Theme								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV/ SV	SV

Each component is allotted a unique reference point (UID), a set of variables are described, and an indicator is identified which relate to the concepts of commercial 'viability' (CV), social 'vitality' (SV), or a mix of both (CV/SV), as explored in Chapter Three (3.4) (Table 4.4). Chapter Five (5.3.2) sets out the methodological rationale for data generation and collection, but the key data sets are:

- Field Observations – annotated maps/plans, sketches, notes, site visits and observations – over a period of time, and throughout the day, evening and night;
- Interviewee Observations - semi-structured interviews, feedback on findings; and,
- Desktop Analysis – documents: including policy, strategies and masterplans, and, historical and contemporary maps.

Table 4.3: key to the tables

KEY TO TABLES

DATA SETS	FO	Field Observations
	IO	Interviewee Observations
	DA	Desktop Analysis – including: documents, maps, plans
INDICATOR	CV	Commercial Viability
	CV/SV	Commercial Viability and Social Vitality
	SV	Social Vitality

At the end of Stage One, a number of findings from the case study are set out which are used to develop a theoretical approach to adaptive-resilience in town centres in Stage Two of the ARM.

Table 4.4: theme and components showing which have been informed by the preliminary theoretical qualities for analysing and designing places: Social, Economic, Civic and Functional (3.7).

PRIARMY	+	SECONDARY	X
TERTIARY	/	NONE	-

Theme - PLACE	**SOCIAL**	**ECONOMIC**	**CIVIC**	**FUNTIONAL**
FORM AND FUNCTION	+	+	+	+
URBAN FABRIC	+	X	+	/
KEY SPACES AND PLACES	+	/	+	X
CONNECTIVITY AND MOVEMENT	+	+	X	+
TIME AND TYPE OF ACTIVITY	X	+	/	X

Theme - DELIVERABILITY	**SOCIAL**	**ECONOMIC**	**CIVIC**	**FUNTIONAL**
POLICY	+	X	X	+
COMPETITION	/	+	-	/
OWNERSHIP	/	+	-	X

Theme - MANAGEMENT	**SOCIAL**	**ECONOMIC**	**CIVIC**	**FUNTIONAL**
LOCAL STRATEGIES AND PLANS	+	/	X	+
FUNDING AND INVESTMENT	X	X	+	+
PARTNERSHIPS AND STAKEHOLDERS	+	/	X	

4.2.2 **STAGE ONE:** Diagnostic

Theme One: *Place*

Theme One	**Place**	*the current quality and identity of the town centre and the ability of the town centre to attract people to engage in necessary, optional and social activities* (Table 4.5)(Gehl 2001: p.11).

The physical and psychological perception of the quality of place is (theoretically) linked to the ability of a town centre to remain *relevant* as the civic, social and, commercial hub of the community (see chapter three, fig.3.8). Through the ARM the perception of the quality and image of the case study location is analysed through the following component:

(i) *Form and Function* - through an analysis of historical maps changes in the form and function of the town centre can be tracked. This approach draws on the morphological period concept or Conzenian tradition, which was developed by Whitehand (3.2.1) (Whitehand 2001, p.103-109).

Table 4.6: Form and Function

Theme One: PLACE								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV/ SV	SV
FORM & FUNCTION	1	X	X	X	Analysis of historical and contemporary maps – morphological period concept (Whitehand 2001).		X	

Fabric (Table 4.6) – analysis of the quality and identity of the town centre - the capacity of the town centre to attract people to engage in necessary, optional and social activities (Gehl 2011). The place analysis draws on urban design theories, methods and practice guidance, using a structured fieldwork tool (see Chapter Three Place Theory (3.2) and Table 5.8).

Table 4.5: Activities – necessary, optional and social

Necessary Activities	take place under all conditions.
Optional Activities	only occur where there are favourable exterior conditions.
Social Activities	especially dependant on the quality of exterior physical conditions.

Source: Gehl (2001 p. 11-13)

(ii) Urban Fabric(Table 4.7) - helps to create a sense of the uniqueness and identity of a place which supports resilience and *relevance* (Butina Watson & Bentley 2007; Parker et al. 2017, p.320).

Table 4.7: Urban Fabric

Theme One: PLACE								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
URBAN FABRIC Locally Distinctive Architecture, Urban Form and Public Art	2	X	X	X			X	
	2:01			X	Listed buildings – quality, maintenance, identity			X
	2:02	X	X	X	Conservation area[s] - quality, maintenance, identity			X
	2:03	X	X	X	Vernacular architecture – quality, maintenance identity		X	
	2:04	X	X	X	Agility of built environment to react to change – adaptability		X	
	2:05	X	X		Unique features and landmarks		X	
	2:06	X	X		Variety of building types and sizes – flexibility of use		X	
	2:07	X			Active frontages		X	
	2:08	X	X		Historical significance		X	

The ‘sense of place’ creates intrinsic value, which is both socially ‘vital’ and which makes it more ‘attractive in the market’, or commercially ‘viable’ (Carmona 2013, p.18). The examples below (Fig.4.3 & Fig.4.4) demonstrate local streets and buildings which are of the place and identifiable as located in that space.

(iii) Key Spaces and Places (Table 4.8) - the town centre is a complex eco-system where a wide variety of social, civic and commercial activities takes place (Fig.4.5, Fig.4.6, Fig.4.7 & Fig.4.8)(Jacobs, 1961; Hirt & Zahm, 2012). There is an opportunity for town centres to be designed to permit and encourage spontaneity of actions and activities (Varna & Tiesdell 2010, p.586).

This is in contrast to many other physical formats (Fosse Way retail park Fig.4.14 & Bicester Village Fig.4.15), which are typically privately managed, socially sterile, and commercially focussed assets. In this way the town centre can be seen as space that is 'under-managed' and can lead to, what Varna and Tiesdell (2010), call a perverse swing to the 'over-management' of place, which can be experienced in public parts of the town centre, as well as other edge and out-of-centre commercial assets – the malls and retail parks (Varna and Tiesdell 2010, p.583).

Carmona (2013) asserts that the study of public space offers 'a good surrogate' to analyse broader urban design processes (Carmona 2013, p.5). A number of commentators point to the importance of higher environmental quality spaces for them to attract visitors to spend time in places (Gehl 2011; Carmona, 2013; Carmona 2021). Therefore, the quality of the environment is a key variable to maintain or enhance the *relevance* of the town centre as a hub for social, civic and commercial activity

Moreover, poor maintenance in the public realm –a lack of care and order in society - can affect the way people perceive their safety in a space, the 'broken windows' theory (Kelling & Coles 1996).

Table 4.8: Key Spaces and Places

Theme One: PLACE								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
KEY SPACES AND PLACES	3	X	X	X			X	
	3:01	X	X		Quality and well maintained public realm		X	
	3:02	X	X	X	Identifiable hub for community and ceremony			X
	3:03	X	X	X	Space for public events and markets		X	
	3:04	X	X		Space open, free and available to all			X
	3:05	X	X		Well integrated blue and green infrastructure		X	
	3:06	X	X		A social and well integrated space		X	

The town centre can offer space for vibrant commercial activity and a location for innovation and enterprise, as well as independent and start-up business. This is the case with traditional markets or street trading, like the example in Fig.4.9. There may be opportunities to provide additional business support and infrastructure, learning from other places, and cultures (the example in Fig.4.10 is mainly a covered market, so could be adapted for other climates).

(iv) Connectivity and Movement (Table 4.9) – to and within the town centre is highlighted as important across the social and commercial elements, and links all preliminary qualities for designing and analysing place (3.7). The hierarchy, and choice of movement options, influence the way that the town centre can be understood (its legibility) and used (its permeability).

Table 4.9: Connectivity and Movement

Theme One: PLACE								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
CONNECTIVITY & MOVEMENT	4	X	X	X			X	X
	4:01	X	X	X	Quality of gateways – legibility, permeability, barriers		X	
	4:02	X	X	X	Modal choice public and private		X	
	4:03	X	X		Choice and hierarchy of movement		X	
	4:04	X	X		Sense of arrival		X	
	4:05	X		X	Cohesive street patterns and good legibility		X	
	4:06	X		X	Permeability and walkable surroundings			X

There are two parts to this component in relation to the town centre that relate, firstly, to the way in which the town centre is accessed from the hinterland/catchment area and the visitor in the role of the motorist (and apparent need for swift and unencumbered passage or convenient parking)(Varna & Tiesdell 2010; Gehl 2011; Carmona 2013; Gehl & Svarre 2013).

Secondly, the 'user' or visitor to the town centre in the role of pedestrian, which is demonstrated in Fig.4.11 and Fig.4.12, creates the potential for conflict between the pedestrian and the vehicle. It is important, therefore, to have an effective and defined method for the hierarchy of movement which gives the pedestrian priority over other users.

(v) *Time and Type of Activity* (Table 4.10) - Jacobs (1961) argued that for places to be successful calls for 'exuberant diversity' (Jacobs 1961, p.150). Observing and understanding when places are active indicates the relative vitality and resilience of parts of a town centre, or the potential to develop 'adaptive-resilience' strategies (Gehl & Svarre 2013, p.101). Active streets and residential mixed-use allows an element of 'passive

surveillance' from users of the place, and for residents who each have a stake in the town centre (Kelling & Coles 1996).

Table 4.10: Time and Type of Activity

Theme One: PLACE								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
TIME &TYPE OF ACTIVITY	5	X	X	X			X	
	5:01	X		X	Activity indicators and observation at different times of day		X	
	5:02	X		X	Operational commercial (daytime, evening and night time)	X		
	5:03	X		X	Quantum and density of homes, mix of tenure and types		X	
	5:04	X	X		Safe and welcoming – active throughout the day, evening and night			X
	5:05	X		X	Mix of commercial uses		X	
	5:06	X	X	X	Essential goods and services		X	

The data should go beyond the footfall counts, which are interesting qualitative data, but which lack contextual information which can be collected through observation to capture how and why space is used, and by whom, as well as when (Fig.4.13) (Jacobs 1961; Kelling & Coles 1996; Gehl 2011; Carmona 2013; Gehl & Svarre 2013; Mumford et al. 2019).

Over reliance on one sector of the economy can limit the social 'vitality' of a place by restricting the residential and mix of uses. Places can become commercially vulnerable to a shock, or structural down turn in specific sectors of the economy, such as retail or tourism (McKinsey & Co. 2017, p. 25; Mumford et al. 2019).

Theme Two: *Deliverability*

Theme Two	**Deliverability**	*the current ability of the town centre to adapt to change and cope with competitive dynamics, user and visitor requirements at a macro-generic and micro-specific level.*

The second THEME of the ARM: Deliverability – examines the resilience and ability of a town centre to cope, and adapt to change within the confines of a number of components, particularly (i) the existing planning policy framework; (ii) current and future competition; and, (iii) ownership - the complexity and variety of landowners.

(i) *the existing planning framework* (Table 4.11)– national and local policies; the impact of policy on the ability of a specific town centre to adapt to change and develop resilience (see Chapter Three, Fig.3.14 & Fig.3.15).

The revised version of the NPPF (2019) says:

> *"Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation* (NPPF 2019, p.25; para 85)*."*

The NPPF (2019) must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in planning decisions (NPPF 2019, p.4). National planning policy has a clear impact on the ability to adapt to change, and to deliver places with resilience: there are both generic and specific impacts on the potential to promote 'adaptive-resilience' in town centres.

The Local Plan sets out the spatial planning policy within the boundary of the LPA; which is unique to each location, and specific policies relating to it. This will enable areas, which can be adapted, and other areas where, due to constraining policies, the delivery of change may be either difficult or impossible, for example where there is Conservation Area and Listed Building designation.

Table 4.11: Existing Planning Policy Framework

Theme Two: DELIVERABILITY								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
EXISTING PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK	6	X	X	X		X	X	
	6:01		X	X	National planning policies		X	
	6:02		X	X	Local plan		X	
	6:03	X	X	X	Extent of town centre	X		
	6:04		X	X	Hierarchy of centres	X		
	6:05		X	X	Network of centres	X		
	6:06	X	X	X	Town centre uses		X	
	6:07	X	X	X	Sequential test	X		
	6:08	X	X	X	Use Class		X	

Conservation Area and Listed Building designation

Chapter 16 of the NPPF (2019) sets out policies for 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' (NPPF 2019, p.54). The NPPF (2019) states that heritage assets are an '*irreplaceable resource*' and that LPAs: '….*should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment*….' (NPPF 2019, p.54). Chapter 18 of the NPPF (2019) sets out a clear and robust policy for the protection of listed buildings and their setting. The ability to adapt areas within conservation areas and with listed buildings is restricted by the policy – making the delivery of adaptation problematic, but not impossible.

Use Class designation

The Town and Country Planning (use classes) Order 1987 (as amended) sets out use categories for land and buildings, which are known as 'use classes'. In order for land or a building to move to a different use class, it is normally necessary for planning permission to be secured. There are some circumstances where it is not necessary to secure a planning permission, for example for a change of use from A2 (financial and professional services) to A1 (shops). This suggests that the use class designation might limit or increase the time required to adapt buildings or places to ensure that they have resilience. Regulation in this

form is an important area of analysis and evaluation, as the counter argument is that the use class regulation supports both the vitality and viability of town centre streets by ensuring that there is a purpose to visit, for example – active ground floor space attracting people to a place to shop, eat and visit (Gehl, 2010 p.11-13; Carmona 2021, p.16-21).

(ii*) current and future competition to the town centre* (Table 4.12) - from other city/town centres and other formats (physical and virtual) which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses.

Edge and out-of-town formats and rapidly expanding virtual formats

The impact that commercial development located on the edge or out-of-town has on town centres is difficult to assess, not least because the town centre is not managed as a single commercial entity. That is to say that all formats are not directly comparable, as illustrated in Fig.4.15 the Fosse retail park is managed as a single asset, whereas, the town centre is not (2.4.4). Indeed, as discussed above (see Fabric), the attraction of a town centre goes beyond commercial success (see Gehl 2001; Gehl 2010; Talen & Park 2021, p. 2). Although measures of footfall, or an estimation of spend leakage, offers an indication of the impact of competition, there needs to be an understanding of the wider context.

Table 4.12: Competition

Theme Two: DELIVERABILITY								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
COMPETI-TION	7	X	X	X		X		
	7:01	X	X	X	Edge-of-town formats	X		
	7:02	X	X	X	Out-of-town formats	X		
	7:03			X	Impact of e-commerce	X		
	7:04		X	X	Catchment	X		
	7:05	X	X	X	Space for grow on	X		
	7:06	X	X	X	Space for new investment	X		
	7:07		X	X	Operator/investor demand	X		
	7:08			X	Trends in investment	X		

Bicester Village (Fig.4.15) is an example of close commercial management with respect to the image of the place, and mix of outlets which creates a 'retail theme park', or a leisure destination (Reeve & Simmonds 2000). The catchment area for Bicester Village is much wider than many retail destinations (for example, reaching over fifty miles to London, with advertising, and staff located in Marylebone station).

The impact of the rapid growth of the virtual offer is discussed in Chapter 2 (2.6.3). The impact on specific town centres is emerging and difficult to gauge, but it is an established element of the 'competition'.

The ownership of assets in the town centre is often complex with varying agendas and perceptions of risk, and appetites to take risk. Assets, held both by the public and private sector, have a commercial value, and it is unlikely that the owner will accept a lower value in the future. These factors can inhibit the agility or ability of a place to re-orientate, or re-invigorate, where there is crisis or change (see Varna et al 2020, p.73).

(iii) *existing and varied asset (buildings and land) ownerships* (Table 4.13) – the aspiration of landowners and fragmentation of asset ownership across the private and public sector.

Table 4.13: Ownership

Theme Two: DELIVERABILITY								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
OWNERSHIP	8		X	X		X	X	
	8:01		X	X	Publicly owned assets		X	
	8:02		X	X	Privately owned assets	X		
	8:03		X	X	Asset owner intentions		X	
	8:04		X	X	Asset interventions	X		
	8:05		X	X	Land assembly opportunities	X		
	8:06		X	X	Infrastructure requirements	X		
	8:07		X	X	Long term vacant units	X		
	8:08		X	X	Repurpose or redevelop		X	

Theme Three: *Management*

Theme Three	**Management**	*how effective the current governance arrangements for management of the town centre, as a socially 'vital' and commercially 'vibrant' cohesive space.*

The final THEME of the ARM, that of Management, analyses the governance arrangements, if any, for the management of the town centre through: (i) local strategies and plans, if any, for the town centre; (ii) funding and investment opportunities; and, (iii) the role of stakeholders and partnerships locally.

(i) Strategies and Plans (Table 4.14) - the local approach to address the challenges facing the town centre through local strategies and management initiatives - 'current position'.

Table 4.14:Management

Theme Three: MANAGEMENT								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
LOCAL STRATEGIES & PLANS	9		X	X			X	
	9:01		X	X	LEP – SEP		X	
	9:02		X	X	Regeneration framework		X	
	9:03		X	X	Masterplan		X	
	9:04		X	X	Public realm action plan		X	
	9:05		X	X	Events plan		X	
	9:06		X	X	Marketing plan		X	
	9:07		X	X	Asset management plan		X	
	9:08		X	X	Business support		X	

This ARM component collates information on existing local strategies, or frameworks, to support the 'vitality' and 'viability' of the town centre. These may be adopted as part of the LPAs policies, as discussed above (see Deliverability: Planning Policy, Development Plan – Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans), as supplementary planning documents, area action plans, etc. Alternatively, they could be adopted by partners as strategic masterplans, or implementation plans. However, as illustrated in Fig.4.17, there can be a conflict between strategic aims and implementation in the town centre. It may also be that there is a Business Improvement District in the town centre, with associated strategies and business plan, often including local marketing initiatives (Table 2.4, Fig.4.19 & Fig.4.20).

Selling Places - Ward (1998) argues that place images are propagated to persuade place users – investors and visitors – to part with their money. The place, therefore, has been packaged as if it were a commodity which can be sold (Ward 1998, p.1). Although, as Ward (1998) notes, places are complex packages of '*goods, services and experiences that are consumed in many different ways*', meaning that reaching an understanding of the effectiveness of marketing and the relative value of image is capable of only indirect measurement (Ward 1998, p.6).

However, even where a town centre is not the subject of direct marketing, or consciously 'sold' as a commodity, people will still have positive or negative preconceptions of its place identity. The identity of a place may be enigmatic, transitory, ephemeral and difficult to define with any certainty.

(ii) *Funding and Investment* (Table 4.15) – the ability to identify and attract investment and/or funding (from the private and public sector) into the town centre.

Chapter Three (3.3) suggested a theoretical link between investment (commercial 'viability') and busyness (social 'vitality') of the town centre.

Table 4.15: Funding and Investment

Theme Three: MANAGEMENT								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV / SV	SV
FUNDING & INVESTMENT	10						X	
	10:01		X	X	LA Budget for town centre		X	
	10:02		X	X	External funding pots		X	
	10:03		X	X	Development p/ship (JV)		X	
	10:04		X	X	Attract private investment		X	
	10:05		X	X	Attract public investment		X	

One outcome of this research may be that it is not sufficient to rely on private sector funding or investment, and that there is a role for government spending to support local economies and essential infrastructure.

(iii) *Partnerships and Stakeholders* – looks at the current governance structures (including TCM and Bids) and ability to communicate and engage with stakeholders.

The town centre, unlike many edge and out-of-town centres, cannot be managed as a single asset, or commercial entity. This is due to the complexity of different aspirations of numerous interests in the place, making the development of partnerships and networks between players, in particular the private and public sector, problematic (Varna et al. 2020). This component of the framework critically evaluates if there are effective partnerships and, if there are, whether there is the ability to promote 'adaptive-resilience' through them.

Table 4.16: Partnerships and Stakeholders

Theme Three: MANAGEMENT								
ARM COMPONENT	UID	DATA SETS			SET OF VARIABLES	INDICATOR		
		FO	IO	DA		CV	CV/ SV	SV
P/SHIP & S/HOLDER	11						X	
	11:01		X	X	TCM initiative		X	
	11:02		X	X	BID initiative		X	
	11:03		X	X	Communication plan		X	
	11:04		X	X	Business engagement		X	
	11:05		X	X	Community engagement		X	

Fig.4.3: Parson's Street (Banbury, England)



Source: author,19/07/2016

Fig.4.4: High Street (Winchester, England)



Source: author, 12/03/2019

Fig.4.5:charity collector – wider variety of activities in the public realm as opposed to other formats (Oxford, England)



Source: author, 13/10/2012

Fig.4.6: evidence of rough sleeping (Oxford, England).



Source: author 17/06/2019

Fig.4.7: Michaelmas Fair Banbury town centre (Banbury, England)



Source: author 17/10/2012

Fig.4.8: Brackley Market Place: a socially ‘vital’ civic space (war memorial), as well as a commercially ‘viable’ area in the town centre (Brackley, England)



Source: author, 28/08/2017

Fig.4.9: Banbury Market Place, remains the location of the weekly markets (Banbury, England)



Source: author, 14/06/2014

Fig.4.10: covered market structure - space for independent retailers and artisans (La Spezia, Italy)



Source: author 08/08/2015

Fig.4.11: narrow pavement dominated by parked cars (Loughborough, England)



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.4.12:pedestrian and vehicular conflict – vehicle has priority (Kidlington, England)



Source: author 05/05/2006

Fig.4.13: evening economy and activity, Loughborough town centre (Loughborough, England)



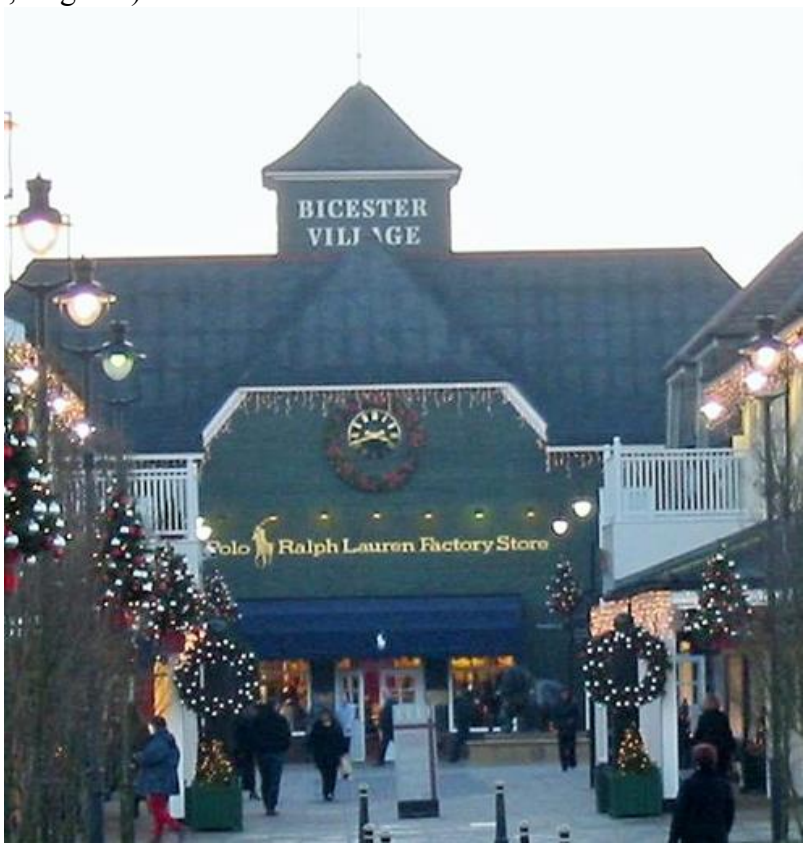
Source: author 03/11/2019

Fig.4.14: Out-of-town Fosse Retail Park is a typical example of this type of format (Leicester, England)



Source: author, 2017

Fig.4.15: Bicester Village – value retail out-of-town discount shopping or ‘retail theme park’ (Bicester, England)



Source: author 18/12/2013

Fig.4.17: un-coordinated management of space: recycling bin dominating high quality urban fabric. (Jerez, Spain)



Source: author, 26/07/2017

Revised Healthcheck Indicators

The variables identified above offer a more balanced and nuanced approach, in contrast to those variables set out in the NPPG (see Chapter Three, 3.4), to gather data regarding the changing relationship between the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of the town centre (Mumford et al. 2019)(Fig.4.18).

Fig.4.18: Venn diagram showing the distribution of indicators between commercial 'viability' (CV) and social 'vitality' (SV) of the town centre. The revised 'healthcheck' variables create a more balanced relationship between CV and SV, with only one set being CV (7).

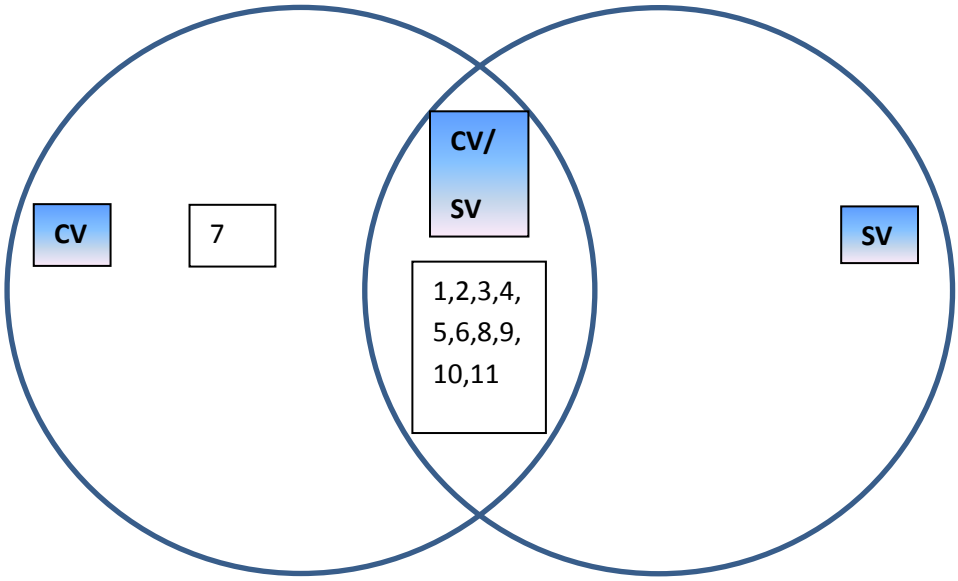


Fig.4.19: Position at the conclusion of Stage One of the ARM, the resilience of the town centre captures and the opportunities for recovery are identified

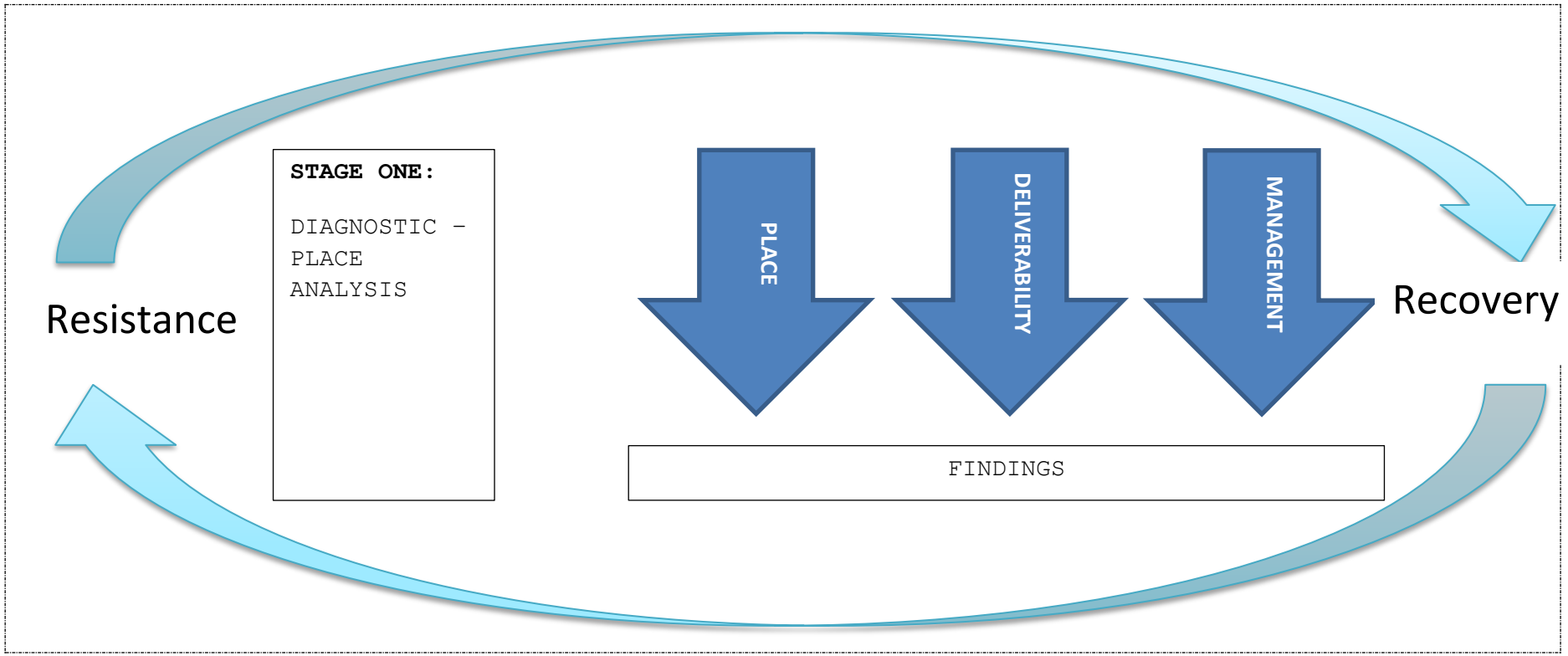


Table 4.17: Micro-Specific Lens and Macro-Generic Lens

***Micro-Specific* Lens** and ***Macro- Generic* Lens**
The diversity of place and variety of characteristics is a positive factor and promotes the identity of place (see PLACE component 3.6) (Jacobs 1961; Bentley et al. 1985; Gehl 2011; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007). The findings captured through the three conceptual themes (Place, Deliverability and Management) will be analysed through two lenses:
M*icro-specific lens*: focussing on issues which are specific to an individual town centre.
M*acro-generic lens*: focussing on issues which are general and impact on all town centres.

Findings

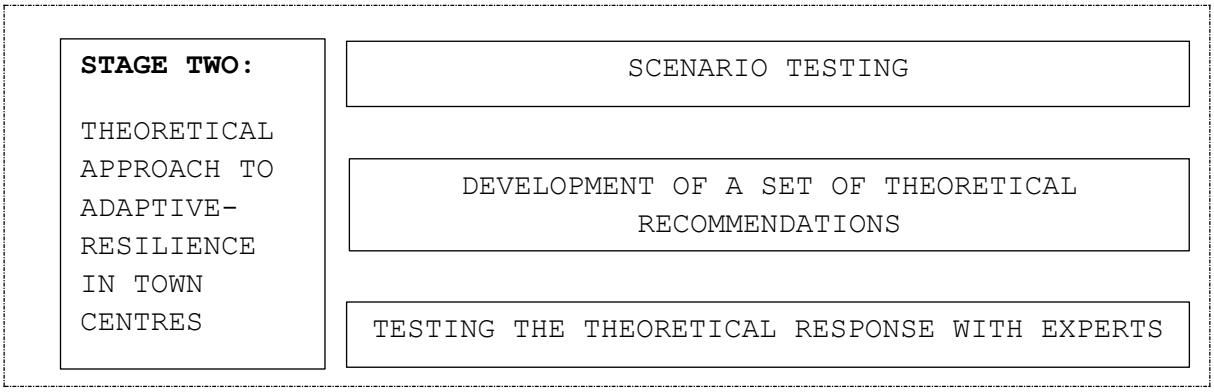
The final process in Stage One is to present the findings from the case studies, in the form of a theoretical understanding of the town centre, in relation to two themes: (i) *resistance* - to shock and change; and, (ii) the potential for *recovery* from crisis (see Fig.4.19).

The following section explains how Stage Two of the ARM develops a theoretical approach to adaptive-resilience in the town centre, which is the focus of the relevant case study.

4.3 STAGE TWO: *Theoretical Approach to Adaptive-resilience in the Town Centre*

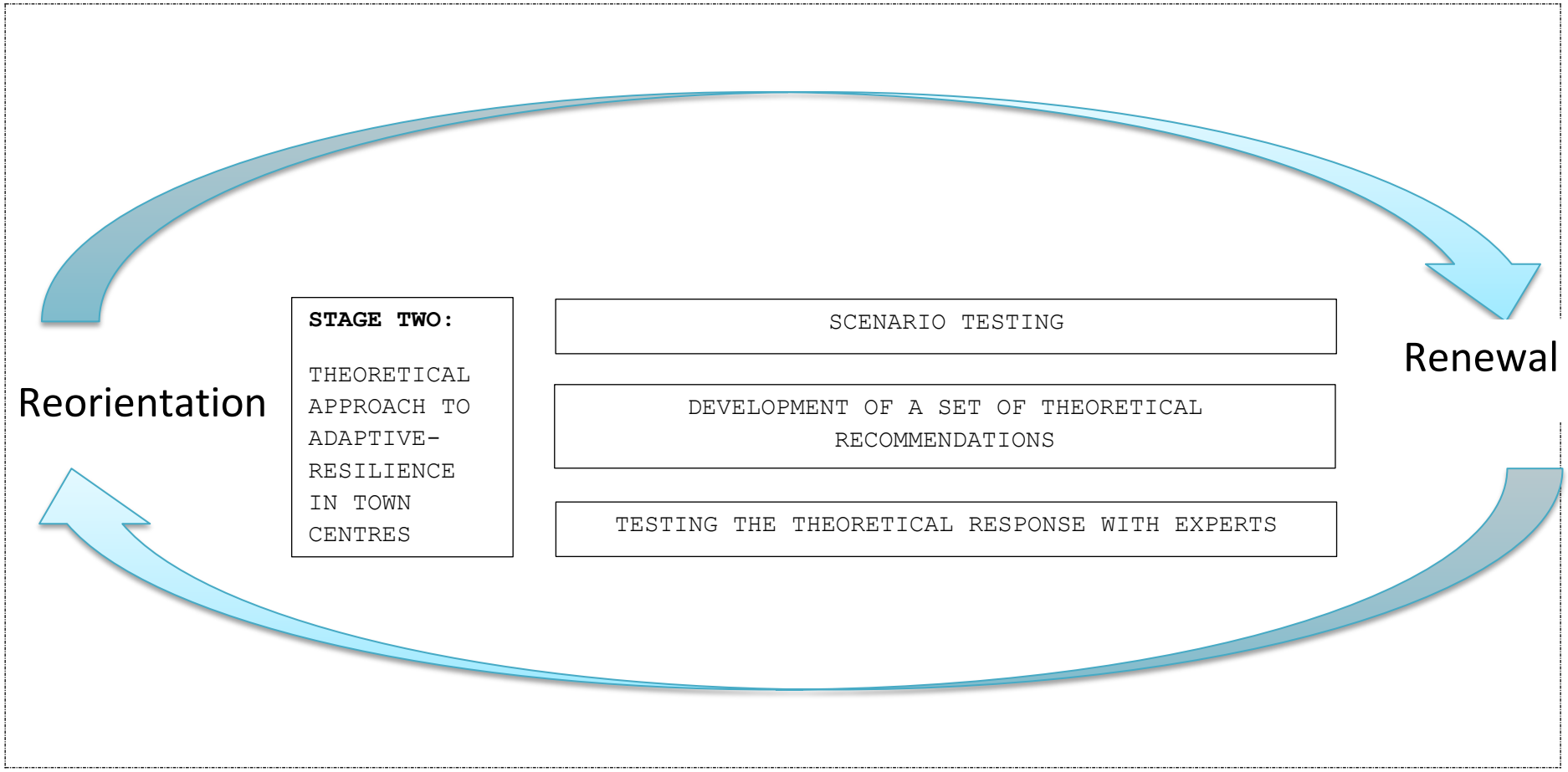
The second stage of the research framework uses the findings from Stage One of the ARM to build a theoretical approach or proposition to adaptive-resilience in the town centre. The findings from stage one of the ARM are first sorted into two groups: group one, those factors which are considered to be specific and unique to an individual town centre; and,

group two, those factors identified as being likely to be related to town centres in general (Table 4.6).



The findings captured in Stage One (the diagnostic process) are tested within the case study environment in Stage Two, through three steps: (i) scenario testing; (ii) development of recommendations; and, (iii) testing the local micro-specific, and macro-generic recommendations with experts in the field. The following section describes the process of Stage Two of the ARM. Following the analysis of data captured through the ARM, a number of scenarios and actions are proposed and evaluated using the Scenario Planning Matrix (SPM) (see Appendix IV). Following the completion of stage two of the ARM, a theoretical adaptive-resilience approach is developed for the case study location. The approach proposes a basis for the *reorientation* and *renewal* for the town centre (see Fig.4.20).

Fig.4.20: end stage two diagram – options for Reorientation and Renewal are identified



4.4 Conclusions

This chapter has set out how the ARM can be used as a research framework, shaped through place theory, and based on the experience of the researcher, to respond to the research problem (1.2). The chapter developed the theoretical basis for Stage One of the ARM – the Diagnostic Tool which is organised around three themes: Place, Deliverability and Management, to guide a forensic investigation into a town centre. The chapter introduced the theoretical approach which will be followed, and has set out a set of key variables that were examined through the case study stage with illustrations. The chapter then described Stage Two of the ARM process, which develops a strategic response to the findings from Stage One, and in turn generates a set of recommendations to help develop an adaptive-resilience approach for the town centre.

It is argued that a key finding of the primary research will be that the development of the research framework would enable wider spatial strategies, focussed on identifying opportunities for 'adaptive-resilience', around a cluster or network of town centres. Furthermore, it may be possible to adapt the research framework for practice and include all physical and virtual spaces within a geographically significant area – at the national, regional and FEMA level. Thereby synergising the theoretical findings with the practical challenge to the town centre: developing an apparatus for a strategic plan-led approach to the spatial management of 'town centre uses' in practice. The next chapter presents the research methodology and methods to address the problem.

Chaptert Five: Research Methods

5.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research methods of the work, underpinned by the approach to address the overall aim of the research: *to critically evaluate and analyse the relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' of town centres and how it has changed through a period of economic shock and adjustment.*

Chapter One set the research question along with a number of research objectives (see Chapter One, 1.2.3): the first two objectives have been addressed through the literature review, in the previous chapters (see Chapter Two and Chapter Three); and, the third objective was addressed in Chapter Four, through the development of a research framework (the ARM).

To recap, the research framework is divided into two stages: (i) the diagnostic framework – place analysis; and, (ii) the development of a theoretical approach to adaptive resilience in town centres. This approach allows data sources to be evaluated, and analysed, within an empirical research framework (1.2.1). A further two objectives were set to answer the research question, and meet the overall aim of the study (1.2.3).The research design, described in this chapter, creates a link with those objectives, and acts as a tool to guide the collection of the relevant empirical research data.

The chapter is organised into three sections:

(i) section one discusses the research question, the sub-research questions, aim and research problem

(ii) section two of the chapter presents the research design, rationale for the selection of the case studies, and explains the methods; and,

(iii) the final section describes the role of the researcher and the importance of the 'reflective practitioner' approach in the context of this research into a real-life and complex phenomenon.

5.2 The Research Question, Sub-Research Questions and the Nature of the Research Problem (Table 5.1)

Research Question	*How has the relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality', in English town centres, changed in a period of economic transition?*

Barnett (2012) suggests that many people understand the kind of problem the city is as one of '*organised complexity'*, but solving that problem is more challenging than ever (Jacobs 1961; Adhya 2012; Barnett 2012; Wrigley & Dolega 2011; Teller et al 2016; Carmona 2019, p.6). The experience of the researcher and the literature review, set out in the first part of this thesis, identified two new sub-research questions to be addressed through empirical research – i.e. the second part of this thesis;:

Emerging (sub) Research Question	*(i) has the market in which the town centre now operates changed within the timeframe identified for this research (post 1945-2020)?*

Over the historical span of this research (1945-2020) the form and function of the town centre, and the market in which it operates, has evolved and changed. The *relevance* of the town centre (Table 3.6), in the lives of many people, has changed as other places, both physical and virtual, have become commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses. This

research argues that the wider market in which the town centre, as a format, operates within has changed (Table 1.1). As new commercially 'viable' formats (both physical and virtual) emerged the market structure did not evolve to reflect the change and challenge to the town centre (2.4 and 2.6). This is not about market failure, but that the market in which places operate now to deliver town centre uses are currently the wrong kind of market, that they have become 'stuck'. This risks town centres becoming *irrelevant* space due to the imbalance between the social and civic focus in relation to the dominance of the commercial focus of place (Marakakis et al. 2022). There is the potential through this research for the problem to be reframed and re-set. As Mazzucato (2015) suggests, to start '*Thinking Big Again'* – by actively creating and shaping new markets, thereby safeguarding places that deliver town centre uses, that all parts of society have access to for essential and non-essential goods and services (Mazzucato 2015, p.5-6).

Emerging (sub) Research Questions	(ii) *can the town centre offer additional 'value' that other formats (physical and virtual), which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses, cannot?*

From the 1980s the main strategy with supporting policies, to maintain the *relevance* of the town centre, has been to emulate the approach to privately managed assets – the malls and the out-of-town destinations, and to simplify management, design and form. In effect, spaces have been developed to deliver a commercial operation, and to 'privatise' the management of the public realm (see chapter two).

The 'management' approach might have focussed too much on the commercial 'viability' of the town centre (2.4.4). Thereby underestimating the 'value' that can be achieved through the social 'vitality' of a place - the quality of design diversity through mixed uses (including homes), and identity (Butina Watson & Bentley 2007; Carmona 2014; Carmona 2019). Moreover, the focus on commercial 'viability' might skew the understanding of 'value' in relation to the town centre. To see value only or primarily in terms of the most

cost effective developable land that can be secured to extract a return of investment from a site (a commercial asset) for development as consumption space. This research seeks to clarify the challenges and options to capture the 'value' of town centres as *complex social, civic and commercial ecosystems.*

5.3 Research Design and Rationale for Selecting Case Studies

This section explains the research design to address the central research question, and in particular the rationale and process for selecting the case studies. It concludes with an assessment of the practical approach to carrying out the case studies. The research framework is designed to enable the effective use of the research methods in the collection of data (exploratory purpose), analysis (descriptive purpose) and developing policy and strategic responses (explanatory purpose) (Yin 1994, p.7; George & Bennett 2005, p.73; Millington et al. 2014; Yin 2017).

Wrigley and Dolega (2011) suggest that research into the challenges facing town centres should not be merely be descriptive, but should provide original empirical evidence to allow for a complex academic analysis of the issues (Wrigley and Dolega 2011, p.2337-2338). This research is underpinned by the concept of the 'reflective practitioner' (5.4), and this has influenced the research approach which has been affected by the researcher's motivations and values (Schon 1983; Baxter et al. 2010). The approach seeks to synergise the theoretical and the practical, focussing on a research problem, which is current, and developing, which calls for a pragmatic approach (see Clark and Creswell 2011; Creswell, 2013; Carmona 2019).

Table 5.1: research framework and methods to respond to the research question and sub-research questions

KEY	+	PRIMARY	o	SECONDARY	-	NONE	MAIN METHOD	SUPPORTING METHOD
KEY	**FO**	Field Observations	**IO**	Interview Observations	**DA**	Desk Analysis		

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK (ARM) THEME	**PLACE**					**DEL**			**MGMT**			**METHODS**
COMPONENT: variables	1 FORM & FUNCTION	2 LOCALLY DISTINCTIVE	3 KEY SPACES & PLACES	4 CONNECTIVITY & MOVEMENT	5 TIME & TYPE ACTIVITY	1 POLICY	2 COMPETITION	3 OWNERSHIP	1 LOCAL STRATEGIES & POLICY	2 FUNDING & INVESTMENT	3 PARTNERSHIP & S/HOLDER	
How has the relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality', in English town centres, changed in a period of economic transition?	+	+	+	o	+	+	+	-	o	o	o	FO IO DA
(i) has the market in which the town centre now operates changed within the timeframe identified for this research (post 1945-2020)?	-	+	+	o	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	FO IO DA
(ii) can the town centre offer additional 'value' that other formats (physical and virtual), which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses, cannot?	+	o	o	+	+	+	+	o	-	o	+	FO IO DA

This research adopts the widely accepted approach to the study of public life, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian research community, by following empirical methods and a pragmatic methodology– building on and adapting the urban design process (3.2)(Gehl & Svarre 2013 p.78; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007, p.237; Carmona 2014 & 2019). A combination of an analytical framework and a case study approach was identified as being most appropriate, enabling intensive knowledge to be developed relating to complex issues (Zeisel 2006; Yin 2009, p. 56). The nature of this exploratory research is to consider 'why' and 'how' questions to address the research problem; to examine the way in which some urban centres appear to be more resilient than others (Yin 2009, p. 9-10).

5.3.1 **The Research Design** (Fig.5.2)

The research design creates a research environment in which empirical data is collected through multiple case studies, framed by the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Four; the empirical data is collected and forensically interrogated using a theory-building research style of 'building blocks' (see the research framework - ARM, Chapter Four, Fig.4.2) (Yin 2009; George & Bennett, 2005 p. 74-76). The research design (Fig.5.2) uses a hybrid of deductive and inductive methods (Fig.5.1); thereby, creating an opportunity to understand why there has been such wide variance in the resilience of town centres to economic shock and adjustment (Fereday et al. 2006, p. 80-92).

Fig.5.1: hybrid process - Inductive and Deductive methods

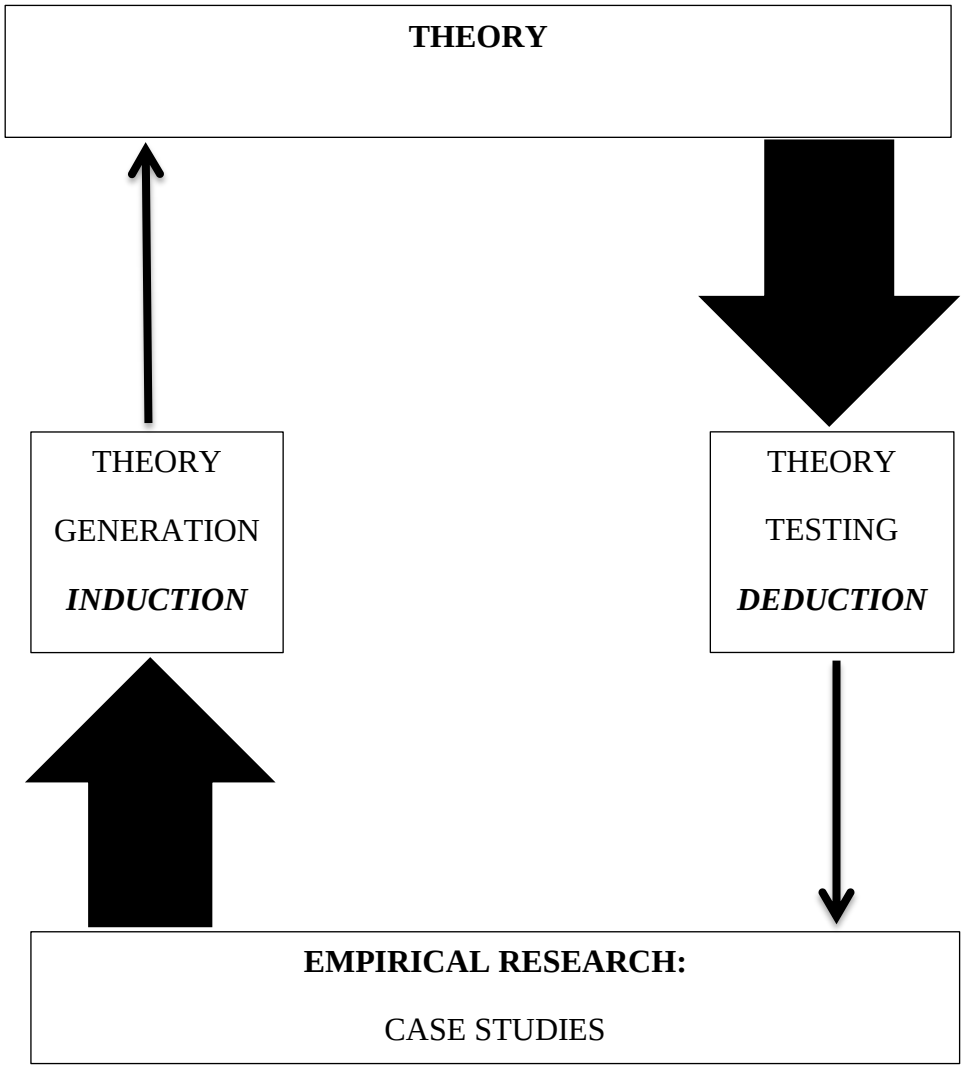
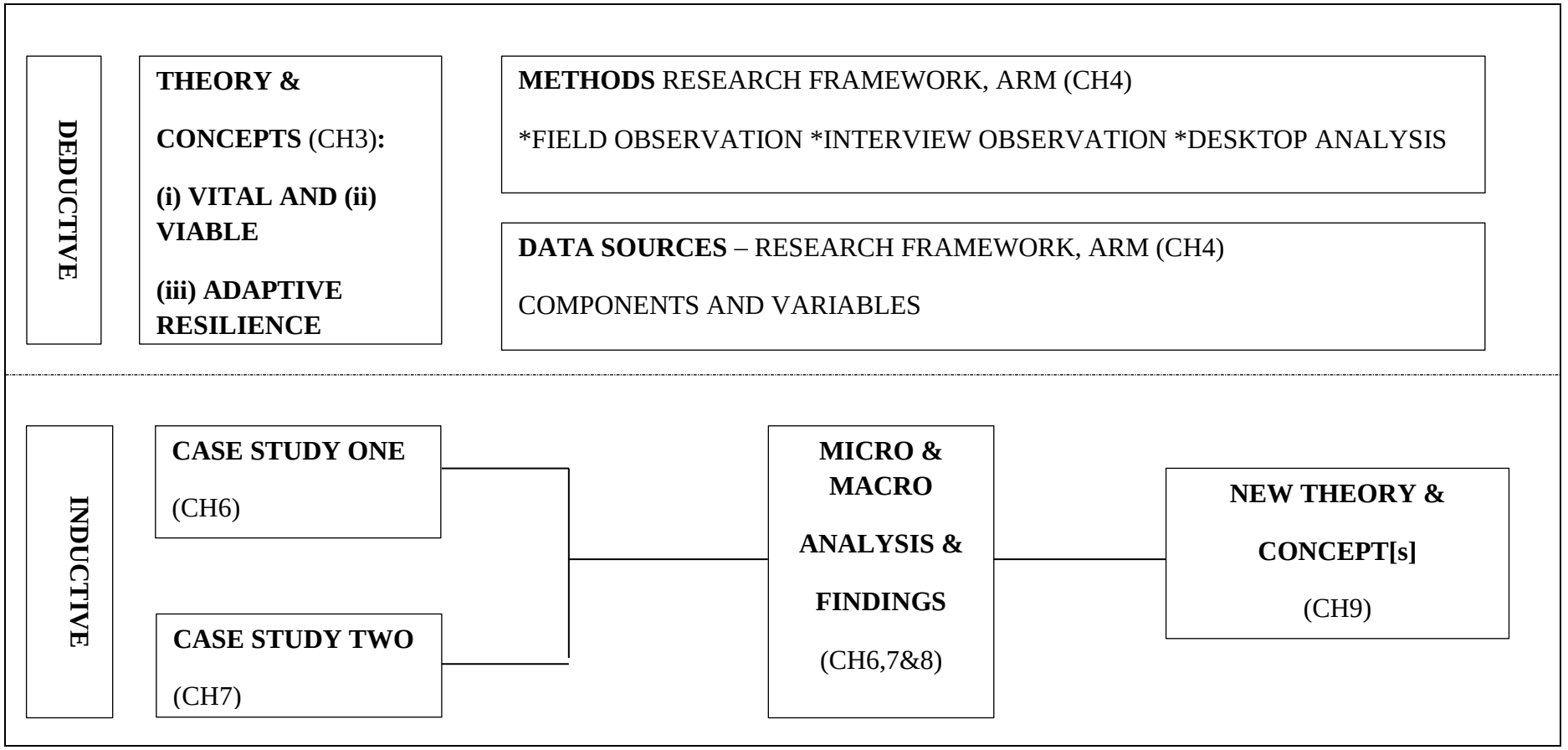


Fig.5.2: research design diagram, the hybrid deductive and inductive split



5.3.2 Case Study Format

George and Bennett (2005) state that the principal criterion for the selection of case studies is that they are relevant to the research objectives (George & Bennett 2005, p.83). Due to the nature of the research problem, where town centres are impacted by issues specific to themselves, as well as issues which impact all town centres, the problem is approached from a generic macro perspective as well as a micro specific perspective (Table 4.6) (Findlay & Sparks 2009, p.8). Therefore, a fieldwork format is appropriate, involving the collection of empirical data from a number of existing secondary sources and through primary case studies and site visits (see Yin 1994; George & Bennett 2005; Millington et al. 2014; Macdonald et al. 2022). Furthermore, this approach follows the accepted and traditional urban design approach to the study of public life (Jacobs 1961; Lynch 1972; Gehl 2001; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007; Gehl 2010; Varna & Tiesdell 2010; Gehl & Svarre 2013; Carmona 2013; Montgomery 2015; Carmona, 2021)(3.2).

The primary research focuses on two case studies, both to answer the research question and to test the effectiveness of the conceptual analytical framework – the ARM (George & Bennett, 2005 p.83; Bryman 2012, p.53-61; Macdonald et al. 2022). The use of two in-depth and focussed case studies requires greater resource, but is beneficial to the investigation as this allows adequate data to be collected and generated, and for useful comparisons to be made (George & Bennett 2005, p.83; Bryman 2012; Yin 2009, p.56; Findlay & Sparks 2009).

Rationale for Selecting Methods

This research investigates a real-life problem (1.2.1), and a key aim of the research approach was to develop policy-relevant theory to address the challenge and, in some cases, the crisis facing town centres (George & Bennett 2005, p.263-264; Millington et al. 2014). The research sought to further develop an understanding of the challenges facing

the town centre in terms of their social and civic '*vitality*' as well as their commercial '*viability*' (3.3). A purely quantitative or qualitative methodological approach was discounted, as neither method applied in isolation would allow a nuanced investigation of the problem. Therefore, a mixed-method approach to the research problem was considered to be the most appropriate. In adopting the mixed-method approach, qualitative methods were the dominant approach, and quantitative methods were mainly confined to the analysis of secondary data (through desk-top analysis) (Table 5.7c). Greater reliance on quantitative data was discounted, due to availability of the data, (see 5.4(iii) for further analysis of quantitative data available to the researcher) the lack of granularity and relevance to the research. Due to the nature of the research objective, it was considered that a hybrid deductive and inductive approach was appropriate (Table 5.2). The hybrid approach was used to construct the ARM, which was then applied to the case studies to develop and test a set of recommendations with experts. The response of the experts to the recommendations along with the practice experience of the researcher was drawn on to develop a tentative new theory and a novel theoretical concept.

Selecting the Case Studies

The following section illustrates the way in which two study locations were selected and employed in this research, to address a 'real-life' problem, and answer the research question (Yin 2009, p.18). It could be argued that a random selection of urban centres would have been acceptable for the purpose of the research i.e. sticking a pin in a map. However, the analysis described allows a more informed and objective process to select the location of the case studies. The findings of the case studies are organised within the same standardised format of the research framework (ARM), allowing analysis of clear learning points on the research design and field procedures (Yin 2009, p.92). The rationale for selecting the case studies is set out below.

The researcher is based a few miles from the town of Banbury (North Oxfordshire), for practical reasons the surrounding Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas were analysed to consider if town centres within the LEP areas could be considered as suitable for the case studies. The first criterion considered was that the case studies would be within a reasonable travel time of two hours (Table 5.2). Although this includes LEP areas within Birmingham and London, these were discounted due to the unique metropolitan character of both city centres, and the hierarchy of the various sub-centres within the urban areas.

Table 5.2: LEP areas selected for Further Consideration

UID	LEP AREA	COUNTY BOUNDARY	AREA INCLUDED
2	Buckinghamshire and Thames Valley	Within	Mainly Bucks
6	Coventry and Warwickshire	Beyond	Coventry City Warwickshire
17	Hertfordshire	Within	Hertfordshire
21	Leicester and Leicestershire	Beyond	Leicester City Leicester County
26	Northamptonshire	Within	Northamptonshire
27	Oxfordshire	Within	Oxfordshire
31	South East Midlands	Beyond	North Oxon, MK, Bedfordshire, Bucks, Northamptonshire
35	Thames Valley and Berkshire	Beyond	'M4 Corridor'

Table 5.3: type of centre

#	Type of Centre	Number of Locations
1	Major City	19
2	Major Regional	37
3	Regional	121
4	Sub Regional	198
5	Major District	243
6	District	491
7	Minor District	514
8	Local	1,814

Source: Venue Score 2017: UK Shopping Venue Rankings

The researcher then identified the various town centres within each LEP area, using the Strategic Economic Plans (SEP) which every LEP area is required to develop, setting out

their ‘growth’ strategy. The town centres were analysed against the criteria for types of centre developed by Javelin (Table 5.3).Of the towns identified in the LEP SEP, they broadly fall into three categories: regional, sub-regional and major district. For the purpose of this research, the town centres categorised as sub-regional were identified as the most appropriate to address the research question (Table 5.4. This is because sub-regional centres have a wider catchment area than that of the major districts, and are more likely to have key anchor stores and wider leisure options. In addition they were seen as being more manageable in size and scope than the larger regional centres. Across the seven LEP areas eleven town centres were identified as sub regional (Table 5.5).

Table 5.4: sub-regional centres

Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Leamington Spa, Stratford Upon Avon, Rugby, St Albans, Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City, Loughborough, Banbury, and Abingdon.

The sub-regional towns were then matched against a set of town centre focussed town centre management and regeneration tools and strategies (summarised in Table 5.5) and explained below. The purpose of the exercise was to identify two town centres with different characteristics, including the strategic and operational interventions relating to the challenge (Table 5.7).

Local Plan – that the local authority has local planning policies relating to the town centre. The quality, or effectiveness of the Local Plan, was not considered as a material consideration in relation to this work.

Town Centre Management - does the town centre have an identified approach to town centre management? This could include a town centre manager, a town team, etc. Chapter Two discussed the emergence of town centre management (TCM) as an intervention to the perceived weakness in the management of town centres, in comparison to out of town shopping malls.

Business Improvement District - does the town centre have a Business Improvement District (BIDs)?

PORTAS Pilot Towns – has the town centre been selected as a PORTAS town? The Portas pilot towns were introduced following the findings of the Portas review into the high street (Portas 2011). They included funding for town centres to deliver projects to promote vitality and viability.

LEP Strategy – is the town identified within the LEP SEP as a specific project area? LEPs are required to develop Strategic Economic Plans (SEP) for their areas. The SEPs vary and not all of them focus on town centres specifically (Table 5.5).

Growth Fund – has the town centre benefited from the Growth Fund? The Growth Fund is a pot of money that LEPs can bid for to delivery key projects developed as part of the SEP. Some town centres have been able to attract significant sums as part from the Growth Fund.

Town Centre Strategy – is there a regeneration strategy or business plan for the town centre? The development of a town centre strategy or business plan suggests a pro-active approach to the management of a town centre. However, the quality and effectiveness of the strategy can vary significantly, and it was thought useful to identify places, as part of the case study process, which are at different stages of developing and delivering a strategic approach or have not adopted this approach.

Rationale for Selecting the two Case Studies – Loughborough and Stevenage

Case Study One (pilot case study, which is developed as a full case study) – Loughborough. Loughborough was selected as a pilot case study, but was then fully developed as a case study for data collection and analysis. A Business Improvement

District, for the town centre, recently secured for a second term. The town was selected as a Portas Town (the only Portas town-wide intervention of those analysed above, in spatial area identified (Portas 2011)). The town centre regeneration strategy had been recently reviewed (2018), it was concluded that this location offered a mature town centre regeneration strategy background for the research.

Case Study Two – Stevenage. Stevenage town centre does not have a BID and the town centre management function has undergone a recent review. A regeneration framework for the town centre (Stevenage Central) has been adopted and a public-private partnership delivery board – Stevenage First. The town has attracted significant government financial support through the Growth agenda (c. £16m phase one and c. £15m phase two). The regeneration of Stevenage town centre is a key priority of the Hertfordshire LEP. This offered a contrasting approach to Loughborough town centre, focussing much more through the LEP, and secured government funding. Stevenage is also an attractive case study location as it is a post war 'new town' and allows comparison to towns that have developed more organically, to investigate if this has an impact on the relationship between '*vitality*' and '*viability*'.

Table 5.5: Sub-Regional Towns Assessed Against Town Centre Management Tools and Strategies

TOWN (LEP UID)	**LOC Plan**	**TCM**	**BID**	**PORTAS**	**LEP STRAT**	**GROWTH**	**TC STRAT**	**NOTES**
Aylesbury (2&31)	Y	Y	N	N	Y/N	N	Y	
High Wycombe (2)	Y	Y	N*	N	Y	Y	Y/N	*Renewal Proposal. Strategy focused on schemes and Local Plan
Leamington Spa (6)	Y	Y	Y	Y*	N	N	N	*PORTAS: 'Old Town' - periphery of the town centre. Strategy – retail led development.
Stratford on Avon (6)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	
Rugby (6)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Action Plan 2016-2020
St Albans (17)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	
Stevenage (17)	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y*	Y	*Attracted significant Growth Fund. Stevenage Central – Town Centre Framework
Welwyn GC (17)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	
Loughborough (17)	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y*	*New strategy being developed. PORTAS: town centre wide initiative.
Banbury (27&31)	Y	N	N	N	N/N	N	Y	
Abingdon (27)	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Choose Abingdon – Partnership Strategy for 2012 onwards.

Table 5.6: number of times the key phrase of ‘town’ and ‘town centre’ appears in the LEP SEP

LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP	**PHRASE**	
LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE	LOUGHBOROUGH	LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE
	64	1
HERTFORDSHIRE	STEVENAGE	STEVENAGE TOWN CENTRE
	49	11

5.3.3 **Three Research Methods** (Table 5.7(a), Table 5.7(b) & Table 5.7(c))

A combination of three specific methods for data collection were deemed appropriate for the research (Fig.5.3): (i) field observations (Table 5.7(a)), (ii) interview observations (Table 5.7(b)), and (iii) desktop analysis including the historical morphological study (Table 5.7(c)). This methodological triangulation provides a way of developing additional, and different data relating to place, as well as allowing the data to be looked at from a range of perspectives (Table 5.1, Fig.5.3)(Denzin 1978; Patton 1990, p.464; Denscombe 2017; Hehir et al 2022, p.6).

Methodological Triangulation (adapted from Denscombe 2017, p.171). The most significant challenge relates to the collection of the data, as the researcher did not have complete control of the process, in contrast to a research conducted under laboratory conditions (Gehl 2001; Gehl & Svarre 2013). However, the risk can be mitigated through careful preparation, acknowledgement and flexibility of approach (Yin 2009, p.83). The data was analysed through rudimentary thematic coding (Crang 2005), which was guided by a priori issues of social and civic ‘*vitality*’, and commercial ‘*viability*’ of the town centre (Hehir 2022, p.8)(see chapter three).

Fig.5.3: Three methods for data collection

(See Field Observation Tool, Table 5.8).

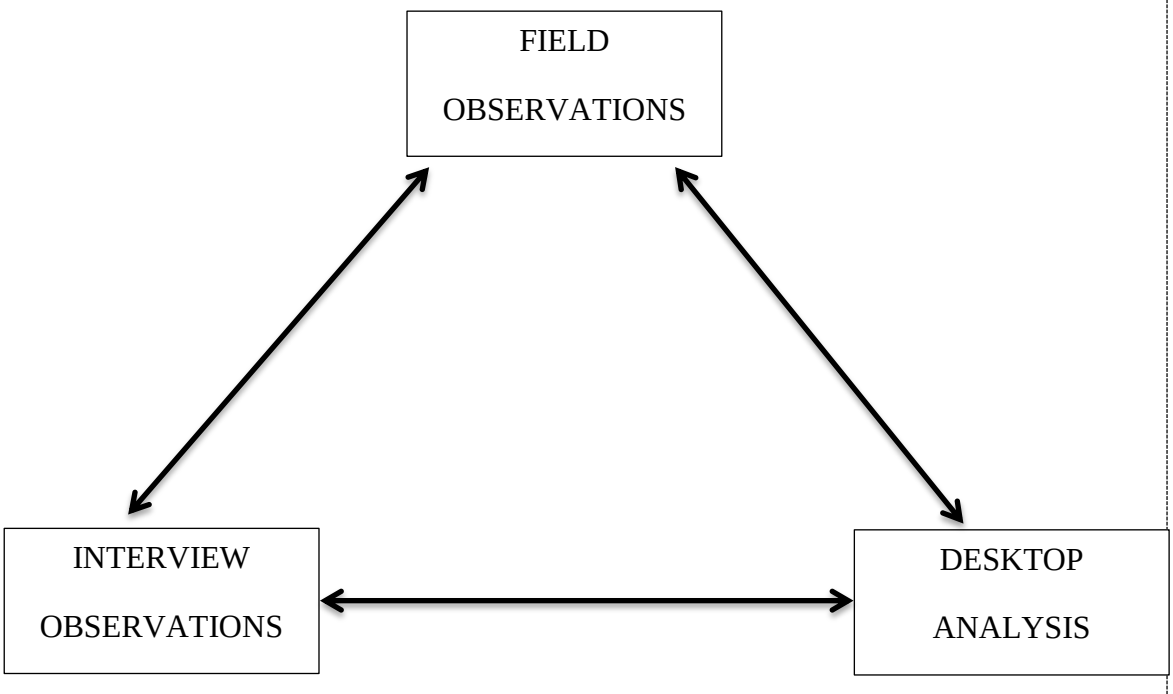


Table 5.7(a): Method of Inquiry – field observations

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

The Field Observations (FO) were organised around the established urban design theory and techniques relating to place, as described in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. The stage included a number of site visits, which took place over a number of years and at different times of the day (including the evening and night-time)(Lynch 1960; Lynch 1984; Gehl 2001; Reeve et al. 2007; Gehl & Svarre 2013).

For the purpose of this method of inquiry a bespoke Field Observation Tool (FOT) was developed (Table 5.8). The FOT was structured so that it is replicable across the case studies to capture observations through notes, photographs and annotated sketch-maps (see Appendix II for examples of sketch-maps). The FOT was designed to gather data relating to the *sense of place* (see Chapter Four), through the themes set out below:

Locally Distinctive – evidence was gathered relating to what factors give the place character and identity. For example, from the built form and/or public art (Campos &

Sequiera 2019, p.2). It was anticipated that the investigation would find that all places have an identity unique to themselves (Zeisel 2006; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007; Gehl 2010; Parker et al. 2017).

Key Places and Spaces – by experiencing a place first hand, and at different times of the day, specific important spaces were identified, so that the quality of place could be investigated (Jacobs 1961; Varna & Tiesdell 2010; Gehl 2010, Hirt & Zahan 2012; Carmona 2013; Gahl & Svarre 2013; Carmona 2021).

Connectivity and Movement – the way in which people use the space was observed and analysed across a number of modes, via foot, cycle, vehicle, etc. This enabled an analysis of the movement hierarchy, and characteristics of the town centre, with regard to walking and cycling (Varna & Tiesdell 2010; Gehl 2010; Carmona 2013; Gehl & Svarre 2013).

Time and Type of Activity – it was anticipated that the relative 'busyness' of a place is important for it to be both socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' (Jacobs 1961; Kelling & Cole 1996). Observation was key - as the purpose and time that the activity takes place is an important factor to capture, and understand the relationship between 'vitality' and 'viability' (Gehl 2010; Carmona 2013; Gehl & Svarre 2013).

Table 5.7(b):Method of Inquiry – interview observation

INTERVIEW OBSERVATIONS

Experts in their field were interviewed (Table 5.10) through the two stage process of the ARM (Fig.4.2).

- Stage One, the diagnostic stage – local experts from the case study locations participated in semi-structured interviews following a set list of questions (Appendix I). The questions asked as part of the data collection were relevant to both case studies and, therefore, this ensures the standardisation of data. The results were then compared, accumulated, and systematically analysed using a content data

method (Gordon & Bennett 2005, p.86; Crang 2005; Yin 2009, p.63; Harvey 2011; Hehir et al 2022, p.7).

- Stage Two, the theoretical recommendation stage – a set of recommendations were tested with participants with local knowledge of the case study locations. The group was extended to participants with a wider expertise of the challenges facing town centres in general (Appendix I(a) and I(b)).

This method of inquiry created a useful knowledge bank on the locations, generated comparative data, and provided a practical sense check from an '*on-the-ground perspective*' of the theoretical recommendations (Talen and Park 2021, p.7; Hehir et al. 2022, p.7).

Table 5.7(c): Method of Inquiry – Desktop Analysis

DESKTOP ANALYSIS

As part of the research approach three sources were identified and analysed through the desktop method of inquiry:

(i) *historical maps* (see Chapter Three, 3.2.1) – the town centre operates in space and time (Lynch 1972; Carmona 2013). Following the Cozenian method, the evolution of the town centre was investigated through the use of historical maps over a period of around one hundred years (Whitehand 2001,p.103-109).

(ii) *national legislation, policy and strategies* – the impact of the relevant government instruments on the case study locations were investigated.

(iii) *local policy, strategies and plans* – the existence and impact of local initiatives were investigated through the desktop analysis, and the positive or negative implication of the initiatives on town centre were evaluated.

(iii) *notes and minutes from meetings, and analysis of information in the public domain* ('notes of a reflective practitioner' (Chapter 6 & 7)) – the researcher attended a number of

meetings, both formal (over 100) and informal (over 200), the notes from those meetings and engagement were analysed and used as the basis for the 'notes of a reflective practitioner'. The reflective notes have been anonymised, for ethical reasons it was considered inappropriate to directly attribute quotes to any one individual: the reason for this is that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. Therefore, only comments that are widely available in the public domain and the notes of the researcher are referred to directly to provide evidence.

Thematic Analysis

The data collected using the research methods, set out above, were analysed using the themes introduced and discussed in chapter four – Place, Deliverability and Management (4.2.1). The themes were generated early in the research process; the themes were identified through the practice experience of the researcher and then refined for the purpose of this research. The use of rudimentary thematic analysis (TA), and its flexibility, is considered to be well suited for the deductive and inductive analytical process adopted in this research. (Braun & Clarke 2006; Braun & Clarke 2021).

Table 5.8: Structured Fieldwork Observation Tool (developing the approach of Reeve et al (2007) and Gehl & Svarre (2013)).

LOCATION:[varying morphological scales and could be used to analyse other formats] **DAY:** **DATE:** **TIME:**	**WEATHER**
COMMERCIAL OFFER – Town Centre USES	**ENVIRONMENT**
Desk top mapping: footfall data, vacant, use type Field: observation and signs of commercial activity	Field: observation of public life; management – cleansing, maintenance; quality - soundscapes
WELCOME (safety, anti-social behaviour) & GATEWAYS	**BUILT ENVIRONMENT**
Field: identity and image of a place, signs of antisocial behaviour	Field: architectural quality, maintenance of buildings, quality between buildings, frontage categories: A = Active; B = Friendly; C = Mixture; D = Boring; E = Inactive (Gehl & Svarre, 2013: p105).

VISITOR ATTRACTIONS AND TOURISM (inc. marketing)	**BUSYNESS – FOOTFALL, PLACES TO DWELL**
Desk Top: footprint online Field: evidence of formal place marketing (i.e. Tourist Information Centre) and informal things to do and social activities.	Field: observation – places to dwell, areas that are busy, areas that are quiet
SIGNS OF RESIDENTIAL POPULATION – PASSIVE SECURITY	**PUBLIC ACCESSABILITY**
Desk Top: residential accommodation to rent or for sale. Field: signs of residential use and mixed-use development	Field: evidence of private space and privately managed public space. Vehicular and pedestrian movement – any conflict.
IDENTITY or IMAGE	**NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS**
Desk Top: online and print information. Field: signs of an identity or image.	Desk Top: review Field Analysis and reflect on findings. Field: other information that is of note, but not identified through the categories.

Field Analysis includes written document (above) and annotated plans.

Table 5.10: list of participants and area of expertise

UID	INTERVIEWEE: ROLE & AREA OF EXPERTISE
A	Elected Member of Stevenage Borough Council – Portfolio Holder which includes Regeneration of the town centre
B1 & B2	Assistant Director for Planning at Stevenage Borough Council – Chief Planning Officer to the LPA
C1 & C2	Former Head of Planning for Planning Aid (Chief Planning Officer) and former Head of Planning and Regeneration for a City Council
D1 & D2	Former Director of Regeneration with a Borough Council and former head of the Loughborough BID (they were part of the team that proposed, set up the BID and secured the second term)
E1 & E2	Head of Planning and Regeneration at Charnwood Borough Council – Chief Planning Officer to the LPA
F1 & F2	Regeneration Manager (with responsibility for the regeneration of the town centre) at Charnwood Borough Council and former Director of Planning and Regeneration – former Chief Planning Officer to the LPA
G1 & G2	Economic Development and Inward Investment Manager at Charnwood Borough Council
H	Expert who was part of the URBED (1994) study, with detailed knowledge of the research problem at the national level
I	Expert with knowledge of new town centre development, including issues at a national level
J	Hertfordshire LEP – Head of Regeneration and Infrastructure
K	Stevenage Borough Council, senior elected member

5.4 Preparation for the Case Study Research

Wrigley (2014) argues that town centres will not 'bounce back', to remain *relevant* town centres need to develop 'adaptive resilience' in order to adapt or 'bounce forward' (Wrigley 2014). Using the case studies to examine town centres through the research framework (ARM) creates the opportunity to understand trends and patterns, relating to the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of urban centres, and to act as a springboard for theoretical reflection and analysis of contrasting findings.

(i) Spatial Considerations

The geographic focus is informed through a consideration of the need for the uniformity of external factors, for example: planning law, taxation, etc. Following the selection of the case study approach it is important that the research is carried out in the 'natural setting' (Zeisel 2006, p.104; Millington et al. 2014).

(ii) Access to Urban Centres

The vast majority of town centres are accessible to the general public. Some areas may be 'private public realm', which can often be accessed during trading hours. It is acknowledged that some areas which appear to be 'public realm' can be 'private' and the collection of data, for example photography and observation, may be managed by the site owner. This was evaluated and permission sought where appropriate.

(iii) Accessibility of Data for the Research

Data relating to the commercial 'health' of the town can be organised into three categories:

(i) *private data* – owned, controlled and proprietary due to commercial sensitivity and data protection. Private data is not open to entities other than those who own it;

(ii) *commercial data* – available to anyone who can afford to buy it; the Commercial Research Companies (CRC) sell data; and,

(iii) *open data* – publicly accessible in an open format for free, under licence for use and redistribution (Table 5.9) (Page 2014; Macdonald et al. 2022).

Table 5.9: focus on the collection of 'vitality' and 'viability' across sources and data types.

DATA TYPE	SOURCE	FOCUS
PRIVATE	RETAIL OPERATORS PENSION FUNDS ASSET MANAGEMENT FIRMS SHOPPING CENTRE MANAGEMENT	COMMERCIAL VIABILITY
COMMERCIAL	CRC BIDs	COMMERCIAL VIABILITY
OPEN	HEALTHCEHECK – NPPG HEALTHCHECK – ATCM LPA – AMR LEPs GOVERNMENT DATA	COMMERCIAL VIABILITY & SOCIAL VITALITY

The methods used for the collection of data differ among the CRC, which means that analysis and interrogation is problematic. A number of attempts were made to identify data sets that could be used to compare town centres, the most notable being the Lockwood surveys (Lockwood 2000). The specialist CRC reports have been criticised by some academics for being descriptive, rather than analytical, but they are recognised as being influential with high profiles in the press and media (Wrigley & Dolega2011; CACI 2016). This research has not had access to private or commercial data sources, and so had to rely on open data.

(iv) Access to Key Organisations/Stakeholders

The researcher is flexible in their approach to key stakeholders, and fit in with their schedule and requirements wherever possible. The researcher employed a number of communication options, including: face to face meetings, virtual meetings, e-mail; etc.

(v) Disclosing Case Studies and Participant Identity – Ethics

The research methods were presented to the Oxford Brookes University Ethics Committee and approval for the research was granted by the committee. The vast majority of data is in

the public domain, and any commentary from semi-structured interviews, reflects either on historical events or considering the potential future for town centres. The method included a two-step process. Step One - semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and interviews were carried out on a voluntary basis, and their participation is anonymised within the thesis (Hehir et al. 2022, p.8). As part of the process and to ensure transparency each participant was sent information pack, which included:

- outline of the purpose of the research, and setting out why the case study location has been chosen;
- a set of research questions, to guide the semi-structured interview process;
- guidance relating to ethics and the GDPR regulations; and,
- a consent form for the interview, and audio recording.

Step two – recommendations were presented to the local experts and a number of other, national experts with knowledge of the challenges facing town centres in a broader context and in other locations (Table 5.7b). A further pack of information was shared with participants (see Appendix I(b), I(c), I(d)). It was not anticipated that any of the data from the semi-structured interviews would be contentious as interviewees would mainly be reflecting on matters that have happened, and their opinion of what they expected to happen in the future.

The researcher attended over 50 formal meetings, and in excess of 100 informal meeting and engagement in both case study locations. The notes from the interactions form part of the data gathering, and inform the research findings. It would have been impractical to seek consent of everyone that the researcher came into contact with. Due to this the reflection on the researchers experience is discussed and analysed as part of the research, but all interactions gave been completely anonymised (except where the interaction is in the public domain, such as minutes of a meeting).

5.5 The Role of the Researcher: 'Reflective Practitioner' and 'Inquiry by Design'

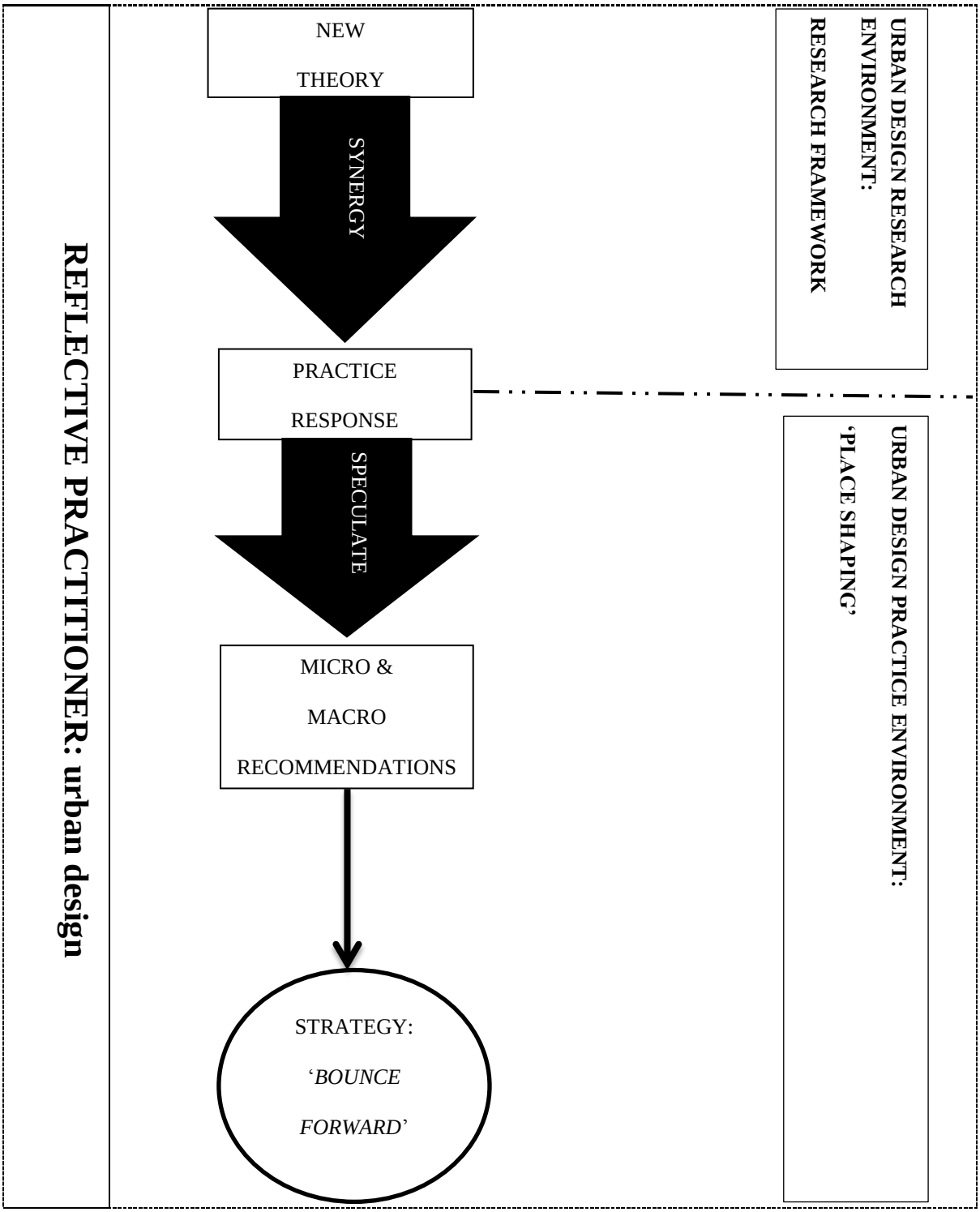
The author is a practitioner and PhD researcher who has drawn inspiration to pursue this research having 'lived' with the research problem.

The research draws on two concepts of the approach a practitioner can follow when seeking to develop skills as a trainee researcher:

(i) Zeisel (2006) developed an approach to research through *'inquiry by design'* - focusses on the development of a systematic research approach to understanding how places work. The method of observing of behaviour in the physical environment developed by Zeisel was used to develop the Field Observation method of inquiry (Zeisel 2006).

(ii) Schon (1983) developed the concept of the '*reflective practitioner'* – it is beneficial if the work focus of the academic and the practitioner can be brought closer together (Schon 1983, p.308; Millington et al. 2014; Carmona 2019). A significant motivation to pursue this research comes from the researcher's experience in practice and exposure to the research problem in a 'real world' setting (1.2.2). The research was not a 'pure mental event', but a process grounded as a 'practice or act' (Bleakley 1999, p.316). However, the 'practitioner' cannot reflect on everything, and it is necessary to select which experiences are reflected on, in a way the research presented in this thesis is an edited version of the observation and experience of the researcher (Karniel-Miller 2020). Schon (1983) draws on the experience of teaching hospitals as an example of where the boundaries between research and practice are 'permeable', moving in and out of research and practice careers; creating the potential for fluidity between theory and practical application, as described in Fig.5.4 (Schon 1983, p.323-324; Carmona 2019, p.8).

Fig.5.4: Part Two of the research process: Inductive Stage – creating permeability between theory and practice. (Adapted from Carmona 2019, p.8).



The ‘reflective practitioner’ approach has, perhaps inevitably, drawn the researcher into the research itself. By acknowledging that the researcher is part of the research is not a matter of self-indulgence, but is an opportunity to be cognisant of a further layer of complexity, unpredictability and nuance (Finlay 1998; Johnson & Duberley 2003; Reid et al. 2018). Reflexivity is built into the ‘reflective practitioner’ methodological approach for the purpose of this research, and is adopted as a primary element of the research design. Whilst being aware that reflexivity is a separate, but related strategy that emerged as part of the reflective practice approach to professional learning – reflexivity in this context seeks to go beyond the reflection that all researchers bring to their work (Finlay 1998; Bleakley 1999, p.328; Berger 2015;Watts 2019, p.9). That is to say that, through the execution of the primary research process and theory building, the researcher actively made a conscious effort to be aware and examine their own beliefs, judgements and practices (Rolfe 1997; Berger 2015, p.220; Johnson & Duberley 2003). The researcher does not have control of the environment or participants in the research process; following ethical approval (see 5.4(v)) for the research through to the completion of the study and beyond calls, therefore, for a truly reflexive approach (Reid et al., 2018). Indeed the researcher does not consider the completion of the thesis as the end of a ‘process’, but that following the concept of the ‘Reflective Practitioner’ and reflexivity strategy will inform the way they will conduct future research, and be embedded as part of their continuous professional development (Berger 2015; Cummins and Brannon 2022) (10.6).

5.6 Conclusions

This chapter has set out the research question, research methods, and strategy to answer the research problem. Reflection on the findings of the first part of the thesis generated two additional research questions: (i) has the market in which the town centre now operates changed within the timeframe identified for this research (post 1945-2020)?; and, (ii) can the town centre offer additional ‘value’ that other formats (physical and virtual), which are

commercially ‘viable’ to deliver town centre uses, cannot? The purpose of the research is not to offer a narrative or descriptive output – it is focussed on the analysis of the ‘adaptive resilience’ of town centres, and seeks to explore, what Wrigley (2014) refers as the bounce forward (Wrigley 2014). A hybrid deductive and inductive research design style creates a research environment in which theory is analysed (in the first part of the thesis – the deductive method), and through the research frame (ARM) new theory and theoretical concept[s] are generated (in the second part of the thesis – the inductive method).

The chapter has introduced the role of the researcher as a ‘reflective practitioner’ is a key element of this research and forms part of the conclusion and learning points of the project (Schon 1983; Carmona 2019). The research process uses two in-depth case studies, to systematically capture data and enable a forensic analysis of the findings through a micro-specific and macro-generic lens. The method enables new theory and theoretical concepts to be constructed which are synergised with practice, allowing speculation on how places might evolve, be influenced, and be shaped in the future (Carmona 2019). Thereby, developing a theoretical proposition for a place to acquire adaptive resilience. To ‘bounce forward’ through the conscious rebalancing of the relationship between the commercial ‘viability’ and social ‘vitality’ of place.

Chapter Six: Case Study One, Loughborough Town Centre

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses research objective four:

Apply, test and develop a conceptual analytical framework through a pilot case study, to:

- *(i) forensically investigate and assess the impact of the crisis on Loughborough town centre;*
- *(ii) propose recommendations for the development of a strategic response to promote the adaptive resilience of the town centre; and,*
- *(iii) test the recommendations and potential effectiveness of the interventions proposed in this case study.*

Loughborough town centre was used as a pilot case study (to apply, test and develop the conceptual analytical framework), and was then fully developed as a case study for data collection and analysis. This chapter summarises the findings from the case study.

The research framework is referred to in the case study as the Adaptive Resilience Model (ARM)(see Chapter Four). The ARM was designed to analyse the challenges facing Loughborough town centre from a macro-generic and micro-specific perspective, so that the research question can be effectively addressed. The primary research for Loughborough was carried out in the latter part of 2019, and the early part of 2020, and consisted of desk based research and analysis, field surveys and semi-structured interviews with practice experts (5.3.2). This chapter presents the findings from the research, and

analyses these through the micro-specific lens, and Chapter Eight from the macro-generic lens. The chapter is in three parts.

Part One – presents the findings from case study one. It is organised around the components of the ARM, which are

(i) a diagnostic framework, divided into three themes:

Theme One – Place: this section investigates the current quality and identity of Loughborough town centre and the ability of the town centre to attract people to engage in necessary, optional and social activities (Ghel 2011) (Table 4.5).

Theme Two – Deliverability: this section investigates the current ability of Loughborough town centre to change, and adapt to cope with competitive dynamics and visitor requirements at the micro-specific level.

Theme Three – Management: evaluates how effective the current arrangements for the management of the town centre as a socially 'vital', and commercially 'viable' coherent space.

Part Two - discusses the findings from the diagnostic stage of the case study; and,

Part Three – sets out a number of local recommendations, which have been tested with five local experts in their field.

The case study is based on a number of methods of data collection and generation in order to develop a rich and in-depth understanding of the town. These were principally (i) on site observation and fieldwork; including over fifty formal meetings (such as Council meetings and meetings of the planning committee) and over 100 informal meetings and engagement; (ii) five formal interviews with local actors with expert knowledge of the case study location, and numerous informal comments are captured here in the body of the chapter; and, (iii) documentary review (5.3.3). The findings were analysed and presented below, the

findings draw on the sources as appropriate to the themes of place, deliverability and management.

6.2 Background

Loughborough (Fig.6.1) is the second largest town in Leicestershire and is a market town (all interviewees used the term ‘market town’, which has grown organically over a number of centuries (Postles 1993). The town had an estimated population of 65,635 in 2017 (the census of 2011 found that there was a population of 59,932). During term-time the population increases, with 18,439 students attending Loughborough University.

Major types of employment in the town are manufacturing (3M Healthcare, Brush, Fisher Scientific UK); education (Loughborough University and Loughborough College of Further Education); engineering (Intelligent Energy); and, construction (William Davis).

Fig.6.1: Loughborough, sub-regional centre in context (not to scale)



Source: Digimap

The town has good transport connections:

- road network: junction 23 of the M1 passes close to the west of the town, offering good access to the north and the south of the UK, connections to the east and west of the UK via the road network are not as good.

- rail network: the train station is located on the edge of the town centre, and is well connected to the East Midlands 'high speed' services from London St Pancras, and to Sheffield, Derby and Nottingham to the north. Connections to the east and west are not as good, especially to major commercial centres, such as Birmingham, which requires a change of train at Leicester.

- air travel: the town is close to the East Midlands airport which is located around 9 miles from Loughborough – a journey time of around 20 minutes by car or around 1 hour by public transport. The airport has scheduled short haul flights to mainly tourist destinations in Europe. East Midlands airport is the UKs busiest 'pure' cargo airport with c. 328,000 tonnes of cargo per annum and is the UK hub for DHL, TNT, UPS and the Royal Mail.

PART ONE

6.3 Place

This section analyses and presents the findings from the first component of the ARM: Place – the current quality and identity of the town centre and the ability of the town centre to attract people to engage in necessary, optional and social activities (Gehl 2011). The case study followed a systematic approach through the use of a Field Observations Tool (FOT) (Table 5.8), to record the town centre of Loughborough, at different times of the day and various morphological scales, so that the character of the place could be captured and recorded, and, a number of themes inductively determined. The purpose of this analysis was to develop a clear appreciation of the relationship between the spatial characteristics of

the town and the opportunities and challenges these characteristics represent in terms of future viability and vitality – i.e. the underlying resilience of the place. Following an analysis of the data captured through the diagnostic stage, a 'current position' was postulated, and identified a number of 'proposed actions'. A set of recommendations were set out at a micro-specific level that could be implemented in Stevenage to improve the characteristics of 'adaptive resilience'. The set of recommendations were then presented to eight experts, their comments and reactions to the recommendations are set out in part two of this chapter.

6.3.1 Strategic Position

In a series of five interviews carried out as part of the research (see also Appendix I), with individuals deemed to have an interest in regeneration, there was an acknowledgment that there was a need for a '….*stronger leadership role* [from the public sector] *by being more strategic*….' with an active response and 'intervention' to the challenges facing the town centre (Participant F1 (PF1), with expertise in planning and regeneration). One interviewee felt that there was an opportunity to develop a '…*clear strategic and physical public and private sector investment approach….for Loughborough town centre over a twenty or thirty year timeframe'* (PE1). However, to look at the challenges facing Loughborough town centre in isolation is to misunderstand the problem (2.6.1).

The financial crisis and technological advances post 2007 and the austerity measures post 2010, combined with changes in consumer behaviour (the increased pressure from other formats (physical and virtual) that are commercially viable for town centre uses), have further weakened Loughborough town centre as a socially 'vital', and commercially 'viable' hub (see section 2.6.2). Although, a planner and a regeneration expert felt that the financial downturn '….*held some growth back*….', they also felt that the independent retail and commercial leisure sector '….*shielded*….' the town centre from the worst (PE1).

The research indicates that it has become increasingly problematic to identify the value of Loughborough town centre as a socially 'vital', as well as a commercially 'viable' place.

> '*I think that viability is easier to define….the commercial ability to make a profit, remain in business. Vitality is probably harder to define and measure. Essentially it is about the amount of life, activity that [Loughborough] town centre can attract. We would tend to measure it in footfall. I think it's more than that, it's the degree to which people are attracted to their centre, to use it, to be there, to choose it as a destination of choice, or a range of social [activities].'* (PF2)

As a format, Loughborough town centre represents the most challenging, complex and risky format in which to commercially operate, regenerate and develop (Table 1.1). Furthermore, the reliance of the local Loughborough economy on the retail and commercial leisure sectors means that the continued use of the town centre is increasingly vulnerable to economic downturn in these sectors.

> *'….in a bit more recent times than that the concern has been about the viability [with the] switch to internet shopping, the sort of….closure of a number of big stores and chains and all the rest of it….whether some of the [town centres] might not continue to operate, if you like, so I think that there's been a push to people in the retail business or commercial business to say that footfall is the key to operating, you know, and that links to me about trying to retain and give people a reason for coming to the town centre in that, that will sustain a lot of activity. And it's just interesting I think that people are still coming into the town [centre] for a coffee or whatever…..'* (PD1).

There was consensus amongst the interviewees that housing and more mixed-use development would play an increasingly important role for the town centre to remain a relevant social and commercial hub (PD1, PD2, PE1, PF1). However, there was less

certainty as to how the relevance of the town centre would be secured, and which organisation (private or public sector or an amalgamation of the two) would or could deliver. As a planner put it, there is a feeling that the stakeholders of Loughborough town centre are '….*on the back foot*….', but there was an '….*opportunity for leadership'* (PE1).

6.3.2 Form and Function

The following sub-section investigates how the form and function of the town centre has changed physically over the last hundred or so years; it sets out the evidence of the impact that the changed relationship between social 'vitality', and commercial 'viability', has had on the built form of Loughborough town centre. It does this by closely analysing two key parts of the town centre: (i) land to the east of Market Place; and, (ii) land to the east of the Rushes. The need for commercial 'viability' has become increasingly important: focussing on the retail and commercial leisure sector of the economy, has over time resulted in reduced density, permeability and larger footplate buildings.

Findings

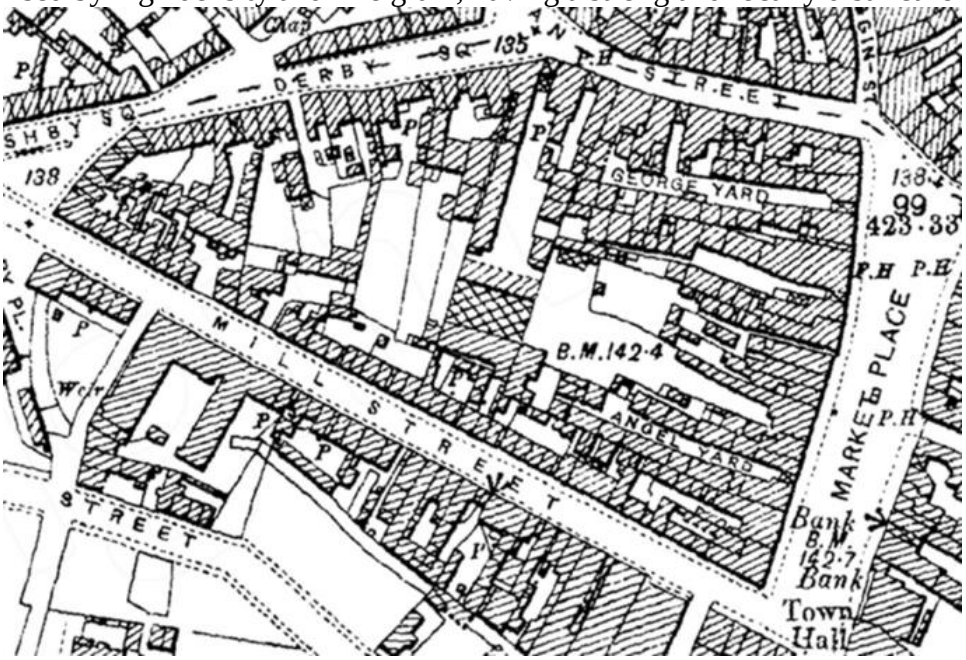
Fig.6.2 demonstrates that the area was legible, with an established built form by the 1900s which actively addressed the surrounding streets (i.e. Market Place, Mill Street, Derby Square and Swan Street) (Postles 1993).

(i) Land to the west of the Market Place.

The streets and buildings are at a domestic scale, and there is some evidence of a mix of social and commercial uses, including, for example, public houses and coaching inns with internal, enclosed yards and stable areas. The street layout of Loughborough town centre is largely at a human and domestic scale; it was a 'vital' place for the community and a commercial hub with the market, cattle market, mill and schools in close proximity (Postles 1993). The street pattern changed in the 1960s to accommodate the car, with a garage in the western corner of the site (Fig.6.3). There is evidence that some plots have

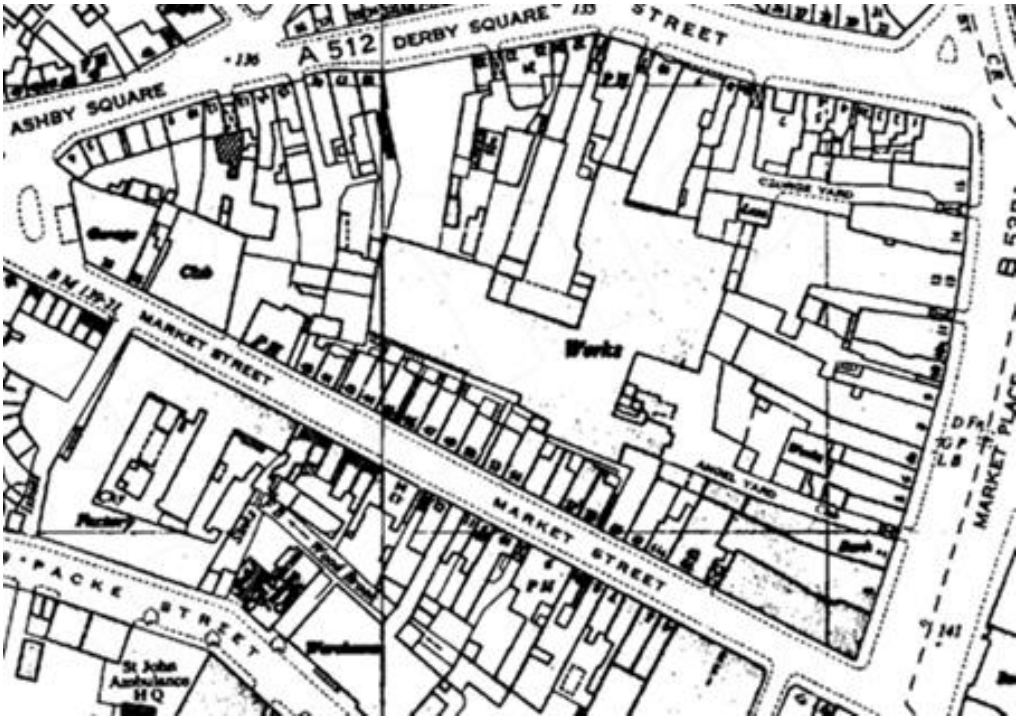
been merged to create larger units. However, there remains a mix of uses, including a bank and commercial leisure with the club and a number of public houses (such as the Green Man).

Fig.6.2: land west of Market Place 1900s – the area to the west of the Market Place was characterised by high density and fine grain, having a strong and locally distinct form.



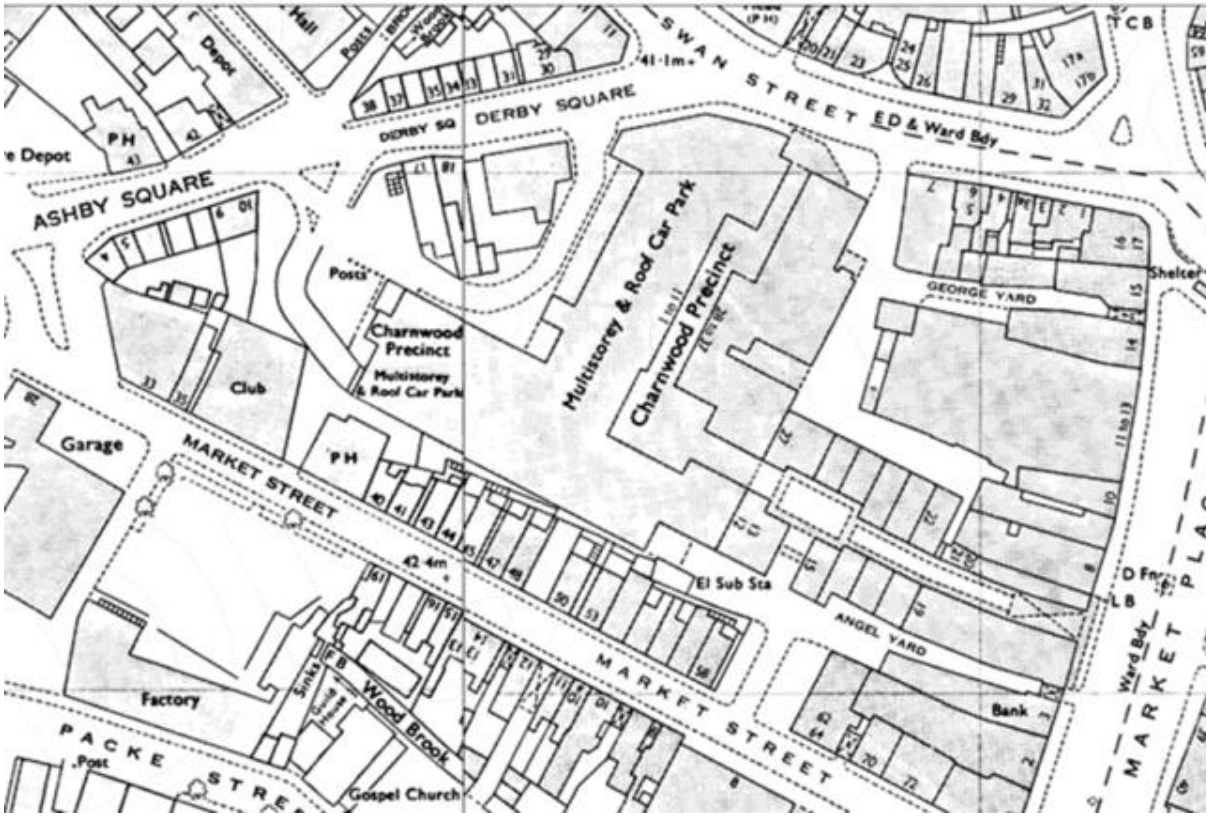
Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.6.3: land west of Market Place 1960s



Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.6.4: land west of Market Place 1970s



Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.6.5: land west of Market Place – contemporary (2019)



Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

The finer grain of the area is further reduced through the 1970s through to the 1990s, with the expansion of the footplate of some retail units (Fig.6.4). The development of this part of the town centre shows the shift from a socially and 'vital' space, with mixed use (including residential), to the need for commercially 'viable' retail and commercial leisure space. Moreover, it is evidence of the move away from the locally distinctive built form to a more generic, coarser grain and functional building type (Fig.6.5).

(ii) Land to the east of the Rushes.

In the early 1900s, the land west of The Rushes was a mix of fine grain, dense housing and social uses (including a school and the Mission Hall). The street structure offers good permeability, with visual and physical access to places of interest, including the church. The area has good legibility, with the buildings actively addressing the road network and a number of landmark buildings, such as the Mission Hall (*). There were soft landscaped areas, including the Rushes, the school area and the brook, which runs under Bridge Street through to West Street (Fig.6.6).

By the 1960s, the fine grain of the built environment has broken down, with larger building forms, such as the 'works'; and, 'parking' areas required to accommodate more cars. However, there remains a permeable and recognisable street structure, and a mix of uses. Although the amenity area around the school has been lost, the brook has been retained, so there remain some locally distinctive features (Fig.6.7).

The area to the west of The Rushes is now characterised by the 'big box', and mono use development, of the Rushes shopping centre, which is designed to be an internally focussed, stand-alone commercial area, one which does not address the surrounding streets (Fig.6.8). The form of the Rushes Shopping centre does not relate to the town centre of Loughborough in form or function, and could be a development in any town centre (Fig.6.13). Any natural or soft landscaping has been replaced by buildings that can be

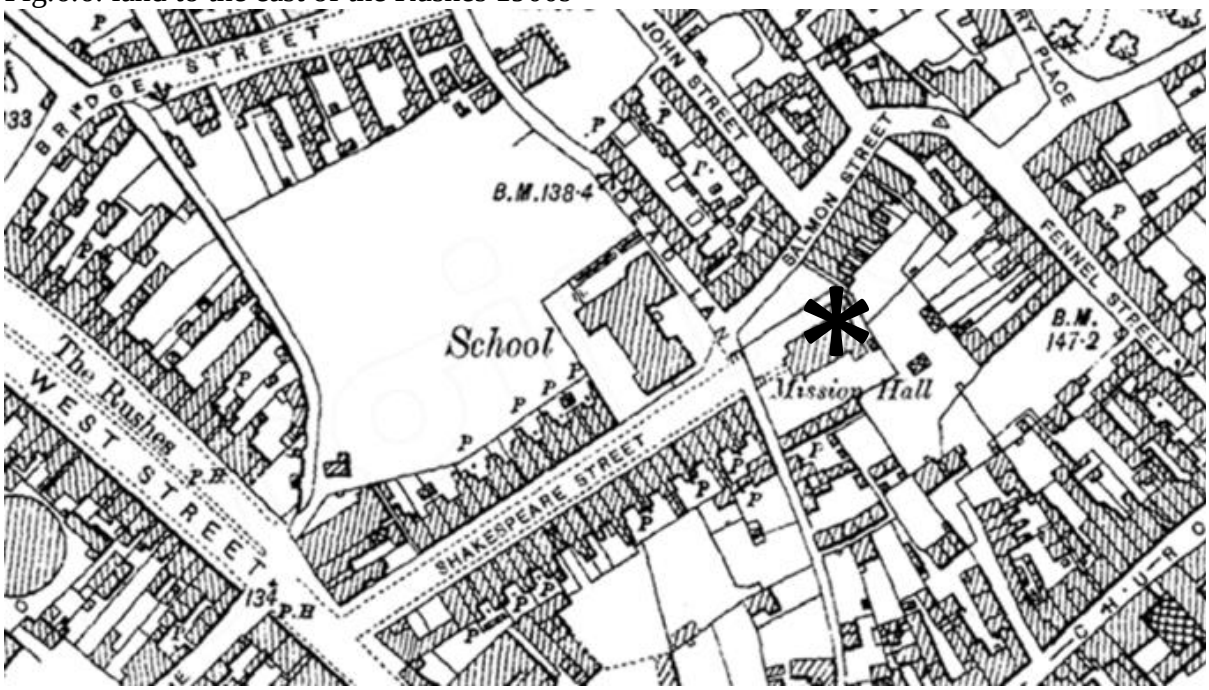
operated for commercial purposes, and the brook has been placed in a culvert, and lost below the vehicular access to the multi-storey car park. The street structure has been substantially altered to accommodate the development, as well as a larger volume of traffic, and this has a detrimental impact of the image of this part of the town centre, leading to a less legible and permeable place, as illustrated in the street structure diagrams in Fig.6.8.

Socially 'vital' uses were the first to move away from the town centre, as there were other places in which people could live; due to changes in technology, such as access to transport modes, there was no need to live close to work or to access service or goods. The 'vital' nature of Loughborough town centre continued to reduce more rapidly in the second historical phase (1979-2007) and accelerated, with new technological advances in computing, in the third phase (2007-2020). The examples above show the changing form and function of two key spaces in Loughborough town centre. They illustrate the shifting purpose of space to be more commercially viable, with increasing reliance on the retail and commercial leisure sectors of the economy.

6.3.3 Urban Fabric

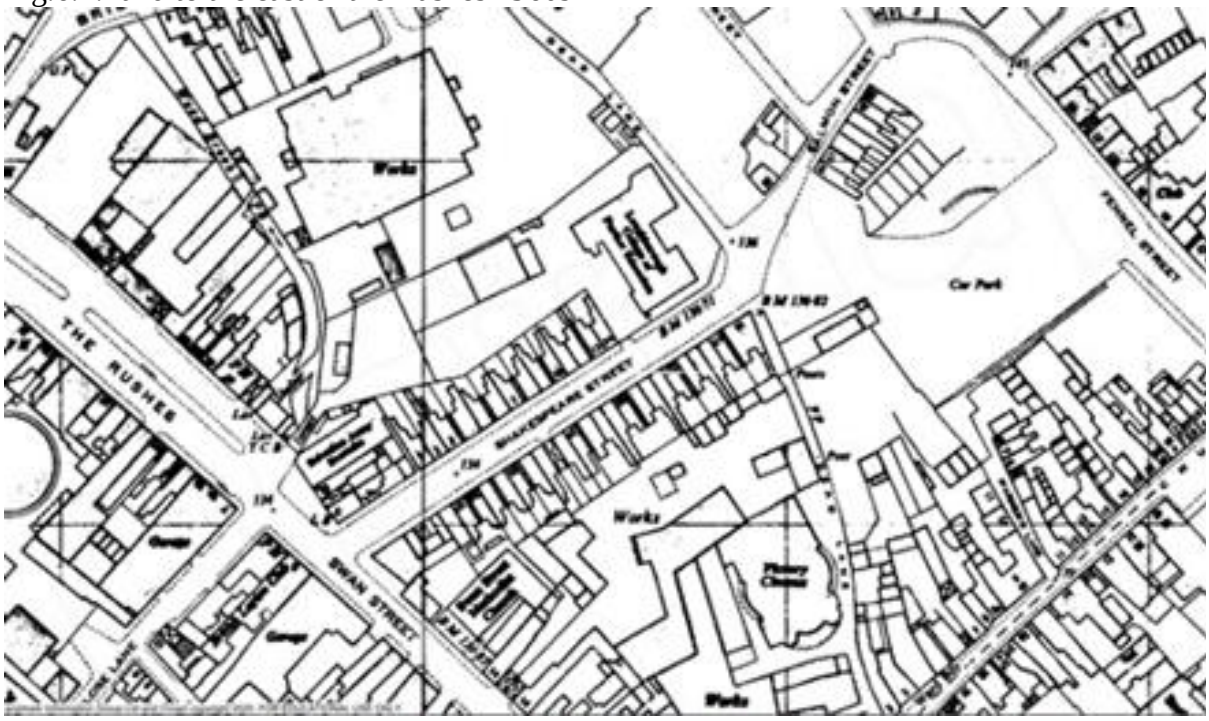
This sub-section sets the 'current position' in Loughborough town centre. With respect to the quality, identity and capacity of the town centre to attract people to engage in necessary, optional and social activities (Gehl 2011). The place analysis draws on the techniques developed by leading urban design researchers and, practice guidance (3.2). Through the use of the place analysis tool (FOT) (Table 5.8), the changing relationship between the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of the town centre can be tracked, and the potential to develop the characteristic of 'adaptive resilience' captured.

Fig.6.6: land to the east of the Rushes 1900s



Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.6.7: land to the east of the Rushes 1960s



Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.6.8: land to the east of the Rushes, contemporary



Source: Digimap not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Findings

Locally Distinctive Architecture

A regeneration expert interviewed, felt that there is a '*Market Town'* identity to Loughborough, the buildings might have changed but the character of the place has been maintained (PG1). There are few buildings in the town centre of historical or architectural significance. Although there are examples of locally distinctive buildings inspired by the art deco movement; and, on the edge and outside the town centre, a number of mature buildings that previously had an industrial use, which add to the feeling of place and the industrial history of the town (Appendix IV). However there are opportunities to strengthen the identity of the town centre to improve resilience (Butina Watson & Bentley, 2007).

Key Spaces and Places

The importance of high quality public realm, and the way in which it influences whether people visit and how long they dwell, was revealed through the fieldwork, in the interviews, and informal discussions as an important factor. Although one planner reflected that if your reason for visiting somewhere is to meet an essential need, the quality of the place in that circumstance means '*squiddly-dit'*, which supports the theoretical position of Gehl (2001), amongst others (PE1). Another interviewee suggested that Loughborough town centre is a *'....good town centre, no nonsense town*….' which suggests that the town centre is a functional and operational space (PF1). The way in which the interviewee described their perception of the town appeared to bring a sense of pride to them, as they became quite animated in their body language and expressions, as interpreted by the researcher, at this point of the interview. One participant reflected that for some users of Loughborough town centre the quality of the built environment would not necessarily be the main factor as to whether they visit, or not:

> *'….for many people it* [the quality of the built environment] *isn't actually*. *It isn't the primary factor that persuades them to come into town. Personally I am looking for quality, but I think for many other people it is more a question of convenience, accessibility, value for money. I guess the quality of the built environment isn't important unless they're combining that trip with a leisure experience. If they're choosing to visit [a] town centre because it's got a range of historical buildings, etc., etc., [or] for general day-to-day purchase [of] goods and services'* (PF1).

Part of the sense of the unique place of Loughborough town centre comes from the formal and not-so-formal pieces of public art in the town centre, which add positively to its identity and visual interest (Campos & Sequiera 2019, p.2) (Fig.6.10). A participant pointed to the 'informal art', and explained that some people consider it to be '*graffiti*' – in that way it could be considered to have a negative impact on the perception of the town centre as a 'managed' space.

> '*I'm not sure why it is tolerated, but there is no clamour to have it [the 'informal art'] removed or enforce…. It is odd, really, as much of it is on*

one commercial landlord's properties – you could say it's quite progressive. I like it!' (this quote is not attributed).

This tolerance of 'informal art/graffiti' in Loughborough town centre is of interest as it appears counter intuitive, and not in line with the 'management' of place or the 'fixing broken windows' concept of order and discipline in the built environment (Kelling & Coles, 1996).

The design, quality, and maintenance of the public realm in Loughborough town centre, are all poor, with no discernible joined up approach (Fig.6.12). There is very little green open space (and no blue, water based, infrastructure beyond the culverted brook at The Rushes) in the town centre, and where there is, it is very limited and inconsequential, making little impact to the overall hard landscape design approach. Although the attractive Queen's Park area is physically close to the town centre, it is poorly linked, and not well integrated. The Park feels remote from the town centre, and does not enhance the social '*vitality*' of the place. It was evident in the interviews with local experts that the quality of key places and spaces is seen as important in maintaining the relevance to users of the town centre, as a social and commercial space (PD1; PF1) (Fig.6.11).

There is an aspiration to improve the quality of the local built environment in the town (as set out in the adopted Masterplan 2018). However the priority is low and pace has been slow, with the outcome of initiatives far from certain (PF1). The town centre masterplan, adopted by Charnwood Borough Council in 2018, acknowledges the importance of key areas, and proposes some options to enhance and improve the built environment, many of which were also highlighted in the previous masterplan adopted in 2007 (see section 6.5, for further analysis).

Big Box and Mono-use (Fig.6.9)

The majority of the buildings in the town centre have a commercial function; mainly retail, commercial leisure, and a limited amount of service or office use. There are few examples

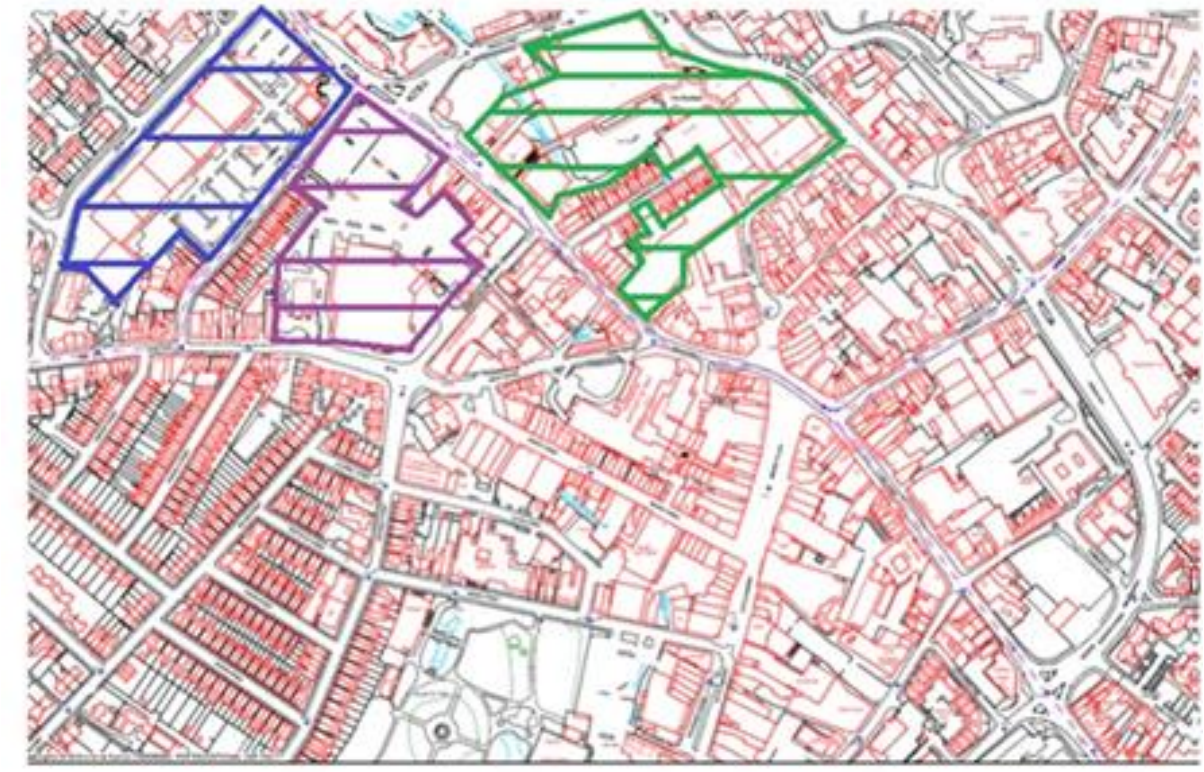
of mixed-use development in and around the town centre, although there is an increasing amount of speculative student accommodation. This mono-use form is particularly evident in the big box retail, introduced from the 1980s, in the form of the Sainsbury supermarket, The Rushes and, the edge-of-town, Regent's Place shopping area (Fig.6.9). This simplistic, uncomplicated built form, and generic mono-use built form has generally been adopted to minimise development and operational costs, evident in the most recent development at Baxter Gate (Fig.6.17).

The big box design is symptomatic of a reliance on the economy of the town centre on large floor plate retail, and the need for operational retail space, an area of the economy which is being challenged by the rapid rise, and growing market share of e-commerce (2.6.3). The form replicates the simplicity of other retail formats (for example retail parks), to simplify the management, design and form. Such space is developed to deliver a commercial operation, and to 'privatise' the management of the public realm - ignoring the historic character of fine grain streets and, therefore, the unique and authentic quality of the town centre. An expert with a background in regeneration said that they felt that The Rushes was a pragmatic solution, as the chains [retailers] would not otherwise have come to Loughborough town centre as they wanted a development that had the '*character*', including the size and shape, of an edge or out-of-town development (Fig.6.14): '*They [Tesco] want a unit of a certain size and shape and that was one that was a bit edge of [centre] and close enough to the town centre to benefit'* (PD1). This interviewee indicated that planners:

> *'….often used to bemoan the fact that we knew which was our sort of favourite potential retail site, you know….the one that came forward first….the Rushes development across the road was the one that come to fruition because some public land….assemble a site. It probably wasn't the top priority retail site, but it was identified as an opportunity site, and that's the one we sort of went with, if you like. But, there have been other sites that have been identified that haven't come forward*' (PD1**).**

The impact of the ‘big-box’ format is highlighted here as a local issue, specific to Loughborough town centre, however, the attractiveness of this built form for developers and operators is a broader generic issue, which is explored further in Chapter Eight (8.3.1).

Fig.6.9: big box retail area: (i) Regent’s Park - blue; (ii) Sainsbury store - purple; and, (iii) The Rushes – green.



Source: Digimap, not to scale

Connectivity and Movement

Outside the pedestrianised area of Loughborough town centre (Market Place and Market Street), the streets are dominated by vehicular traffic, or parked cars; the result of the dominance of vehicles makes the town centre appear to have been designed for the movement of traffic, at the expense of the ability of pedestrians to navigate or enjoy the space (see Appendix II(a)).

The purpose of the inner ring road is to move vehicles past the town centre as swiftly as possible, and acts as a barrier to pedestrian movement to other areas of interest in the town, such as the train station and church (Fig.6.15). It is an example of an inverted movement

hierarchy – where vehicle movement is given priority over that of the pedestrian, or cyclist. For Loughborough to maintain its *relevance* at the 'heart of the community', it must retain a reason for visiting for social as well as commercial needs.

Route to and from the Railway station

The link between the town centre and the railway station is important, as it is a key gateway, being the introduction and the first impression that some visitors will have of the town (Fig.6.16). However, it is poorly signposted and provides poor legibility, with few landmarks or indicators that it leads to the town centre. The railway station itself was purposefully designed to be a sterile, functional space, to keep people safe (from rail traffic) and make sure they pay for their rail fare. The configuration and design quality to the station suggests that the experience of arrival or exit point of the customer is of little importance, as they have paid for the service that the railway company provides. The forecourt of the station is dominated by surface car parking.

6.3.4 Time and Type of Activity

This section analyses the data captured through the application of the ARM in relation to time, and type of activity in Loughborough town centre, through semi-structured interviews, and observations (at varying times during the day, evening and night) which were systematically captured through the Fieldwork Observation Tool. The research analyses the ability of Loughborough town centre to generate what Jacobs (1961) referred to as '*exuberant diversity'*, when the streets are active places, with an element of '*passive surveillance'*, resulting in users and residents feeling that they have a stake in the town centre (Jacobs, 1961).

Findings

Activity in Loughborough town centre follows a rhythm determined by commercial uses. Footfall is at its highest during the day-time, commercial trading hours of the retailers, and

then reduces substantially as the shops close in the early evening. The exception to this are the 'big box' areas, with J Sainsbury, and The Rushes shopping area (Tesco and to a lesser degree the Marks and Spencer food hall) trading well into the evening, mainly accessed by customers using cars, and by students on foot in term time. The evening and night-time economy is dominated by commercial leisure, including pubs, chain restaurants, local restaurants and fast food establishments. Some streets in and around Loughborough town centre are very quiet in the evening, and night-time, with little or no footfall. These areas can be characterised by mono-use, without a residential element. This means that in the evening and night-time they can appear unwelcoming and uninviting.

By identifying when Loughborough town centre is active, an understanding of the relative vitality and resilience can be developed, to enable proposals for strategies to progress 'adaptive resilience' (Gehl & Savarre, 2013; Wrigley & Dolega, 2011). The findings presented here, highlight the influence of the commercial sector, in particular retail in the daytime, and commercial leisure in the evening and into the night time, on the type and time of activity that dominates the town centre. As there are few mixed-use developments which include a residential component, the effect is that some streets appear uninviting (especially in the evening and night time) as there is little passive security. The active and monitored security is noticeable across the town centre, with a large number of free standing CCTV units.

6.4 Deliverability

The following section reports the findings relating to the second component of the ARM: Deliverability, which is the current ability and agility of Loughborough town centre to change, to cope with competitive dynamics and visitor requirements, at the micro-specific level. It reflects on the likely resilience, and ability of Loughborough town centre, to cope and adapt to change within the confines of a number of key issues:

(i) the existing planning framework;

(ii) existing and varied asset (buildings and land) ownerships; and,

(iii) current and future competition to the town centre from other city/town centres and other formats (physical and virtual) which are commercially 'viable', to deliver town centre uses.

The diagnostic stage identifies a 'current position', and suggests a number of 'proposed actions' identified at a micro-specific level that could be implemented in the town centre, to develop its 'adaptive resilience'.

6.4.1 Policy

This section analyses the data from this research, which shows that, because of the national planning framework, planning policy is localised, and planning decisions relating to the town centre have a tendency to be taken in isolation, and without regard to the potential impact (negative or positive) town centres outside the boundaries of the LPA. It evaluates the impact of policy on the ability of Loughborough town centre to maintain a balance between social 'vitality' and commercial viability, as well as on its ability to adapt to change, and to develop resilience through interpretation of three key concepts of the NPPF (2019), these are: Loughborough town centre – (i) hierarchy and network; (ii) the sequential test; and, (iii) town centre uses.

Findings

Loughborough town centre – network and hierarchy

The LPA follows the national policy guidance to identify the network, and hierarchy in which Loughborough town centre is part. However the policy guidance is of limited relevance, as it is confined to the LPA administrative boundary, and does not include other formats that are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses (Table 1.1). The NPPF (2019) states that '…..*planning policies should: (a) define a network and hierarchy of town*

centres….' (NPPF, 2019). Loughborough town centre is identified in the hierarchy as the 'top' of the 'retail hierarchy' in Charnwood, with other centres classified as district' or 'local' centres (Charnwood Local Plan, 2015, para. 6.56-6.58, pages 54-55). Local policy comments on an anticipated growth in competition from larger centres within the catchment of the town centre (such as, Derby, Nottingham and Leicester); although beyond the acknowledgement of this competitive context it does not comment further. What is striking from the Local Plan document and the NPPF (2019), is that no other formats, which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses (including physical and virtual), are referred to in the 'Town Centres and Shops' section (see 2.6.2). The absence of spatial planning strategies, beyond those of the administrative boundaries of the LPA, means that a spatial planning framework, and plan led approach, is confined to the LPA area, and decision taking is based on local issues. Local policy is constrained by the remit of the LPA. It is not practical, or necessary, to identify a 'network' of town centres within the borough boundaries, as there is only one town centre, Loughborough town centre, designated as such in the Local Plan (2015). Moreover, given the local focus of decision taking, even if a broader 'network' of town centres were identified, it would be almost inconceivable that development proposed for a town centre (including the investment and jobs growth) would be deferred to by locally elected members for another town centre within the 'network', irrespective of whether it was still in the same administrative boundary, or in a neighbouring local authority's area. It is also unlikely that a promoter or proposed operator would show the necessary flexibility to change the location of a proposed development to fit with an identified network. The LPA follows the requirement of the NPPF (2019) and, therefore, is policy compliant.

Loughborough: extent of town centre and impact of the 'Sequential Test'

LPAs are encouraged to review and define the area of the town centre to correspond to commercial need, either by expanding to accommodate growth, or contracting to adapt to

decreasing demand for space. In the case of Loughborough town centre, its spatially dispersed character was highlighted in the interviews, as being a threat to both the identity, and the ongoing commercial viability of the town centre. It is open to the LPA to redefine the boundary of the town centre, at para. 85(b) the revised NPPF (2019) sets out that LPAs should '*define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre*' (NPPF 2019, p.25). One planner interviewed suggested that a more compact town centre would have a positive effect, making the town centre more competitive – socially and commercially attractive. A more compact area would allow greater prioritisation in terms of janitorial management, (cleansing, etc.) and investment in the quality of the public realm (PE1).

Although a more compact town centre would offer a better defined space, it would also make it increasingly likely that competing development on the edge, or at an out-of-town location, would become difficult to resist, due to the commercial need set out in the '*sequential test*' (see NPPF 2019, p.25-26 para.86-90). This is because some major retailers have sought to locate in large units with sufficient and free car parking. This was found to be the case in the most recent permission for significant retail space in the Aldi consent. The applicant argued, through the sequential test, that there were no suitable locations within the town centre, or ones that would become available within a 'reasonable' period and, therefore, an out-of-town location in this case was the only option (PE1). The data captured through the research strongly suggests that national planning policy does not have flexibility to respond to local issues, and it is out of step with the commercial reality that there are now a number of formats that are operationally 'viable' to deliver town centre uses, and which are more attractive to the commercial market.

The economic circumstances and markets have now materially changed, compared with the challenges faced by the town centre in June 1996, when the 'sequential test' was

introduced as national policy guidance (PPG6 1996) (2.6.2). The data indicate that the 'sequential test' is of little practical relevance to the promotion of the short-term, or '….*long-term vitality and viability*….' of Loughborough town centre (NPPF 2019, p.25). This was reflected in the input from one planner interviewed, that there are constraints to developing in Loughborough town centre which makes it more complex, risky and costly. They considered that: '….*it is easy to get around the sequential approach*….' and, in their opinion that this needs '….*work to [be done] at the national level'* (PE1).

Town Centre Uses

The research has revealed that there is ambiguity over what is defined as a town centre use, and fluidity in the formats that are commercially viable for town centre uses is problematic at both the wider generic and local specific level (2.6.2). The local specific level is considered here. The review of the literature, combined with analysis of the case study material, indicates that the crisis facing the town centre has become acute, as physical and virtual space other than town centres became commercially 'viable' to deliver goods and services, which were traditionally town centre functions (Table 1.1). A regeneration specialist in one interview suggested that the reliance on retail and commercial leisure sectors – the '….*retail landscape has changed…*'. In their opinion, the town centre in the future could return to a more social function, including residential, and become a place '….*where people want to live'* (PF1). Indeed, the NPPF (2019) identifies residential development as a '*town centre use'*, it does not require a mixed-use approach at all morphological levels (NPPF 2019, p.25).

The NPPF (2019) stipulates that planning policies (and by extension LPAs) should support '….*long-term vitality and viability*….' (NPPF, 2019). All interviewees were of the view that 'vitality' relates to the social characteristics and 'viability' relates to the commercial characteristics of a town centre. Another planner interviewed agreed with the general

definition – *'....it ['vital' and 'viable'] trips off the tongue....' but '....what do they really mean?'* (PE1).

The issue here is that the Use Class Order (1987) does not deliver clarity in terms of what are '….*main town centre uses*….' (para 86: NPPF 2019) (NPPF, 2019; Use Class Order 1987). Interviewees with expert knowledge of Loughborough town centre referred to a local feeling that the town centre is an important place, and should be supported as a focal point for the community (PE1; PG1). It seems that that the NPPF (2019) and local planning policies have their limitations in supporting Loughborough town centre at the heart of the local community. For example, the Local policy, in CS9 (Town Centres and Shops), is focussed on '….*major retail, leisure and other 'town centre' development*….' (Charnwood Local Plan, 2015). This suggests an emphasis on the commercial 'viability' of the town centre. The local policy does not actively promote mixed-use socially 'vital' development, including new homes

The case study evidence suggests that Loughborough town centre is still a complex social and commercial place, although this complexity has reduced, particularly in the P2 and P3 with the greater focus in recent years on the retail and commercial leisure sectors of the economy. Development has sought to emulate privately managed assets – the malls and out-of-town destinations – to simplify management, design, and form (as set-out in the big-box section, above). The conclusion seems to be that rather than simplify the social and commercial position of Loughborough town centre, the LA should seek a more nuanced solution, by creating a mix of social and commercial uses both horizontally and vertically (Table 8.2). Town centre uses are made up of more than 'retail' and 'leisure', as discussed above. A mix of uses, which operate throughout the day, will increase resilience to shock and/or change in one sector of the economy, and can be more easily adapted. At the time of the data collection for the case study (late 2019), the development plan and town centre polices were under review.

There was a feeling, expressed in an interview with a planner, that the LPA has limited tools, that the commercial developers and operators would find the path of least resistance to deliver commercially 'viable' development without the constraint of previously developed land, or a requirement to deliver social 'vitality' (PE1). The planner reflected that the LPA: '….*want to concentrate town centre use in the town centre, but fighting against the market and what the market wants'* (PE1). Moreover, they felt that that a mix of uses could be diversified, to bring more residential back, so that Loughborough town centre could be part of the solution to the local housing crisis. The ability of the LA to respond strategically to the challenges facing Loughborough town centre is limited by the absence of spatial planning above that of the LPA (explored further as a generic issue in 8.3.1).

6.4.2 Competition

Loughborough town centre risks leaking visitors, customers, and spend to other attractive town centres (such as Melton Mowbray), out-of-town offer (such as Fosse Park) and larger regional city centres (such as, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester) within the catchment area, as well as to virtual space. This section sets out the perception of the participants of competition to Loughborough town centre, which was discussed in a series of semi-structured interviews (Appendix I). Other town centres share generic social and commercial characteristics with Loughborough town centre, and can be compared, although they all have specific characteristics which make them unique. There are now other virtual retail formats that compete for local consumer spending as commercially 'viable' places, but which operate outside the requirement for town centres to be both commercially 'viable' and socially 'vital'. It is, therefore, difficult to compare virtual formats that are 'viable' for town centre uses, and Loughborough town centre.

Findings

To take the view that Loughborough town centre competes with other formats (whether physical or virtual), outside the town centre format, in any consistent or conventional sense is inaccurate. Indeed, the term *competitive* implies that the town centre has an agreed operational, and management approach for a commercial product, which it does not. The research reveals that Loughborough does not operate within a defined or identifiable market, and so the practical appropriateness of testing competitiveness of its town centre in the current context is of limited value.

It is the government's requirement (as set out in the NPPF 2019) for town centres to be at the 'heart' of the community and deliver socially 'vital', as well as commercially 'viable' town centre uses. As an interviewee from a regeneration background suggested, the '….*sense of place*….' offered by Loughborough town centre could give it an advantage over other formats, as it offers a social dimension – '….*a place where people meet and want to [be]*' (PF1). The main difference between the town centre and other formats, and why places do not compete on equal terms, is that the town centre is as public space - open for all of society for social and commercial use, whilst other formats are privately managed – selectively available for commercial use and consumption (2.4.4). Where the commercial 'viability' of a place is the dominant factor, a privately managed and controlled space would be the least risky, and least costly format to develop and operate out of (Fig.6.18).

6.4.3 Ownership

The complex ownership of assets (buildings and land) in Loughborough town centre creates a particular problem when looking to plan for the future social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of the town centre. Loughborough's town centre differs from other formats, which are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses, both physical and commercial, in the diversity, fragmentation, and quantum of different ownerships interests.

The laissez-faire, and non-interventionist approach of key stakeholders, in the ownership, and limited control over assets, has resulted in a *reactive* response to development. In general, the main groups of asset owners in Loughborough town centre can be divided between the public and the private sector. The impact of this on the town centre is discussed below.

Findings

The aspiration of landowners is a key element when considering the ability of a place (at varying morphological levels) to adapt to shock and change. This section sets out the findings from the case study, and groups the landownership into two broad categories, in order to analyse the current position in Loughborough, the categories are: (i) assets in the ownership and control of the public sector; and, (ii) assets in the ownership of the private sector.

Public Sector Ownership

There are publicly owned assets in, and on the edge of Loughborough town centre. The assets are not managed for the wider social and commercial benefit of the community, which have access to the town centre. The professional experience of the researcher, combined with data from the case study, shows that the way in which public assets are managed and controlled has been to the detriment of the health of the town centre. They are managed in a quasi-private sector approach of internal markets. Public sector asset management, is a 'commercial' function of independent public bodies, where budget holders and assets managers are required to act like private sector actors, and 'sweat' the commercial value of the asset. The 'value' of the asset is not measured in terms of community or social value, as part of a wider desire for local vitality, but as a financial asset, and a commercially 'viable' one. This is the case, for example, with the Magistrates' Courts building on the edge of the town centre, managed by the Ministry of Justice, and,

although a relatively new development, is no longer operationally needed for the courtrooms. This asset forms part of the capital value of the services finances, and therefore, is jealously guarded in particular in periods of austerity, where funding is limited and services under threat. The result of this is that public sector assets have not been strategically managed to meet the local spatial needs of the place in which they operate, but remotely, due to the operational needs of the public sector function; and often there is little interest in the locality in which they operate. Although there are a number of publicly owned assets in Loughborough town centre, there is not an asset management approach for the benefit of the commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' of the town centre, as a hub at the heart of the community. It can be concluded that the management of the assets is operational and buildings focussed, rather than place orientated (Fig.6.19 & Fig.6.20).

Private Sector Ownership

Some areas in Loughborough town centre are still made up of fine grain streets, with small retail units and some commercial leisure. However, the units are held in a number of disparate ownerships. There are larger parcels of land (such as the Carillon centre, The Rushes, the J Sainsbury site), that are held and controlled by larger investment vehicles. Any approach to develop or regenerate part of the town centre will be complex, due to the variety and number of different asset ownerships. This is in contrast to edge and out-of-town formats which, in general, have an agreed asset management strategy designed to maximise the commercial profit generated from the site (for example, the edge-of-centre Regent's Park development). No strategic asset management, or framework, exists for the future development of Loughborough town centre.

The Loughborough town centre position is not unique in itself; the challenges created by the differing agendas, and business strategies of asset owners in the town centre, are not specific to Loughborough. This is illustrated by the example in Fig.6.21, where the

aspirations or lack of aspiration of the landowner has had a direct impact on the perceived quality of the town centre.

As part of the research, the author attended a number of town centre consultation meetings as part of the development of the town centre masterplan (2018). It was ironic, but not untypical, that one landowner who attended the meeting on the regeneration of the town centre, had a deliberate business approach of not investing in his assets, as he waited for an improved commercial offer for development (Fig.6.20).

This demonstrates the negative impact different commercial agendas and limitations of control can have on the quality of the built environment. There can be a naïve expectation on the part of a local authority, and the public in general, that all stakeholders in the town centre will collaborate, and have a shared interest in delivering the 'best' outcome for a town centre. For example, sometimes the greater commercial benefit (and profit) may come from limited investment in the fabric of a building, or what might be considered by some to be an inappropriate use.

6.5 Management

This section sets out the findings following the application of the final component of the ARM: *Management* –based on an analysis of how effective the current arrangements for the management of the town centre are, as a socially 'vital', and commercially 'viable' coherent place.

First, and foremost, to consider the town centre of Loughborough as a 'managed' space is problematic, if not impossible, in the current organisational and policy context. A variety of organisations has either a formal or an informal responsibility for some functions and operation of the town centre, which can overlap and lead to confusion. This section analyses the local approach to address the challenges facing the town centre, through local strategies and management initiatives, such as the town centre masterplan, to set out the

'current position'. From this, a number of 'proposed actions' are identified at a micro-specific level, that could be implemented in Loughborough town centre to seek and develop its 'adaptive resilience'.

6.5.1 Local Strategies and Plans

A number of local strategies have been developed by the LA in Loughborough, outside the statutory planning framework, that link to the future management and development of Loughborough town centre, these are set out below.

Findings

Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Economic Plan 2014-2020

Loughborough town centre falls within the geographic interest of the Leicester and Leicestershire Local Economic Partnership (LLEP), which is within the (arbitrary) administrative boundary of the county of Leicester, and includes Leicester City. All Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are required to have a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP); one of the three main themes of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) SEP is town centre regeneration. The SEP is a broad document, setting out a high-level strategic position for the LEP area. However, Loughborough town centre is not identified as a strategic priority or explicitly identified for funding. This suggests that the allocation of funding, through the SEP, was based on town centres that had already started, or identified projects that the LEP could readily support and deliver, within a relatively short timeline. Although the SEP (2014-2020) identifies town centre regeneration as a key theme, it does not put into context the competition that town centres face from other formats (both physical and virtual) that are 'viable' to deliver town centre uses.

A number of issues relating to the appropriateness of the LEP, emerge from this research (and more generally to the wider national LEP concept). These include the ambiguity in the relevance of the geographical focus of the LEP – beyond the fact that covers the

County of Leicestershire; its membership and accountability; and, the limitations in the scope and ability of the LEP to deliver the aspirations set out in the SEP. These wider concerns are beyond the scope of this research, but what can be concluded is that in relation to Loughborough town centre the SEP is of little value.

Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan (2018)

Charnwood Borough Council took the lead in 2017 to fund and commission the Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan (2018). The 2018 Masterplan replaced the 2007 Masterplan, although there is around a ten-year gap between the drafting of the Masterplans, there are close similarities between the two. As one planner said:

> '*If I reflect on master plans in this authority area, they haven't really progressed*. I fear with this one *[the 2018 Masterplan] will be fully constrained….it's very ambitious*.' (PF1).

A number of interviewees in the case study considered the delivery of regeneration in the Borough to be laissez-faire, mainly due to restricted resources, corporate priorities, and the culture of the Council, which does not '….*have a track record for proactive intervention*….' (PG1).The Masterplan (2018) clearly identifies The Borough Council as the lead organisation responsible for bringing together local public-private partnerships, and joint ventures, to 'pump-prime' strategic sites where there is market failure. It was acknowledged by one interviewee, employed by the Borough Council, that the corporate approach would have to change significantly if the '….*very ambitious*….' recommendations of the Masterplan (2018) were to be delivered - *'….sadly, it's not very well at this stage….'* (PF1). It may be that, although the crisis facing the town centre of Loughborough is a local one, not all of the potential solutions could or would be local. It was evident, through the interviews, that the interventions set out in the masterplan were local, although several interviewees recognised that the approach needed to be more '….*strategic*' (PD1; PF1; PG1). There is little evidence to suggest that the Borough Council has the capacity (financial or human resources) to lead proactive regeneration at

the time of the research, nor is it clear that there is a corporate or political ambition to prioritise significant intervention.

Funding and Investment in the Town Centre

No capital funds were identified, through this research, as allocated and specific to Loughborough town centre. The allocation of funding from the government, outside the SEP process (discussed above), for town centre initiatives, and capital projects is short-term, and often includes an application or bidding process. Again, several interviewees suggested that there is '*bidding fatigue'*, with a number of unsuccessful bids being made for funding for the town centre by the local authority. Such a situation creates a Catch 22 position: local stakeholders do not have the resource to prepare the 'shovel ready' schemes which show any ability to deliver the short-term outputs that the government seeks, but by not having 'shovel ready' schemes local stakeholders are unlikely to be successful in securing government funding (PG1).

Several interviewees expressed the view that the challenges facing Loughborough town centre have been compounded by the austerity measures introduced by the government post 2010, which have had a significantly negative impact on public sector funding. A number of interviewees commented on the impact of budget cuts on Loughborough town centre; the need to prioritise statutory functions, reduce services, and the knock-on effect on attracting, and retaining, staff with appropriate skills and experience.

6.5.2 Partnerships and Stakeholders

The type of strategy and management identified by key agencies, such as a local authority for a town centre to develop 'adaptive resilience', will influence who the relevant stakeholders are to deliver outputs, as well as their power/influence and role they may play (McGlynn 2000, p.88).

Findings

The use of the term *management* in relation to Loughborough town centre is problematic. Whilst, in relation to the town centre, the notion of management was tacitly accepted by interviewees, when challenged on which organisation was responsible and accountable for the management of the town centre, participants were unable to clearly identify any organisation or body (PD1; PF1).

> *'It isn't really managed [Loughborough town centre], certainly I don't think that the public appreciate the different responsibilities and different agencies with respect to the town centres. We don't really have a defined town centre, organised centre. Loughborough doesn't have it's own [town] council. It might have provided a vehicle for responsibility, we have a Loughborough town committee, but that isn't executive. In terms of that you need accountability and, I guess, hands on management of the centre'* (PF1).

There seems to be no coordinated approach to the management of the town centre in Loughborough: there is no single point of contact. One interviewee, who had worked closely with the BID, considered that there was *'....a lot of confusion…*' in relation to '*….who does what…*' and '*….who's responsible….*' (PD1)(Fig.6.22).

Non-the-less, a number of organisations claim, or were suggested as having, a responsibility for at least some aspects of the management of Loughborough town centre, and these and their role is explored below.

Town Centre Management

Loughborough does not have a designated town centre manager (TCM) or TCM initiative; although at one point it did prior to the BID (PD1).

> *'....the BID can't manage the town centre and the borough [council] can't manage the town centre in the complete sense, if you like. Charnwood [borough council] did have [a] designated town centre manager at one point. There still is that challenge for that department [of the borough council] that's challenged for [all] local authorities, it's perfectly [capable] of doing it, if needs must the local authority need[s] to sign-up to [the] improvement of the town centre'* (PD1).

Charnwood Borough Council's website does have a 'town centre management' area, managed through the Neighbourhood and Communities service. The TCM relates mainly to the janitorial and operational management responsibilities of the council, including the weekly market, car parking, and maintenance. An employee of the council thought that having a designated TCM might be *'....beneficial….*', but did not elaborate on the role that they could play (PE1). The term TCM is used by the Council on their website as a convenient categorisation for services that the local authority would deliver as part of its normal operational and statutory responsibilities. Otsuka and Reeve (2007) saw a growing tendency by the mid-noughties for TCM to move beyond the janitorial to develop a regeneration agenda and become more strategic in outlook (Otsuka & Reeve 2007). This case study found little evidence to suggest that there is a TCM-led approach to regeneration in Loughborough town centre (PF1; PG1). The validity, and merit, of using the term *management* within the context Loughborough town centre is questionable.

Business Improvement District

The Loughborough Business Improvement District (BID) is focussed on the commercial 'viability' of the town centre. It is responsible for the delivery of the BID business plan, and does not have a wider remit for the management of the town centre The Loughborough (BID) is now in its second term, having been 're-elected' through a vote of eligible businesses. An interviewee with close knowledge of the workings of the BID explained that the Loughborough BID is not a strategic organisation by design (PF1): '….*the BIDs role is primarily around day to day management*' (PF1).

The BID is a commercially targeted intervention, which is operational and limited in scope in number of ways:

(i) spatially (the BID boundary is defined as a specific area within the wider Loughborough town centre boundary);

(ii) financially (by the achievable levy funding within the BID boundary or other voluntary funding); and,

(iii) in output to the requirements of the electorate (through the business plan)(Fig.6.23).

The Loughborough BID's outputs are organised around four key themes, relating to local marketing, lobbying local organisations, business liaison and some training and event promotion. The BID developed a brand and marketing approach, around the 'Love Loughborough' slogan (Fig.6.23). One participant noted that the 'Love Loughborough' brand was useful, and used by the BID for local seasonal promotions and events in the town centre. Although, and as a side comment whilst appearing amused, they said that they were not sure what 'Love Loughborough' really '*means*'. They considered the BID to be more business aware than the Council, more likely that businesses would approach the BID in the first instance, and that this was positive (PG1). One interviewee with close knowledge of the workings of the BID proposed that the BID could take on more responsibility for delivery in the town centre, to '….*become an 'agent' of the Borough Council'* (PD1). The Loughborough BID does not have the capacity, or a mandate, to *manage* Loughborough town centre. One interviewee with experience of the BID and the Borough Council, said that the Council had to be *'....better than it has been*….'. They observed that some departments in the local authority competed and appeared to '….*work against each other*….' in relation to Loughborough town centre, and that the BID was more *'....accepted and trusted by businesses, I think, than Borough Council business community'* (PD1).

Loughborough Town Team

Charnwood Borough Council set-up a Loughborough Town Team group to bring stakeholders together as a 'representative consultative forum'. The role of the Town Team group is to advise the Council on matters relating to the management and development of

the town centre, the Local Plan, and the town centre masterplan. This group is made up of representatives from the BID, and the Council sections responsible for Planning, Regeneration and TCM matters, amongst others. Interviewees from the Borough Council expressed a view that Charnwood Borough Council had a '*responsibility*' to develop a '*vision*' for the town centre, '*….especially as there is not a Town Council for Loughborough*' (PF1; PG1).

Loughborough Area Committee

A representative of the Borough Council suggested in interview that the Loughborough Area Committee had '*responsibility*' for the management of the town centre, and could be an accountable body (PE1). This is not the case, however, as the Loughborough Area Committee has no jurisdiction, or even representative membership, beyond that of the Borough Council. The term 'management', in relation to Loughborough town centre, is interpreted narrowly locally as being operational, and focussed on the short-term janitorial and marketing activities - predominantly delivered by the Borough Council and the BID.

6.6 Notes of a Reflective Practitioner – Loughborough Town Centre

This section of the chapter reflects on the research experience of the researcher who was embedded in the regeneration team, as a consultant, at Charnwood Borough Council (CBC) from 2016 to 2019. The researcher remained an active participant observer throughout the primary research stage for this thesis. In contrast to the earlier part of this chapter, the primary research here focusses on the experience of the researcher. It was concluded that this part of the primary research goes beyond commenting on fact and could compromise the individuals that took part. For ethical reasons, it was considered inappropriate to directly attribute quotes to any one individual: the reason for this is that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. Therefore, only comments that are widely

available in the public domain and the notes of the researcher are referred to directly in this section to provide evidence.

The role of the author (as a practicing consultant) at CBC was focussed on advising the Council on major strategic growth in the Borough. This consisted primarily on the three 'Sustainable Urban Extensions' in the north of Leicestershire, which can be summarised in programme management terms as:

- North East Leicester Sustainable Urban Extension: 4,500 new homes, infrastructure and community facilities;
- West of Loughborough Sustainable Urban Extension: c. 3,200 new homes, infrastructure and community facilities; and,
- Broadnook 'garden suburb: c.1,950 new homes, infrastructure and community facilities– following the principle of the Garden City concept.

The researcher was also asked to lead and participate in other areas of work which included, for example: Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Zone; strategic sites and options to bring forward site assembly; and, town centre regeneration.

Town Centre Regeneration: the Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan

As set out on 6.5.1, the Borough Council took the lead in revising the masterplan for the town centre (in 2016). The instruction came from the Portfolio Holder for regeneration, the elected member who had responsibility for the 'health' of Loughborough town centre. The researcher joined the Council after initial work had already commenced with a process to select a consultancy team to prepare the new Masterplan, for which eight consultant practices were short-listed. This meant that the brief relating to the work had been issued, and related to four areas: (i) a Framework Masterplan; (ii) Site/Area Investment Plans; (iii) a Management, Marketing and Promotion Strategy; and, (iv) an Implementation Strategy. Following a competitive tendering process, in which the researcher participated, Urban

Initiative Studios were awarded the commission in November, 2016. An officer of the council explained that the competitive process was effectively set-up to find a '….*middle of the road*….' proposal, and that the council had been '….*comfortable*….' with the previous Masterplan adopted in August 2007. The fact that the work on the Masterplan was seen as a revision rather than a '….*fresh look*....' at the town centre is reflected in the report to Cabinet (12 April, 2018), which sought approval for: '….*a refreshed Masterplan for Loughborough Town Centre*' (CBC, 2018). The competitive process meant that the initial sift of proposals rejected both those that were identified as either being: (i) too '….*costly*….', irrespective of the quality or additional benefit that they might provide; as well as (ii) those where the cost was considered to be too low – that there was a suspicion the proposal would not deliver what was expected. This does call into question what the definition of 'best value' is, in terms of selecting the best practice for the job.

The notes of the researcher, made at the time (around 30 September, 2016), reveal that the selection of the firm work appeared to be made on the basis that their proposals '….*were a good fit*….', and offered a '….*similar*….' approach that the authority was comfortable with. The selection of the consultancy firm to prepare the Masterplan had the feeling of a transactional, utilitarian approach in line with the perception of Loughborough as a '….*no-nonsense town*….' (see 6.3.3, above). However, that is not to say that the process was unfair, but there appeared to be a preconception of the type of plan that was favoured. For example, the researcher noted that one of the firms bidding proposed quite an innovative and fresh approach to the Masterplan process, but there was no place found in the selection process where this might either be assessed as a positive or negative aspect of the bids.

Workshop Consultation 14 March, 2017, notes

As part of the Masterplan refresh a number of consultation events were held between December 2016 and March 2017. The researcher participated in several of the events, but the event on the 14 March was of particular interest due to the participants involved. The

following reflections were noted by the researcher during, and following the meeting. The Workshop was run by the consultants Urban Initiative Studios, and the researcher was part of the team facilitating the event. At this Workshop there were conflicting positions, evident in the view of participants, in relation to there '….*not being enough information, what is the Council proposing?*', and that '….*the Council has decided already*….' what the findings of the work will be and what the masterplan will include – i.e. what is the point of attending. A representative of a number of businesses said that they felt that they had '….*consultation fatigue*….', and that the '*Council*' should get-on and start delivering. One business representative said that they were fed up with consultations, and getting quite animated, stated that they expected the '*Council*' to listen to business, and act on what they have already been '*told*'. There was a feeling of uneasiness and change in the atmosphere when this viewpoint was challenged. That the point of the consultation process was to have regard for different viewpoints, but that there is always a risk that there might not be consensus or that one point of view might prevail over another. It was noted in this workshop that there was a change in body language, with a number of participants from the business sector rolling their eyes, 'knowing' glances, and, to a point, a withdrawal of their engagement in the meeting.

The Workshop was similar to many of this type of event that the researcher has run, or been part of the facilitation team. Many of the attendees appeared to have their own agenda or preconceived positions. The representative of a bus company felt strongly, for example, that the pedestrianised streets should be re-opened to traffic, and that the one way system was *'....a complete non-sense*.' Another participant, who was a member of the local civic society, felt that the '*Council*' had '*ruined*' the town centre, that the shops in the town centre had been better thirty or so years ago and '….*wanted to know what the 'Council' were going to do about it?'* Without considering what the Council might or might not be able to directly deliver. The delivery of the change or evolution in the town centre is the

theme of the next part of the brief reflection on the Loughborough experience, using field notes and drawing the researcher's experience.

Notes on Progressing Physical Change in the Built Environment to Support the Delivery of the Masterplan Objectives

Meetings with Homes and Communities Agency (18 October, 2016; 15 June, 2017; and, 26/04/2018)

The researcher, as part of their role with the Council, held a number of meetings with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), what has now been renamed Homes England. This note is a reflection on the nature of the more formal 'update meetings', although there were a series of less formal discussions. The HCA were most interested in the larger housing developments, the SUEs which are briefly set out above. However, the researcher took the opportunity to present the wider opportunities in other key strategic sites in the Borough, which included the Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park, and Loughborough town centre.

Engaging the HCA on opportunities for new homes in the Borough, outside those being advanced at the SUE sites, was problematic. The experience of the researcher led to the conclusion that the HCA was focussed on maximising the number of new homes that could be built. Although, the researcher sought the support of the HCA (including financial) to 'unlock' additional sites for more intensive development as new housing, and to encourage mixed-use development in a town centre setting, this did not appear to fit the criteria of the HCA. It seemed clear from the nature of the meetings that the HCA representatives would allow a brief discussion on the potential for new homes in town centres. However, it felt that this was more of an indulgence as the HCA representative would become less engaged (in their body language, and active listening), and would stop making notes of the conversation. The evidence set out here is confined to the experience in one Borough in the

country. However, it seems that some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the experience at a wider (macro) scale. Firstly, that the HCA were focussed on bringing forward sites that would deliver as many new houses as possible. Secondly, that the HCA appeared not to be focussed on bringing forward complex sites, and places that could support the regeneration of High Street and town centres. Finally the HCA appeared, at this time, to be reluctant to take a pro-active approach to delivery – having a strategic, and hands-off approach. Moreover, it would seem that central government were aware of the final point. In a speech delivered by the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, in March 2018 committed to giving the HCA (which was renamed Homes England) greater powers.

Strategic Landowners in Loughborough Town centre

Consultations with two landowners stand out in the context of the experience of the researcher; these include two private sector land holders.

Private Sector Landowners

To protect the identity of the land holders, the land in their ownership is not identified.

Land Owner One (LO1)

The site is a large supermarket that has been trading in the town centre for some time. The meeting took place on 21 September, 2017; the Masterplan was well advanced by this stage with the first draft issued in August, 2017. The local authority engaged with the landowner to understand (i) the land owner's aspiration for the site; and, (ii) to test whether they would be willing to make some physical changes to integrate the site more effectively into the town centre, in particular for pedestrians. Firstly, on the landowner aspiration for the site, they appeared cautious, and measured in the information that they willing to share. There seemed to be a pre-agreed, and rehearsed approach from the landowner side as to what they were willing to divulge – it felt very much like it was the agreed line. The representatives of the landowner explained that their asset strategy for the store was

updated on a cycle of three to five years. That the Loughborough town centre store '*traded well*', and that they were committed to the supermarket at this location. Although the supermarket had been operating on the site for a number of years, and it appeared to be set-out in an older operating format, they did not divulge any information that would suggest physical change to site.

This led on to the second part of the meeting, following analysis of the site (linked to the masterplan) it was clear that the supermarket 'turned in on-itself', and that it was poorly linked to the rest of the town centre – being designed around a private car park. The Council had identified a number of fairly minor physical changes to the configuration of the site, which would help connectivity to the rest of the town centre. One physical improvement, for example, would be the removal of at least some of the perimeter walls, which had a poor aesthetic impact and reduced legibility, as well as, permeability. The representatives listened to the proposal, but it was clear from their body language and verbal response that they had no intention to act on the information. Although, they did '*suggest*' that the Council could work the proposals up further, and if the Council was willing to fund the physical works they might '*suggest*' that the works are '*permitted*'. However, there was clearly no commitment to review the way in which the store was integrated into the wider town centre.

Land Owner Two (LO2)

LO2 had attended the workshop in March 2017 (see 6.6.1, above). The draft Masterplan identified their site as part of a key opportunity area. The site was located at a key gateway to the town centre. A meeting was set-up soon after the March workshop, between officers of the Council and the landowner. There were two main reasons for the meeting: (i) to understand LO2's aspiration for the site in the future; and, (ii) to test if LO2 would be willing to work with the Council collaboratively to include their site in a wider opportunity. The researcher noted that in the first part of the meeting LO2 was very robust

about '*their site'*, and the opportunities that they felt were available to realise a good return on their investment. However, they were also very clear that they would not accept any approach, and that the site was '*ticking-over'* with the current tenants. Landowner LO2 was critical of what they felt was a lack leadership from the Council (the Borough Council, as well as Leicestershire County Council) and the decisions of the Local Planning Authority (LPA). Officers did not test what decisions LO2 was referring to, but it is likely it was in relation to a deep discount retailer who had secured an out-of-town site.

When Officers moved on to the second part of the meeting; to test whether LO2 would be willing to work with the Council in partnership to bring forward a wider development. The atmosphere changed abruptly when the option of a partnership with the Council was suggested. It felt like the meeting would be concluded very quickly, and it probably would have, had one of the officers at the meeting not had a long-term professional relationship with the landowner. There seemed very little opportunity to progress discussions further.

Land Assembly – the prevailing attitude towards the potential use of Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

When reviewing a number of sites in the ownership of the Council it became clear that combining the sites with contiguous properties, in the ownership of third parties, would be a logical approach. Assembling the land to bring forward a larger development parcel, it was concluded, would have a beneficial impact commercially, aesthetically, and add value socially. The first option considered was to enter into a partnership agreement with the landowners, such as a joint venture (JV) approach. However, and as highlighted above, there was a reluctance amongst some landowners to engage in a partnership with public sector bodies. The reluctance appeared to stem from experience, or a perception that working in partnership with the public sector would be too '*complex*' or add unnecessary '*bureaucracy*'.

The lack of enthusiasm of landowners to work with the Council to bring forward a wider opportunity meant that officers looked at other options to assemble the land. One option investigated was to acquire the land, however as the land was not on the market there was no certainty that the landowners would agree to sell the land. Following government guidance relating on CPO the option to commence negotiations through CPO at the outset was considered to be prudent. The government guidance advises local authorities, that although CPO should be considered to be a 'last resort', they should consider the commencement of CPO at an early stage in the negotiation. The guidance sets out that initiation of the formal process will ensure that: '*….the seriousness of the authority's intentions [are] clear from the outset, which in turn might encourage those whose land is affected to enter more readily into meaningful negotiations.*'

At a meeting with senior elected members to discuss the site and seek authority to proceed with CPO it was clear that the elected members would not support the use of CPO. It appeared that the reluctance to consider CPO came from an ideological position. Their approach to CPO appeared to be influenced by the Thatcherite 'property owning democracy' legacy, and the 'one nation' conservative laissez-faire approach to land and asset ownership, where it is for the landowner to determine what happens to their land (Francis 2012)(2.4.1). As one elected member explained that they '….*could not agree*….' with the proposed approach as, in their opinion, it would '….*deprive*….' the land-owner of their land. Officers explained that the proposed approach was in line with the government's guidance, and that the landowner would be paid market value with additional compensation. Furthermore, that by bringing forward a larger site would be of additional benefit to the local community. It was evident, however, by this point that the focus of the meeting had moved on to other matters, and that the senior members of the Council would not consider the use of CPO for land assembly, or enter into further discussion on the matter. As an aside, the political leadership of the Council matched the national governing

party at the time. It is ambiguous, therefore, whether the seemingly ideological position prevailed locally, or was more closely aligned with a Conservative Party approach to the way land ownership is considered.

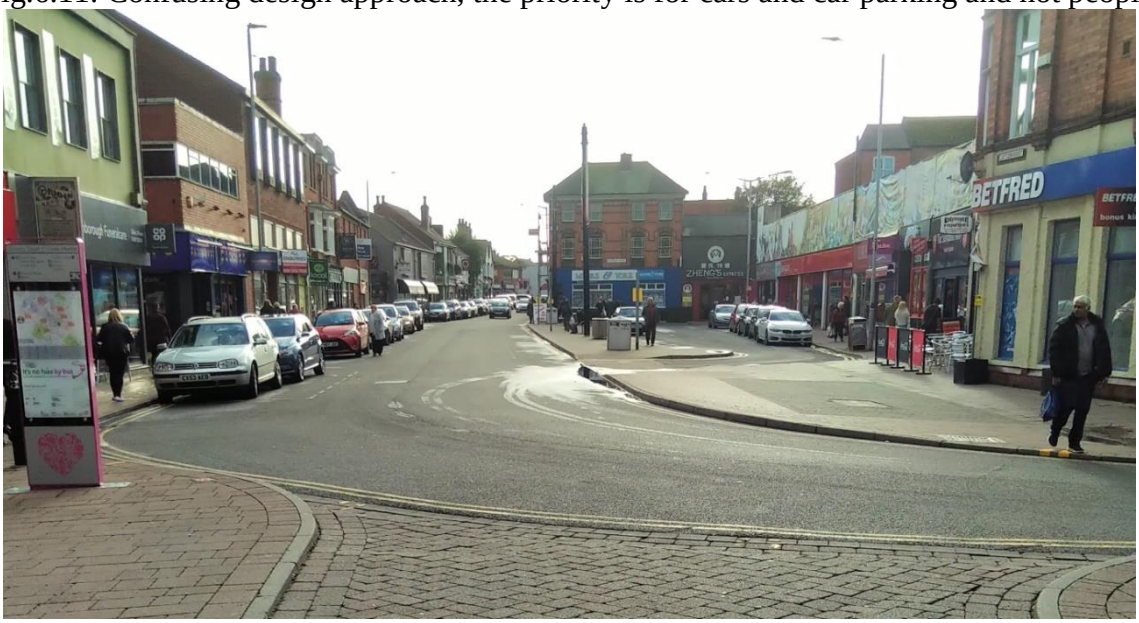
The comments here are based on the notes and fieldwork observations of the researcher as a reflective practitioner. They are not intended to be an exhaustive account, but to offer a contextualisation of the research process. As set out in the methods chapter, the use of the reflective practitioner approach runs through this research, and the observations above come from a conscious effort and awareness of the reflexive nature of the primary research process, and then the theory building stage (5.5).

Fig.6.10: Large piece of informal art on the blank wall of a building in the town centre, artist unknown



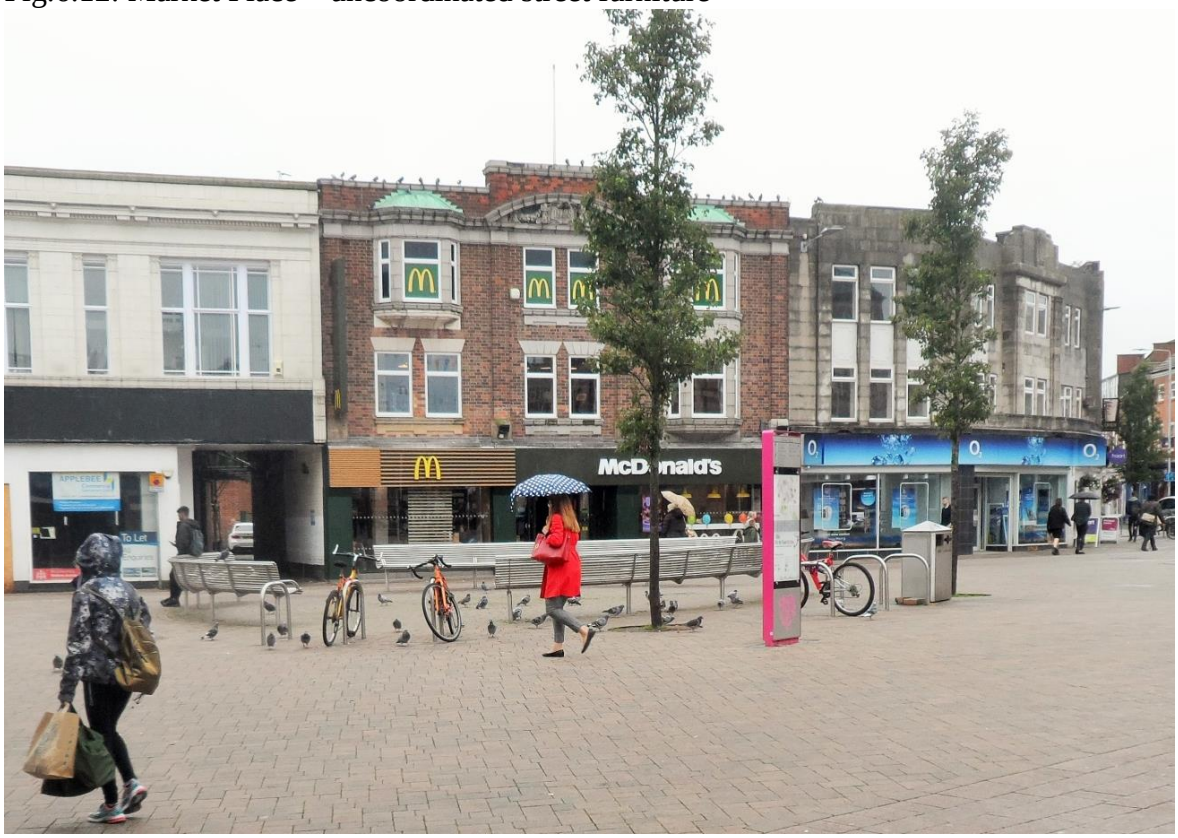
Source: author, 05/11/2019

Fig.6.11: Confusing design approach, the priority is for cars and car parking and not people



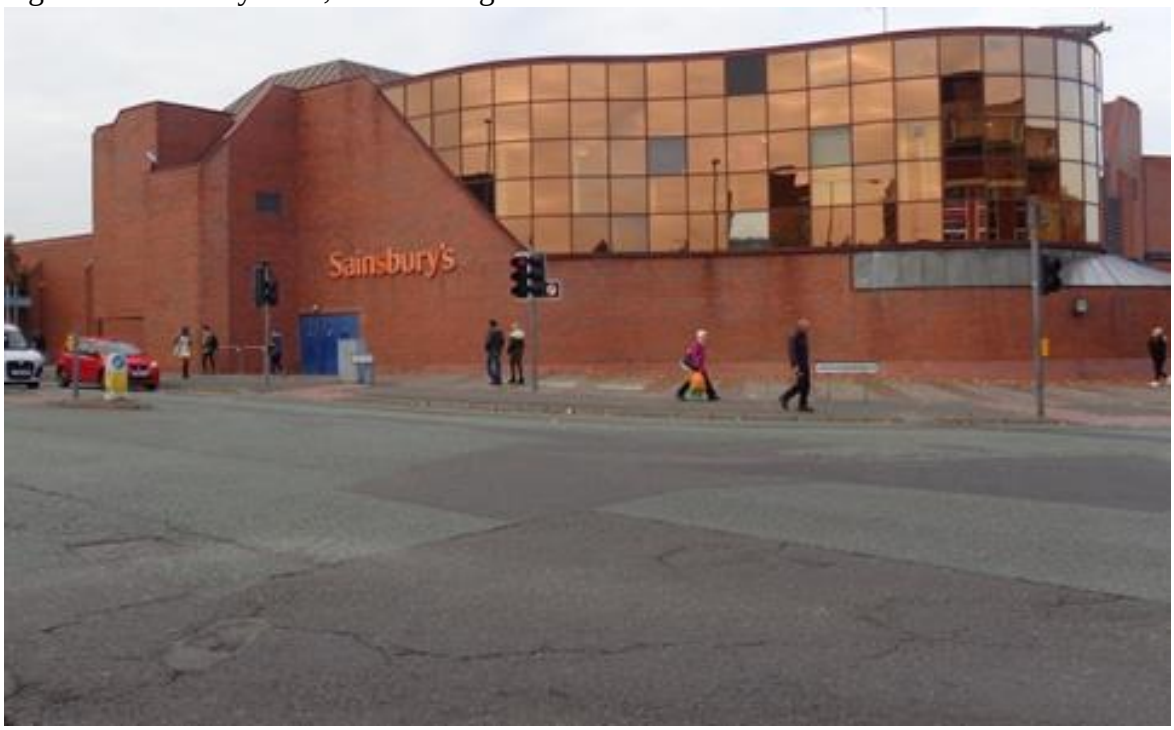
Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.6.12: Market Place – uncoordinated street furniture



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Fig.6.13: Sainsbury store, inactive edge



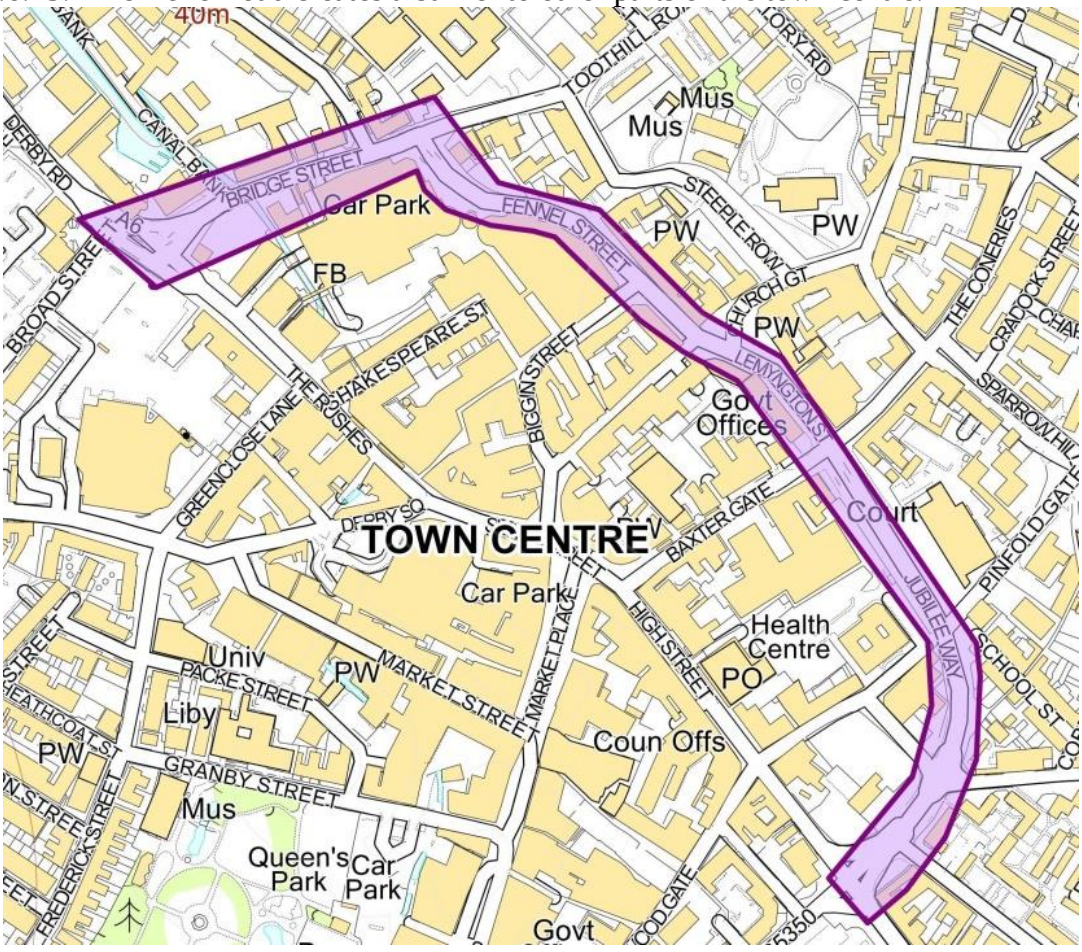
Source: author, 25/10/16

Fig.6.14: The Rushes



Source: Digimap

Fig.6.15: Inner relief road creates a barrier to other parts of the town centre.



Source: Digimap

Fig.6.16: Poor quality urban fabric and legibility to and from the railway station.



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Fig.6.17: Baxter Gate, mono- use commercial leisure area, note false upper window structure to suggest active first floor use



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Fig.6.18: The Rushes, simplistic design that mimics a retail park, focus is inward looking with poor pedestrian connection to the town centre



Source: DigiMaps

Fig.6.19: Redundant Magistrates' Court



Source: author, 14/11/2019

Fig.6.20: Redundant post office



Source: author, 14/11/2019

Fig.6.21: Privately owned ‘gateway’ site being held vacant for investment



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Fig.6.22: Evidence of multiple actors who can carry out works and impact the operational 'management' of the town centre



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.6.23: Loughborough Business Improvement District generic 'Love Loughborough' campaign slogan

LOVE
Loughborough

Source: LinkedIn

PART TWO

6.7 Discussion – Key Findings

The second part of the chapter discusses the key micro-specific findings from the case study, which are summarised in Table 6.1. The discussion is organised around the key themes of place, deliverability and management.

6.7.1 Place

Key Finding LP1 – big box, mono-use built form has a negative impact on the town centre

The commercial operational requirements from the retail sector (P2&P3) have a negative impact on the built form, the authenticity and identity of the town centre, with a reduction in the mixed-use, finer grain and locally distinctive domestic buildings at a human scale (6.3.2). If the need for retail space contracts further, or operators move away from these locations, the redevelopment or repurposing of the units would be challenging.

Key Finding LP2 – limited mixed-use activities, in particular in the evening and night-time

Some streets are particularly quiet in the evening and night-time. The image of Loughborough town centre is that of a utilitarian place: one interviewee called it a '….*no nonsense town'* (PF1). With reference to Gehl's (2011) spectrum, it is a place for necessary and some optional activities, but less likely to generate 'resultant' activities (social activities) (Gehl 2011) (6.3.4).

Key Finding LP3 – infrastructure designed for vehicular traffic and not the pedestrian or cyclist

The inverted movement hierarchy and hard landscaping creates significant barriers to movement, making the pedestrian experience poor with few good examples of integrated green or blue ecology and infrastructure (6.3.3).

6.7.2 Deliverability

Key Finding LD1 – withdrawal of RSS led to localised planning system

The planning system constrains the ability to follow a plan-led approach outside the confines of the arbitrary LPA boundary, and beyond the format of the town centre. Analysis of local planning policies find that they are compliant with the NPPF (2019), but that this is mainly a procedural necessity (as a material consideration), and of little real value to the 'health' of the town centre. To a point, national policy is contradictory and perverse in the case of Loughborough town centre (see 2.6.2) (6.4.1).

Key Finding LD2 – the town centre economy is dependent on the retail and commercial leisure sector

Loughborough town centre is particularly vulnerable to change in the retail sector, potentially through the rapid rise of virtual as a percentage of the market (2.6.3). A more balanced economy in the town centre with the introduction of residential led mixed-use would support a more resilient place (6.4.2&6.4.3).

Key Finding LD3 – asset strategies are complicated by the myriad of land interests in the town centre

There is scope for proactive engagement with asset owners in the town centre, both from the private and public sector, to develop a better understanding of the aspiration and plans or landowners (6.4.3).

6.7.3 Management

Key Finding LM1 – there is no lead organisation or leadership for strategic or operational management

Fundamentally the research did not identify any organisation that was responsible and accountable for either the day to day or strategic management of the town centre (6.5.2).

Key Finding LM2 – approach to TCM and BID is focussed on janitorial tasks and local marketing

The use of the phrase *management*, in relation to the town centre, was felt by all participants to be loosely defined, and to relate more to general co-operation rather than to control or direct the 'operation' of the town centre (2.4.4) (6.5.2).

Key Finding LM3 – the 'Masterplan' does not promote investment or a route to government funding

A refreshed masterplan was adopted by the LA (2018), but it is more of an aspirational document than a regeneration framework that could be used as a tool to attract funding, or inward investment (6.5.1). This case study found little evidence to suggest that there is a TCM-led approach to regeneration in Loughborough town centre (PF1; PG1).

PART THREE

6.8 Recommendations

The following section of the chapter sets out the micro- specific (MS) recommendations which address the findings from Case Study One. The recommendations have been developed following analysis through the diagnostic stage of the ARM. The recommendations were presented, and tested through semi-structured interviews with five local experts (Table 5.10). The approach to testing the recommendations had to be adapted due to the impact of C-19, and the restrictions to face to face meetings. Therefore, a blended method was employed which included a position paper setting out the recommendations and semi-structured virtual meetings.

6.8.1 Local initiatives

Interim measures to develop a structured adaptive resilience approach

The research suggested a number of interim measures (prior to consultation and potential implementation of national (or macro-generic) measures) that could be implemented at a local level, to develop an adaptive resilience approach for Loughborough. The interim measures suggested require a partnership approach to developing adaptive resilience measures, these are set out below:

Local Recommendation One

Loughborough town centre future task force (LM001:(i))
A town centre focussed partnership, bringing together key public and private sector actors as well as community focussed groups, to develop an adaptive resilient approach, so that the town centre can adapt to change and crisis. The *Loughborough town centre future task force* should be an interim measure (until M001:(ii) is implemented). It would normalise the approach and be administered by an accountable public-sector body reporting at least

annually to the local community. The form of the *Loughborough town centre future task force* would be decided by the partners and may evolve over time (for example: formalised partnership with memorandum of understanding, a company, an LLP, etc.).

This initiative was considered by a regeneration expert as offering a positive response, and one which sought to develop the current Loughborough Town Team as it: '….*consolidates the responsibilities….and elevates them to a higher strategic role*' (PF2). Although the Town Team consists of a number of stakeholders, it is not a '*representative consultative forum*' or a delivery vehicle to enhance the adaptive resilience of the place.

Participant F (a planner) noted that a '….*critical absent driver for effective engagement and delivery in the past has been the availability of funding*….' (PF2). This was echoed by participant E, who questioned whether this approach could be delivered in the current climate, as stakeholders would look to the Borough Council to deliver this, but there is already insufficient budget to deliver what they are committed to (PE2). They also questioned whether this was a '….*layer of bureaucracy that we can do without*….'. They considered that stakeholders (including the LA) were '….*well engaged*….' with the LEP, the BID and other stakeholders (PE2). It is noted that in the short term funding could be a barrier; the Task Force could rationalise, consolidate and build on some existing groups (as described in section 6.5.2). Moreover, it is proposed that the task force would be part of the broader national measures and would be funded as part of that wider initiative.

Local Recommendation Two

Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework
The adaptive resilience framework should be a spatial plan (building on the town centre masterplan (2018) work), for the future aspirations of the town centre, which sets out a path to promote adaptive resilience. The framework would be organised over a timeframe, and be reviewed annually (as part of the annual community monitoring approach). The timeframe of the adaptive resilience framework should be such as to enable a strategic approach to develop a proactive adaptive resilience plan. Therefore, it should look at the long-term (11-30 years), the medium-term (3-10 years) and the short-term (1-2 years); accepting, of course, that longer term planning would be less precise. Thereby offering a planning mechanism to prepare for key pressures. These include, climate change; population growth; and, structural physical issues can be addressed, for example: the future of the big box mono-use areas of the town centre; resolution of the vehicle and pedestrian conflict in the town centre, including the removal of the inner relief road; increasing the economic resilience of the town through more mixed-use development, including good quality new homes.

SHORT TERM								MEDIUM TERM								LONG TERM
YEAR ONE				YEAR TWO				YEAR								YEARS
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	YR10	YR11-YR30

There was general agreement that a regeneration framework would be worthwhile (PC2; PD2; PE2; PG2). A senior planner felt that the regeneration framework could help, as long as it was not just another document that would *'....sit on the shelf….*' (PE2). It could act as a tool to inform the actions of the task force as a delivery mechanism. A planner felt that the resilience framework should mirror the five-year cycle of the local plan, so it would

need to be evidence based and reflect the reality of '*opportunities and constraints'* (PE2). As set out in the findings (6.4.1), there are limitations to what can be achieved, through the local planning policy, to influence the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of Loughborough town centre. The town centre masterplan (2018) is a useful tool to engage with local stakeholders, and sets out a general approach to the *management* of the town centre (6.5.2). It is recommended that a more robust structure be developed to advance an adaptive resilient approach for Loughborough. The adaptive resilience framework should span a thirty-year rolling period which should be reviewed annually, and which can be adapted to ensure that it is relevant to the changing needs of the town centre. A more strategic plan (and the longer timeframe, within the broader national and regional spatial planning framework) would enable a more substantial debate on what type of town centre stakeholders want within a new market which addresses the social as well as commercial 'value' of Loughborough town centre.

Local Recommendation Three

Loughborough town centre strategic asset management plan
The town centre strategic asset management framework (LSAMP) is designed to be a delivery mechanism for the regeneration framework, enabling a practical approach to understand the aspirations of landowners, identify opportunities for inward investment, flag up risks and develop a proactive implementation approach. The Partnership could look to develop an asset delivery vehicle, as the work of the *Loughborough town centre future task force* is progressed. This approach allows a targeted approach to assets that are (i) in public ownership, through initiatives such as One Public Estate; and, (ii) in private ownership.

Two participants, both with significant experience of regeneration in Loughborough town centre, agreed that a strategic asset management framework would be beneficial (PD2;

PF2). An employee of the Borough Council felt that the: '….*deployment of the Council's strategic assets offers the prospect of a more dependable source of funding*' (PF2). Participant E highlighted the challenge of developing an asset management based strategy, a challenge based on disparate ownerships and conflicting agendas. They gave an example of the challenges they have faced, trying to work with public sector colleagues with assets in the town centre. For example, there are layers of ownerships within the health sector with GP ownerships and those held by the CCG and the NHS (PE2). An asset framework would support the delivery of the regeneration framework (the Adaptive Resilience Framework), to manage a rebalancing of social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability'. In Loughborough town centre this will be particularly important, as the anticipated requirement for retail and commercial leisure floorspace decreases, resulting in the need to repurpose or redevelop big-box mono-use built form (for example: Regent's Place, The Rushes, etc.).

Local Recommendation Four

All business is local – support local business
As part of the strategic response to the future form and function of Loughborough town centre an adaptive resilience approach to town centre uses would be key, to develop a more diverse socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' economy The aim would be to encourage and enable a more diverse economy, that delivers a mix of commercial and social uses (including homes): ▪ diverse social and commercial ecology: review and rationalise inward investment; and, ▪ Loughborough business: all business is local, so focus on the local needs of business, suppliers and customers.

There was strong agreement from a senior regeneration practitioner, that an adaptive resilience approach to the future of the town centre was very important (PF2). A senior planner felt that the '….*strong independent sector* ….' in the town centre was evidence of the way in which the local authority supported local businesses. A participant also pointed to the variety of unit sizes within the town centre, which promoted start-ups, and offered an opportunity for businesses to grow and '*step-up'* (PE2). Therefore, in contrast to edge and out-of-town retail parks, the town centre's 'value' lies in its ability to encourage and support innovation through start-ups, and local enterprise, across a variety of sectors (and creates resilience by having a mixed economy and a mix of uses, including residential).

Local Recommendation Five

Experience and time of activity
It is recommended that the type of uses in the town centre are expanded, and intensified, to expand activities across a longer time span to encourage resilience. In general terms, the time of activity town centre, follows the operational hours of the two dominant economic uses - retail, and commercial leisure. Greater emphasis should be given to the creation of a more 'liveable' town centre, with a mix of uses both vertically and horizontally, and bring forward the growth in the number and variety of homes available in the town centre (Table 8.2). It is important that the new homes are high quality, and well designed, so that they are desirable places for a cross section of the community, and to avoid the concentration of any one group (for example, student accommodation). Opportunities to explore home working should be taken in the design of residential space. These should include appropriate technology to support new ways of working and that homes are designed, with sufficient space to accommodate a healthy mix of live and work activities -for example making sure that there is sufficient space for living and working.

Options to expand new ways of working within the town centre, along with collaboration to increase enterprise and innovation, should be explored with institutions such as the University of Loughborough, other higher education providers and business focussed groups. This should include an innovative approach to continuous learning and exhibiting, to celebrate the unique character of Loughborough through investment in such as art, both formal and informal.

With a more diverse mix of uses, including residential, the local economy would be less reliant on the retail and commercial leisure sectors for the commercial 'viability', and result in an improvement of resilience in Loughborough town centre.

Two participants, with decades of experience and knowledge of the town centre, said that a broader economic base (including bars, cafés, restaurants, leisure facilities), and an increase in the number of people living in the town centre would be beneficial socially and commercially (PD2; PF2). There was a tacit acceptance that for mixed-use development, including homes, there needs to be '….*significant improvement*….' in what is on offer, and that there is a need to for a new approach so that the town centre is a *'....place where people want to live*….' (PE2).

A regeneration expert acknowledged that '….*encouragement of town centre living will be crucial to the long term success of the town centre'* (PF2). Although one participant questioned whether '*Towns like Loughborough have perhaps lacked the critical mass*….' to '….*deliver a "city living experience"*' (PF2). The participant suggested that this was '….*perhaps something of a chicken and egg conundrum*….' (PF2). The conundrum referred to here (PF2) has similarities to the 'Ravenscroft Cycle' explored in Chapter Three (3.3), whereby social 'vitality', and commercial 'viability' are intrinsically linked. Participant F proposed that*'[High] Quality housing as part of the town centre mix could initiate a virtuous circle of investment which could add significantly to the vitality of the*

town centre securing its overall commercial viability' (PF2). In order to achieve the higher quality of housing, they suggest that this should include *'....homes suitable for apartment style living with the opportunity to work from home being standard'* (PF2). In addition, there could be forms of incentive to make living in the town centre more attractive. These might include funding for more and better quality outdoor infrastructure and design; or, increased space for working and living in the town centre. By investing in the social 'vitality' of the town centre, a variety of appropriate commercial uses might be attracted, thereby resolving the '….*chicken and egg conundrum*….' identified by participant F.

The researcher was aware that throughout the interviews the way in which differing groups (such as gender, age, ethnicity) might or might not use the town centre was not explicitly raised. It might be concluded that the status of the town centre, predominantly perceived as a public space, meant that there was a tacit acceptance by the participants that the town centre 'belongs' to all in society. However, this is speculation and might be an area for future focus (10.6).

Local Recommendation Six

Improve the quality of the built environment
The town centre of Loughborough is no longer 'vital', as there are now other physical and virtual formats that people can use for *necessary* activities. This means that it is of greater importance for the quality of the physical environment to be good. The case study analysed a number of elements that make-up the built environment of the town, that might, or ought to, influence the decision making process of potential users to visit the town centre. This area is one in which the local authorities have the most responsibility and control, that are specific to Loughborough, and could be implemented locally: ▪ *re-connecting the town centre*. Loughborough town centre should be a hub where other strategic and key parts of the community and economy can be accessed by

walking, cycling or public transport. This is particularly important within the town centre and railway station corridor, which is of poor quality, and where priority is given to trips by car.

- *Locally distinctive Loughborough*. The built form of Loughborough is a key part of the town centre's authentic character, as an established market town. Stakeholders could adopt a *Loughborough palette* as part of Loughborough design guide to manage and influence the design of future development.
- *Places between buildings (streets and squares)*. Key places and spaces - the design and management of the public realm in Loughborough town centre is poor. These are the areas that have a particular impact on the perception of whether the place is well managed and safe. There has been a lack of investment in the public realm in Loughborough, which has resulted in badly managed and poorly designed places and spaces. Addressing this should be a key priority area for local investment. A programme of coordinated projects to enhance and improve key places and spaces should be developed and implemented. This would be an achievable goal, although it may call for reprioritisation or additional funding.
- *Formal and not so formal art*. Space should be made available for the temporary, or more permanent pieces of local art. This could support the image and identity of Loughborough town centre as a unique place to visit.
- *Big box format areas*. The LPA should work proactively with the landowners and operators, to minimise the negative impact of the mono-use big box areas. Specific examples include The Rushes, the J. Sainsbury site, Baxter Gate and Regent's Place and the Magistrates' building, on the edge of the town centre. The LPA and partners should review the impact that poor design has on the quality of the built environment, the experience of users and the identity of the town centre. The quality and form of the built environment is of particular importance as the need to

visit the town centre has reduced.

- *Vehicular traffic passing through the town centre*. Vehicular traffic using the town centre as a through route should be prevented. This is particularly so in the inner ring road and the route to and from the railway station. The redundant road network should be repurposed for environmental improvements, and to enhance the walkability and cycle-ability of the town centre. This would include investment in the social ecosystem, to develop a more natural place and space for people to move around.
- *Improve gateways into the town centre and remove barriers to pedestrian movement*. This is important to provide a sense of arrival, being able to move around and the quality of the environment. This should include a redesign of vehicular dominated junctions to give the pedestrian priority and remove clutter from the streets.

It was accepted, by a senior planner, that this is the area that local authorities have the most direct control over, and that the poor quality of the public realm has been identified in the adopted masterplan (2018) as something that the local authority should address as a priority (PE2). Although pedestrianisation of the Market Place and Market Street area '*….over 23 years ago was a major step forward….arguably that momentum has not been sustained'* (PF2). A number of 'masterplans' for the town centre, including the most recent, contain public realm initiatives and recognise the importance of key gateways, connectivity and development opportunities. However, participant F said that the '*…. ambition has been blunted by conservative attitudes among businesses in particular and the wider belief in the primacy of the car, both in terms of access and provision for parking….*' (PF2). The participant considered the *'....resistance [to be] frustrating….*', but that action has also been hampered by insufficient funding (PF2).

Participant E felt that they could accept and support all of the recommendations above (6.8.1), but '….*wouldn't support the removal of the inner ring road'* (PE2). Instead of banning vehicular movement through the town centre, which is not accessing the town centre, they highlighted the fact that the LA was investigating autonomous vehicles to more effectively join up parts of the town – in particular the train station, the town centre and the University campus. They would also support improved walking and cycling routes (PE2).

Although there was consensus that high quality public realm and a liveable town centre are important, there appeared to be a reluctance from participants to be radical, to find a way to intervene in the town centre or to consider what is socially as well as commercially appropriate for the town centre. As one participant reflected, when The Rushes was proposed, the LPA felt that they had to accommodate what the '*market*' at that time wanted – a big box mono-use shopping area (PD1). Key to the local recommendations identified in this case study is the option to 'think big' about the future of Loughborough town centre – to re-set what is valuable to the community in their town centre, both socially as well as commercially.

6.9 Conclusions

Loughborough town centre was selected as the location for a pilot case study, and was then fully developed as a case study for the purposes of data collection and analysis. The ARM framework is designed to capture data at both the (i) micro-specific level, explored in this chapter; and, (ii) macro-generic level, explored in Chapter Eight.

Following a detailed inquiry into the town centre, Loughborough town centre was found to have few of the characteristics of adaptive resilience. A number of key findings emerged, across the three themes of the ARM: *Place, Deliverability and Management*. Using a

'building block' approach, a set of recommendations to create adaptive resilience were developed, and then tested with local experts.

Place

The form and function of the town centre has changed over time with the changing relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability'. The historical place analysis captures the shift from a town centre that was 'vital' for the community's needs, with a mixed-use economy to one with a commercial focus on the retail and leisure sectors. The form of Loughborough town centre reflects its commercial function. Most recent development in the town centre has been big box and mono-use in character, which has added little to the quality of the built environment or unique identity of Loughborough. Over reliance on the retail and leisure sectors of the economy makes the town centre increasingly vulnerable to economic downturn, restructure, and other crises.

Deliverability

The case study demonstrates that Loughborough town centre is no longer a 'vital' place. It is no longer *necessary* to visit the town centre as there are other competing, and alternative, physical and virtual, formats that are more attractive and convenient. The market in which the town operates has materially changed, both spatially and technologically, but the regulatory framework has not. The national planning framework has not responded to the changed market environment, and approaches the challenges facing town centres in isolation. This has resulted in local approaches being inhibited by the absence of any spatial planning framework above that of the local planning authority. There is no acknowledgement that there are now mature formats, both edge and out-of-town, providing formerly town centre uses, which are *de facto* part of a network and hierarchy of centres, and compete commercially. Without an understanding of the changed market and

environment in which Loughborough exists, the *relevance* of the town centre as a social, civic and commercial 'hub' is at risk of further decline.

Management

The current approach to the crisis facing the town centre is short-term, operational and janitorial. The research failed to identify any organisation with responsibility and accountability for either the strategic, or operational management of the town centre. For example, Charnwood Borough Council had taken on a town centre management function for markets and street furniture, amongst other janitorial responsibilities; and the BID for commercially focussed functions, such as local marketing. The strategic management of Loughborough is considered in isolation to other places, outside the town.

The pace of change over the last decade has been more rapid and unpredictable. For Loughborough town centre to remain *relevant* for potential users, and to take on the characteristics of 'adaptive resilience', an understanding of the challenge to the centre needs to be developed and better understood. The ARM process suggests local initiatives that the local community, along with other stakeholders, might use to cultivate a stronger strategic approach to adaptive resilience for the town centre. However, the current approach to the town centre does not recognise the 'value' that can be achieved through social 'vitality'; which might be delivered through better quality of design, diversity of mixed uses (including homes), and stronger identity of place. The crisis facing Loughborough town centre cannot be resolved in isolation or through local initiatives alone.

Table 6.1: Key Finding, Evidence and Recommendation

KEY MICRO-SPECIFIC FINDING	EVIDENCE	RECOMMENDATION	UID	Research Question
Key Finding LP1 – big box, mono-use built form has a negative impact on the town centre	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis; Document Review	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Loughborough town centre strategic asset management framework*	LP001:(i)	1 2 3
Key Finding LP2 – limited mixed-use activities, in particular in the evening and night-time	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork)	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Loughborough town centre strategic asset management framework* *4. All business is local – support local business*	LP001:(ii)	1 2 3

		5. Experience and time of activity *6. Improve the quality of the built environment*		
Key Finding LP3 – infrastructure is designed for vehicular traffic and not the pedestrian or cyclist	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *6. Improve the quality of the built environment*	LP001:(iii)	3
Key Finding LD1 – withdrawal of RSS led to localised planning system	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis; Document Review	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework*	LD001:(i)	1 2 3
Key Finding LD2 – the town centre economy is dependent on the retail and commercial leisure sector	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork):	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive*	LD001:(i)	1 2 3

	historical analysis; Document Review	*resilience framework* *3. Loughborough town centre strategic asset management framework* *4. All business is local – support local business* *5. Experience and time of activity*		
Key Finding LD3 – asset strategies are complicated by the myriad of land interests in the town centre	Observation (fieldwork); Interviews; Document Review	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Loughborough town centre strategic asset management framework*	LD001:(ii)	1 3
Key Finding LM1 – no lead organisation or leadership for strategic or operational management	Interviews; Document Review	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Loughborough town centre strategic asset*	LM001:(i)	1 2

		management framework		
Key Finding LM2 – approach to TCM and BID is focussed on janitorial tasks and local marketing	Interviews; Document Review	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework*	LM001:(ii)	1 3
Key Finding LM3 – the 'Masterplan' does not promote investment or a route to government funding	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); Document Review	*1. Loughborough town centre future task force* *2. Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Loughborough town centre strategic asset management framework*	LM001:(iii)	2 3

Chapter Seven: Case Study Two, Stevenage Town Centre

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven addresses research objective four by applying the conceptual analytical framework through case study two to*:*

(i) forensically investigate and assess the impact of the crisis on Stevenage town centre;

(ii) propose recommendations for the development of a strategic response to promote the relevance of the town centre; and,

(iii) test the recommendations and potential effectiveness of the proposed interventions.

The conceptual analytical framework is referred to in the case study as the Adaptive Resilience Model (ARM); this chapter follows the same structure as the previous chapter (Chapter Six).

Part One – presents the findings from case study two. It is organised around the components of the ARM, which are divided into three themes.

Theme One – Place: this section investigates the current quality and identity of Stevenage town centre and the ability of the town centre to attract people to engage in necessary, optional and social activities (Table 4.5).

Theme Two – Deliverability: this section investigates the current ability of Stevenage town centre to change, and adapt to cope with competitive dynamics and visitor requirements at the micro-specific level.

Theme Three – Management: evaluates how effective the current arrangements for the management of the town centre as a socially 'vital', and commercially 'viable' coherent space.

Part Two - discusses the findings from the diagnostic stage of the case study; and,

Part Three – sets out a number of local recommendations, which have been tested with local experts in their field.

The case study is based on a number of methods of data collection and generation in order to develop a rich and in-depth understanding of the town. These were principally (i) on site observation and fieldwork; including over fifty formal meetings (such as Council meetings and meetings of the planning committee) and over 100 informal meetings and engagement; (ii) eight formal interviews with local actors – with expert knowledge of the case study location, and numerous informal comments are captured here in the body of the chapter; and, (iii) documentary review (5.3.3). The findings were analysed and presented below, the findings draw on the sources as appropriate to the themes of place, deliverability and management.

7.2 Background

Stevenage was the first new town designated in the New Towns Act 1946. It was one of the eight new towns located within 30 miles of Charing Cross which were '….*intended to take people and industry from the congested areas of inner London*' (The Ministry of Town and Country Planning (MTCP) 1951, p.120). It was not a new settlement. Stevenage dates back at least to the Roman period and in 1281 a Royal Charter permitted a market and fair in the town.

The town had an estimated population of 88,995 in 2019; the census of 2011 found that there was a population of 83,957. Major employers are manufacturing (Fujitsu and Du Pont); aerospace and space (Airbus and MBDA); and, bio-tech (GSK). The town has good transport connections (Fig.7.1):

- road network: junctions 7 and 8 of the A1(m) are located close to the town and offer very good connections north and south;
- rail network: the train station is located on the western edge of the town centre and is part of the north/south mainline. There is a fast service into Kings Cross (22 minutes) and services into the City of London. Connections to locations east and west of the town are not as effective.; and,
- air travel: the town is close to Luton, Stanstead and is well connected to the London airports, particularly Heathrow and City.

Fig.7.1: Stevenage and surrounding area, there are strong north and south communication routes including into London King's Cross and the City.



Source: Digimap (not to scale) (spacing between Figs/text)

PART ONE

7.3 Place

This section analyses and presents the findings from the first component of the ARM: Place – the current quality and identity of the town centre and its ability to attract people to engage in necessary, optional and social activities (Gehl 2011). As with the Loughborough case study, this case study followed a systematic method of data collection through the use of a Fieldwork Observations Tool (FOT) (Table 5.8). The FOT was used to record the town centre, at different times of the day and at various morphological scales. Through this process the character of the place was captured and recorded, and a number of themes were developed, analysed and inductively determined. The purpose of this analysis was to develop a clear appreciation of the relationship between the spatial characteristics of the town and the opportunities and challenges these characteristics represent in terms of future viability and vitality, i.e. the underlying resilience of the place. Following an analysis of the data captured through the diagnostic stage, a 'current position' was postulated, and identified a number of 'proposed actions'. A set of recommendations were set out at a micro-specific level that could be implemented in Stevenage to improve the characteristics of 'adaptive resilience'. The set of recommendations were then presented to eight experts, their comments and reactions to the recommendations are set out in part two of this chapter.

7.3.1 Strategic Position

There are a number of similarities between Loughborough and Stevenage. Like Loughborough, the capacity for strategic planning is limited to the administrative boundary of Stevenage Borough Council (SBC), which relates to the boundary of the town (7.4.2). The town centre was perceived by an interviewee to be a '*pioneering*' place, as it is a pedestrianised precinct and was the first post-war new town (PA). The concept of

Stevenage as a 'pioneering' town was often talked about in informal and more formal settings, as a unique identifier or unique selling point (USP) for regeneration opportunities. The USP appeared to be a common source of comfort that was returned to in many of the meetings in relation to the regeneration of the town centre that the researcher participated in, and observed (Fig.7.16).

Assessing the town centre using the adopted terminology of 'vitality' and 'viability' (see chapter three) is problematic. Not least as the town centre was designed as a 'zoned' area with the core being predominantly a pedestrianised commercial precinct. As a senior planner reflected:

> *'I think if anything vitality, in my view, is an operative approach. Viability means sustainability, and the need to keep going. So [in terms of] policy requirements [the] terms don't really equate to anything. I think the viability is the reason for coming there – it's the desire to be there'* (PB1).

The town centre of Stevenage was perceived by an interviewee to be a '*pioneering*' place, as it is a pedestrianised precinct and was the first post-war new town (PA). The interviewee considered that:

> *'Clearly I think that you can get a town centre with a mix of both viable and vital. There should be more uses, there should be hairdressers! They [town centres] are interesting places to visit….maybe, in some ways, the shopping mall will become more interesting places to visit….'* (PA).

However, the ambiguity in terminology was not considered to be limited to planning policy:

> *'I think yes [town centres] are important. I think there is confusion concerning high streets and town centres* (2.6.2)*, they have many similarities, the town centre has many more functions to fulfil other than retail, but retail remains a necessity in the future, in my opinion. It's essential to the town centre'* (PA).

Another interviewee considered that, in general terms, that town centres were a central and important element of a town as a whole:

> '*I think that, if you look at places where there are specific elements, it's the main function'* (PB1).

7.3.2 Form and Function

The following sub-section investigates the form and function of the town centre. It provides an historic framework in order to allow a critical evaluation of: (i) the decision to position the 'new' town centre in relation to the community and built environment that existed prior to the construction of the 'new town'; and, (ii) the changing relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' has had its built form.

Findings

The 'Old Town' was retained in the masterplan for the 'new town' of Stevenage, but was not integrated effectively into the design of the 'new town' or the town centre (Fig.7.4). In contrast to the modernistic design of the new town centre, the 'Old Town' High Street has kept the charm, characteristics and historic identity of a settlement that grew organically around the strategic north-south transport route (Fig.7.2 & Fig.7.3). In retrospect the decision not to integrate the 'Old Town' high street into the new town, as part of the masterplan, was a lost opportunity which continues to have a negative impact on the social 'vitality' and, even more so, on the commercial 'viability' of the new town centre (see 7.4.2 for further analysis).

The street pattern of the new town centre, and the surrounding road structure, is evident by the 1960s (see Fig.7.5). The modernist design resulted in mainly a mono-use built form; the new town was planned as a zoned environment, with a focus predominantly on the retail sector. The town centre of today has maintained the modernist form and function of the core area; although, a number of larger footprint and mono-use retail units have been introduced. The most notable change has occurred at the edge and outside the town centre, as retail and commercial leisure uses have spilled across the inner ring road to the west and south (Fig.7.6). In contrast to Loughborough, the changing relationship between the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' is less evident in the form of the new town centre, as it

was designed predominantly as a commercial hub – with a focus on the retail sector of the economy; with some social and civic uses on the periphery.

7.3.3 Urban Fabric

This sub-section sets the 'current position' in Stevenage, the fieldwork having been completed in early 2020. The place analysis draws on standard techniques and, practice guidance (3.2). Through the use of the Fieldwork Observation Tool (Table 5.8) the changing relationship of the social 'vitality', and commercial 'viability' of the town centre can be tracked, and the potential to develop the characteristic of 'adaptive resilience' captured.

Findings

Locally Distinctive Architecture

The character of the town centre is that of a place which has largely been designed at the same time. The architecture in the core is distinctive to the immediate post-war period, in that the built form follows modernist planning principles of the period. The built form is mono-functional, and intended to meet the requirement of the retail market at the time they were designed.

The original built form, of the core town centre, is now protected by the town square conservation area. Vincent (1960), writing in 1960, considered the Market Place to be '….*a complex of buildings forming a coherent architectural conception*….' (Vincent 1960, p.105). The Town Square Conservation Area 'Condition/Trend' analysis carried out in 2012 rated the Square as '*poor/deteriorating'*.

Fig.7.2: Stevenage ‘Old Town’ 1890s



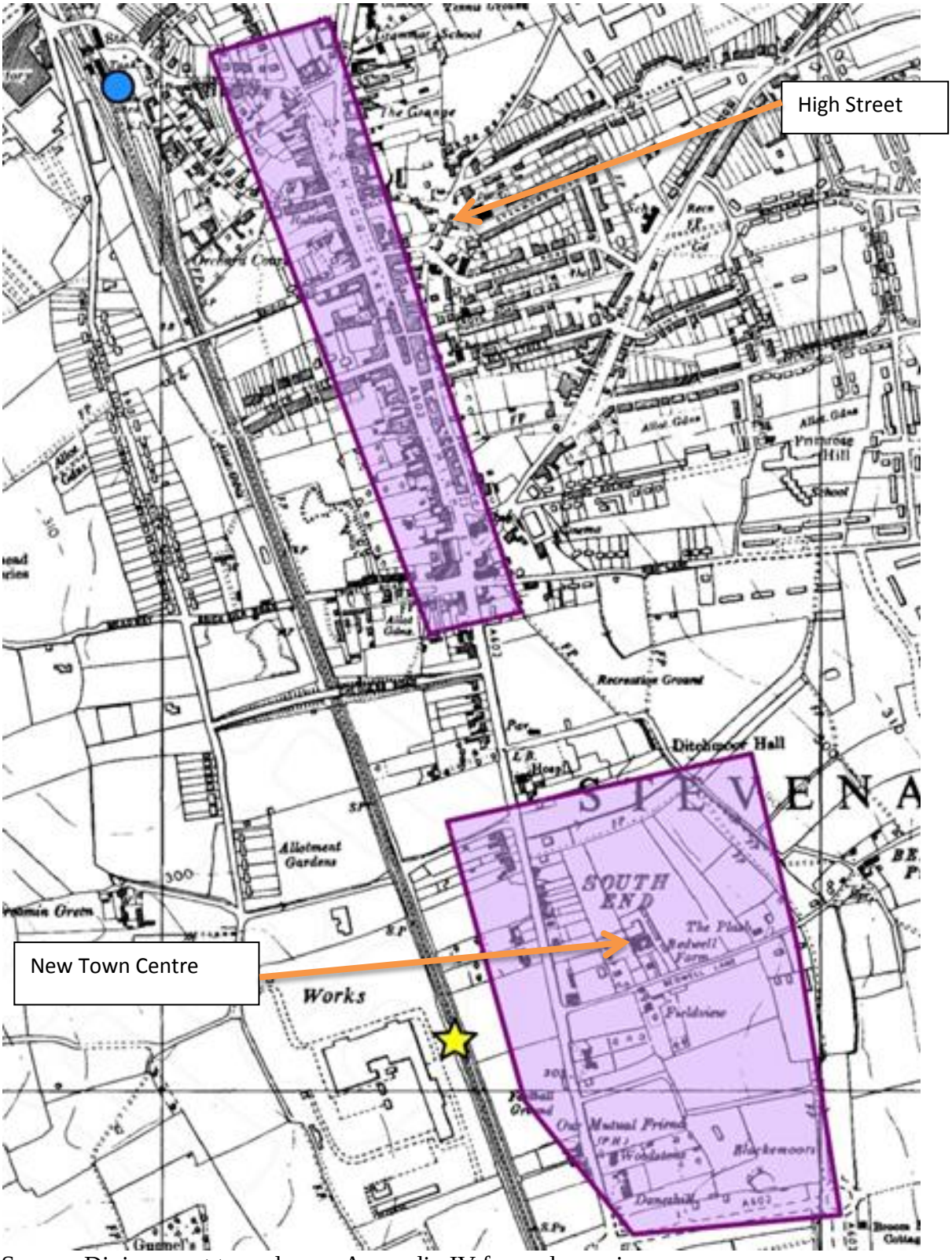
Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.7.3: Stevenage ‘Old Town’ 1950s



Source: Digimap not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.7.4: planned location of the 'new' town centre in relation to the High Street, c. late 1950s. The granular form of the High Street and link to the original railway station are evident.



Source: Digimap not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

KEY: to fig.7.4

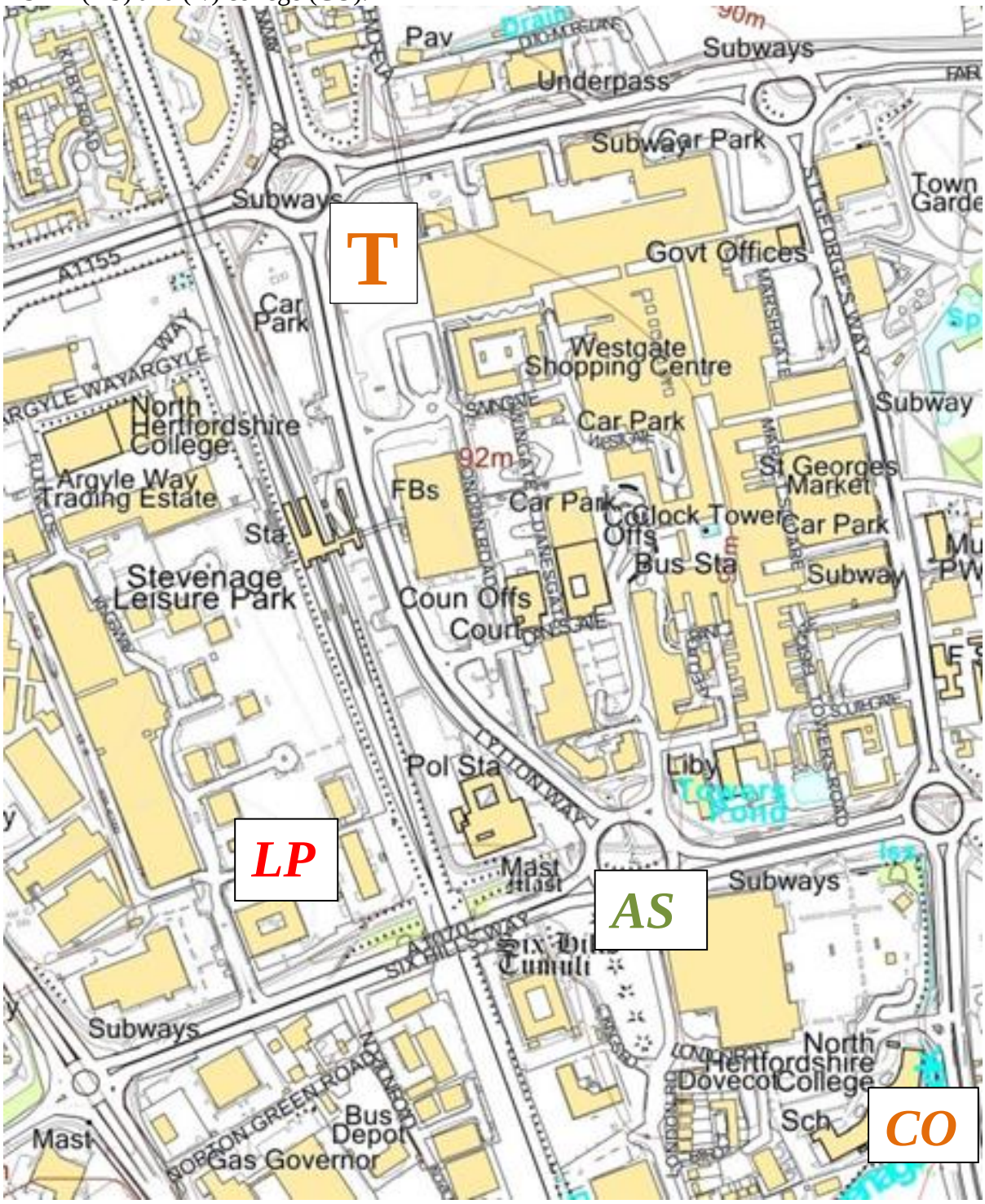
Extent of new town centre and 'Old Town' High Street	Site of new rail station	Site of original rail station
		

Fig.7.5: Stevenage Town Centre, 1960s. The town centre is effectively an island surrounded by a road structure, which is unimpeded by pedestrian access – pedestrian movement is via a sterile and separate network of subways, bridges and walkways.



Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

Fig.7.6: contemporary plan showing- (i) big box built form to the north of the town centre, including Tesco (T); edge of town development, including (ii) the Leisure park (LP), (iii) ASDA (AS) and (iv) college (CO).



Source: Digimap, not to scale, see Appendix IV for scale version

The observations of the researcher, and analysis through the FOT, find that the Town Square has deteriorated further since the time of the condition trend. There are plans for works to improve the paving and street furniture in the area. Any change within the Town Square area is regulated through the conservation area designation. Furthermore, the 'complex of buildings' is no longer under the control of one organisation. Following the closure of the Urban Development Corporation, the majority of public assets were sold to the private sector, and are now in a variety of ownerships (Fig.7.9). The ownership and conservation designation constrains options to adapt the built environment to meet changing circumstances. Moreover, the methods of construction mean that the built form is that of a single unit, which has been sub-divided to form smaller shop units. This adds further complexity to the ability to repurpose or adapt (Fig.7.15 and Fig.7.27).

A senior elected member felt that the architecture adds to the sense of place and the origins of the town centre, there is an *'....historic perspective*….', and one that local members did not want to see lost. They pointed to the regeneration carried out in some other new towns, for example Harlow and Peterlee, where they felt the original design principle had been lost (PA).

The body language, as interpreted by the researcher, of the elected member (PA) suggested that there was professional and personal pride in the conservation of the new town heritage. They referred to the work that a number of organisations have carried out on the history of new towns, and the specific focus on the history of Stevenage. Prior to the interview the participant had discussed at some length their personal involvement with organisations like TCPA and their work focussed on new towns, including Stevenage.

> *'Socially the town centre is extremely important especially concerning the post-war new town. There was a town centre; that is where you went for everything'* (PA).

An elected Member of SBC felt there was a general '*civic pride'* in the fact Stevenage was the first post-war new town, and that it is a '….*pioneering town*….' and '….*symbolic of*

1940s and 1950s architecture' (PA). Furthermore, that there was a feeling of '*….love for the town square*….', and that the buildings surrounding the Square are recognisably '*Stevenage'* (PA)(Fig.7.15).

> *'Yes, I do think of Stevenage as a post war new town, one of the biggest examples of [a post war new town]. I don't think that there is anything more symbolic about [the] 1940[s] than….the town square or the conservation area. If somebody came back after a town centre regeneration in say thirty or forty years time, got off a train….I would like to think that they still recognise it as Stevenage. Although it's changing they do still want familiarity'* (PA).

A planner commented on the importance of the clock tower and the fountain within the setting of the town square, which:

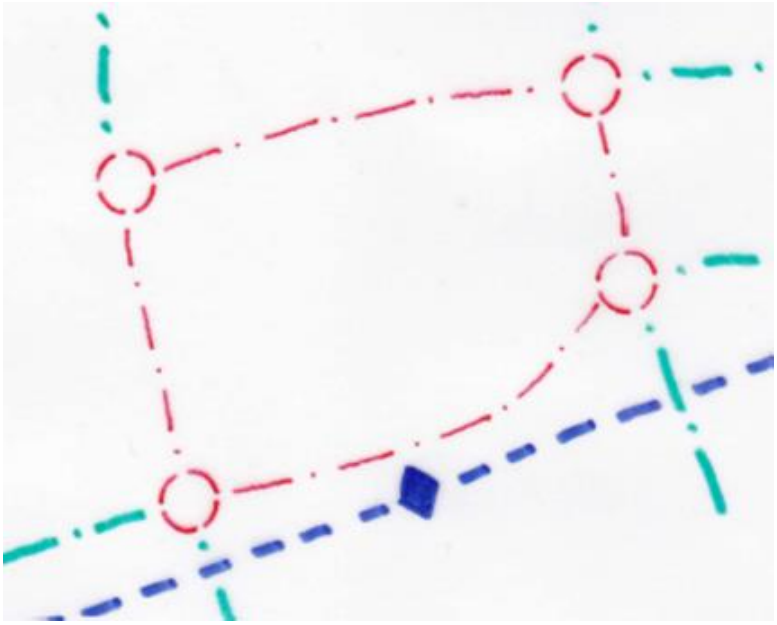
> *'As a physical space, yes [there is locally distinctive architecture]. With the clock tower, square and fountains – most people associate these things with Stevenage.'* (PB1)(Fig.7.14).

Key Spaces and Places

Formal public art is well integrated in the built environment and is an important part of public realm. In particular the 'joyride' sculpture (Fig.7.17), in the Town Square, has become a civic emblem. There is a theme of murals on the side of buildings or running through a number of the underpasses that link the centre to the nearby town gardens.

The structure of the built form is a product of modernist design principles. These design principles led to an island town centre, enclosed by a rapid transit infrastructure, which separates modes of movement (Fig.7.7). The plan form of the town centre is a geometric street pattern, created to fit around its commercial requirements (7.12). The commercial focus of the town centre means that it 'looks' in on itself. Irrespective of the way visitor arrives at the town centre, it is via the servicing areas of commercial buildings – the 'back of house'; there is no sense of arrival and few signs of social 'vitality' (Fig. 7.12, 7.13 & 7.14). A planner felt that the '….*building form has an industrial feel*' (PB1).

Fig.7.7: diagram of the island town centre.



Source: author(not to scale)

Fig.7.8: the main car parking areas.



Source: Digimap (not to scale)

On the whole, a planner reflected, the town centre offered '*use-ability'* and worked as a '….*space for operators*' (PB1).

> *'I would say that the layout is excellent due to its historical core – it needs a polish. There has been investment in shops. The built environment of the [town centre] needs some improvements. The public realm is nice; it's bright, airy and spacious and it has an easy pedestrian flow'* (PB1).

What this quotation points to is a resistance on the part of some local actors and key policy makers to recognise potentially fundamental challenges represented by the now dated built form and its insularity. (Fig.7.14, Fig.7.15 and Fig.7.17).

The original core town centre was thought to be unique, and offered an original setting (Vincent 1960). The cohesive design approach to the built environment has eroded over the decades. The original design principles are now largely irrelevant due to a lack of investment, poor management and new development, a fact barely acknowledged by the interviewees, or other local participants in other formal and informal interactions (such as consultation on the future of the town centres).

In an interview a planner said that, in their opinion, the '….*urban form is tired*….' (PB1).

In terms of how the town centre is used they felt that the quality of the built environment of the town centre was not an important consideration as to whether people decide to visit a town centre.

> *'For me, personally, I would say not. The building and the quality of materials, and the quality of the public realm are not what lead me to a place. It's the usability that is more important to me. It's how you can move around and, ultimately, the proximity to where I want to go because it's nearby what I want to do, or what I am going to do'* (PB1).

However, an elected member of the council disagreed, reflecting on their experience of the town:

> *'I think it's [the quality of the environment] a significant influence. It [the town centre] attracted people from surrounding areas in a very short time; the quality was very important. If I hear of another town centre that has something particular I go there, because the odds are that they will have roughly the same collection of shops. I do believe in WOW factors'* (PA).

Big Box, Mono-use

In the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s big box, and mono-use buildings were permitted (Fig.7.9). This extension to the town centre is in contrast to the original design by Leonard, and was built after the Development Corporation had closed.

> *'Developments of a time add locations in a fragmented way, and undermine a lot of it [the original modernist design approach]'* (PB1).

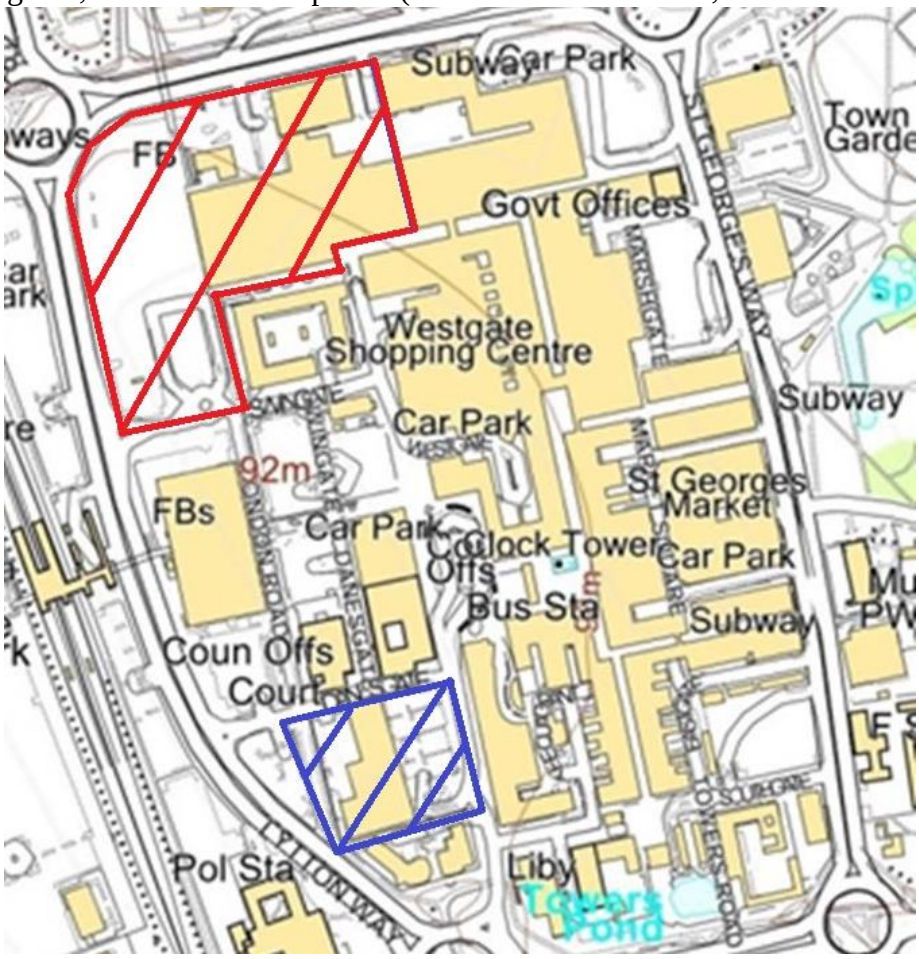
Development introduced following the closure of the Urban Development Corporation (Fig.7.9) does not follow the underlying pedestrian street pattern of the town centre. The larger shop units are attached to surface car parking areas, and are configured to operate more like a retail park (Fig.7.13). This shows that the units were designed and delivered for the end user and limited to a single use – retail. The size, bulk and design of many of the big box units mean that they are difficult to adapt and repurpose. This is not a specific problem in Stevenage, rather it is an issue faced by the majority of town centres (see chapter eight) (Fig.7.20).

Connectivity and Movement

The town centre was designed to facilitate the rapid transit of motorised traffic around the perimeter of the built form (Fig.7.17). Vincent (1960), writing in the 1960s, concluded the design to be a success as it resulted in a 100% segregation of pedestrians from traffic. The design for the car in the post war landscape may have appeared modern and innovative; however, it is now one of the main challenges to be addressed to create a more accessible, liveable and socially 'vital' space. Pedestrian entrance points to the town centre are often overly engineered, poorly managed and uninviting, thus requiring either access to the town centre via utilitarian bridges, walkways and ramps (Fig.7.10 and Fig.7.18) or the even less inviting underpasses (Fig.7.19). The pedestrian is further kettled, and segregated from the

cycling lanes, which run underneath the road network, by barriers and are funnelled down narrow pavements (Fig.7.21).

Fig.7.9: big box, mono use development (red area includes Tesco, blue area is Matalan



Source: Digimap

Bus Station

The bus station dominates the western part of the town square; this area has a negative impact on the aesthetic and environmental quality of the town centre (Fig.7.22). There are plans to move the bus station to another part of the town centre, but this will only relocate the problem and not resolve the underlying issues.

Journey To and From the Railway Station

Stevenage railway station is located at the western edge of the town centre, but is not effectively integrated into the fabric of the centre, and offers a poor gateway (Fig.7.23). The proximity and ease of access to the railway station is highlighted as being an important element to attract investment and regeneration. There is good connectivity to other local destinations (including London, which is only around 25 minutes away), and to destinations further away (as it is on the east coast mainline) leading to the development of an additional platform.

The railway station is a functional space, designed to keep people safe, from rail traffic, and make sure they pay for their rail fare (see Fig.7.23). The configuration and design quality of the station suggests that the experience of arrival or exit point of the customer is of little importance. This is not a unique problem in Stevenage, but it is an important consideration if the town is to maximise the social and commercial value of the experience and, therefore, regeneration opportunities in the town centre.

Fig.7.10: diagram showing pedestrian entry points to the town centre.



Source: Digimap, not to scale

7.3.4 Time and Type of Activity

This section analyses the evidence captured through the application of the ARM, in relation to time and type of activity in Stevenage, through observation at varying times during the day, evening and night (and systematically captured through the Fieldwork Observation Tool) and semi-structured interviews. By identifying when the town centre is active an understanding of the relative vitality, and resilience, becomes possible leading to proposals for strategies to encourage 'adaptive resilience' (Gehl & Savarre 2013; Wrigley & Dolega 2011). The town centre was observed at varying times during the day, evening and night.

Findings

Activity in the town centre follows the pattern of the retail operators in the town centre area. The town centre is most active with the day-time trade of the central area, when the shops are open. There is little footfall in many of the streets of the town centres in the evening and night-time. The centrally located Weatherspoon's pub trades well throughout the day, and into the early evening. However, the evening and night-time trade is dispersed to other parts of the town, such as the 'Old Town' and the Leisure Park (as explored in the competition section 7.4.2).

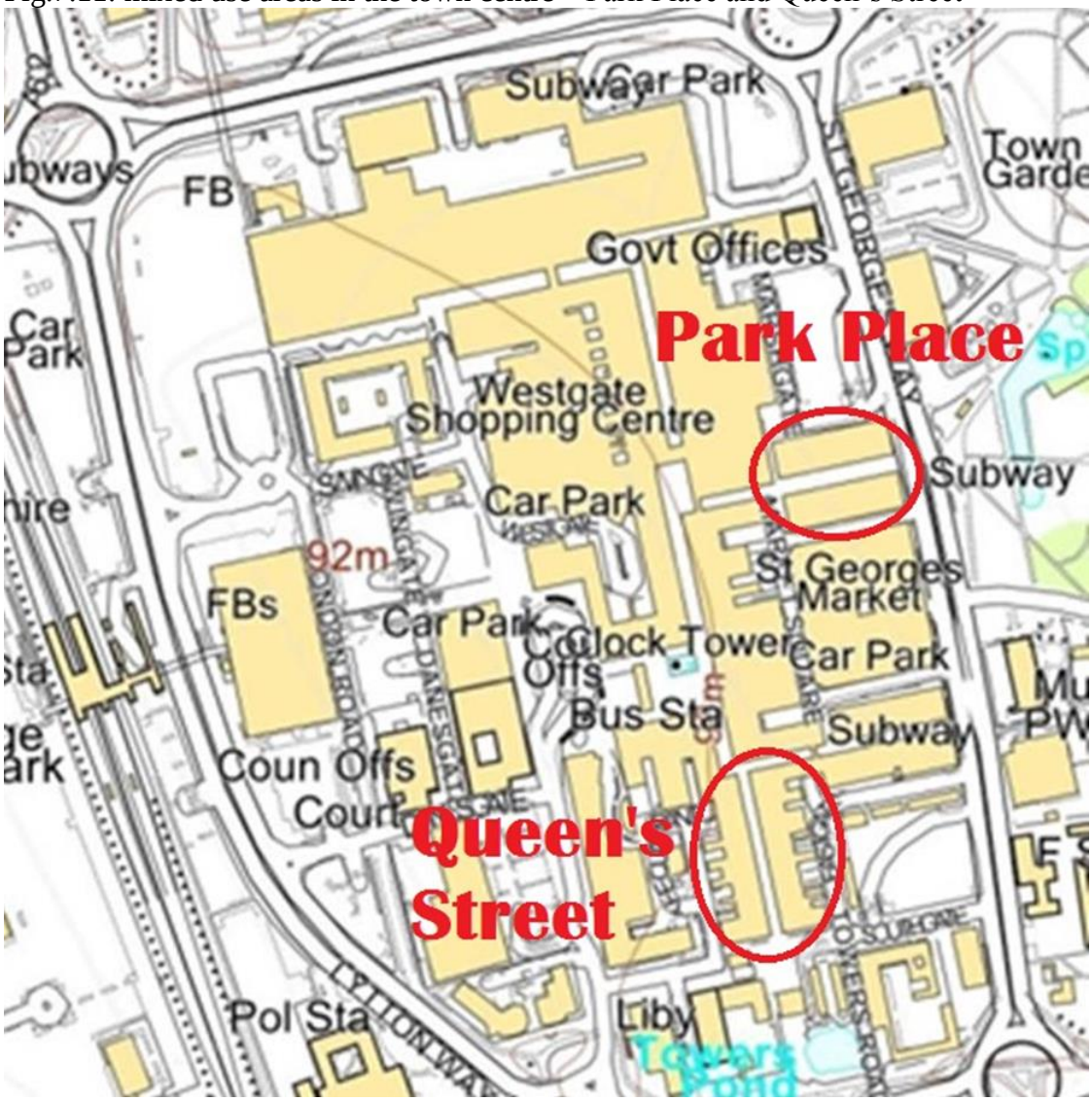
From observations made as part of the fieldwork, a fall off of footfall in the evening and night-time is very noticeable. A planner highlighted that the closure of the town centre MacDonald and Burger King fast food restaurants in the town centre is evidence of the struggle to maintain an evening and night-time economy (PB1). The social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of the town centre is too reliant on the retail sector, and this has a negative effect on the town centre - it is less resilient to shock and change.

There are few mixed-use and residential buildings, and any that there are tend to be located on the periphery of the town centre. The original residential stock, like the rest of the town centre, requires investment, and is now of relatively poor quality and has been poorly maintained in places (Fig.7.25). However, there have been some edge of centre development (Fig.7.13), but this is poorly integrated to the original built environment. A small amount of refurbishment has taken place. The most notable refurbishment is Park Place, which has improved the original architecture, and reinvigorated the street (Fig.7.26). There are signs of the permitted development (PD) rights for the change of use from office to residential having a negative impact (Fig.7.24). A senior elected Member explained that the Council '*….does not support PD'* as this can lead to poorly configured residential buildings and removes a

sector of the economy – the office sector (PA). Moreover, PD undermines and reduces confidence of the community in planning, and the concept of a plan led system (PA and PB1).

Stevenage has retained some socially 'vital' uses in the town centre, including the Borough Council offices, a library, a limited NHS presence, and an operational Magistrates' Court. The introduction of a more mixed-use economy, including proposals for c. 3,000 residential units, is a key element of the regeneration framework for the town centre. In the opinion of an elected Member, increasing residential-led regeneration, as part of a strategy to deliver mixed use, would increase '*variety*' and enhance the feeling of '*place*' (PA). The investment opportunities (PA) should be an incentive for the Government, through Homes England, to become more involved in the regeneration of the town centre. Furthermore, a planner expressed the view that by intensifying the mix of uses in the town centre, including residential, would improve the '*resilience*' of the town centre (PB1).

Fig.7.11: mixed use areas in the town centre – Park Place and Queen's Street



Source: Digimap, not to scale

7.4 Deliverability

The following section reports the findings relating to the second component of the ARM: Deliverability – that is the current ability of the town centre to change, to cope with competitive dynamics, and visitor requirements, at the micro-specific level. It examines the resilience and ability of the town centre to cope and adapt to change within the confines of a number of issues:

(i) the existing planning framework;

(ii) varied asset (buildings and land) ownerships; and,

(iii) current and future competition to the town centre other formats (both physical and virtual) which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses.

The diagnostic stage describes the current position, and suggests a number of proposed actions identified at a micro-specific level that might be implemented in the town centre to support adaptive resilience.

7.4.1 Policy

This sub-section reviews the evidence from the research in the form of interviews and policy documents, and concludes that a similar situation pertains in Stevenage to that in Loughborough: that planning policies are localised and that planning decisions are based in isolation on local issues, and without regard to the potential impact (negative or positive) town centres outside the boundaries of the LPA. This section evaluates the impact of policy on the ability of the town centre to maintain a balance between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability'. It also reflects on its ability to adapt to change, and to improve resilience through interpretation of three key concepts of the NPPF (2019), these are: Stevenage town centre – (i) hierarchy and network; (ii) the sequential test; and, (iii) town centre uses.

Findings

Stevenage town centre – network and hierarchy

The Local Plan states that the town centre was once '….*capable of attracting people from a wide catchment*….', and that the '….*retail world has moved on since the principal shopping streets were completed in the late 1960s; but, Stevenage has not moved with the times*' meaning that the town centre is now '….*tired and not fit for purpose*….' (Stevenage Local Plan 2011-2031). Policy SP4b seeks to deliver the objectives for regeneration and growth, identified through the Stevenage Central town centre framework (2015), by bringing forward a '….*comprehensive and co-ordinated*….' regeneration programme. However, the Stevenage Central town centre framework (2015) is of limited weight in planning terms as it is not part of the statutory plan. As one planner indicated in an interview, there is a feeling that they are '*fire-fighting'*, due to a lack of capacity, and the position that the regeneration framework is not a statutory planning document; but there is an expectation that the aspirations of the framework will be delivered. A senior planner observed there is a '*belief*' from the public that the Council has more *'....influence than it really does'* (PB1).

Following analysis of the relevant documents and interviews with local experts, it is evident that Stevenage is not treated as or seen as part of a wider network or hierarchy, due to the local nature of spatial planning in England. The LPA, in Policy SP4a, demonstrates compliance with the NPPF (2019), by defining a retail hierarchy within the Borough. The hierarchy is constrained by the LPAs boundary. In essence the hierarchy, for the purposes of the sequential test, is: (i) Stevenage Town Centre; (ii) High Street, defined as a major centre; (iii) the Poplars as a District Centre; (iv) seven local centres; and, (v) seven neighbourhood centres (Stevenage Local Plan, 2011).

A senior elected member of SBC pointed to work on a spatial strategy relating to the 'London to Stanstead corridor':

> *'The London-Stanstead corridor….we have lots of discussions continuing. It's the shape of that – people are not going to be defined by their counties. The place matters to people in the immediate area, and into other areas where people will be moving around. You know, what people do during their lives….having good transport - it's important to other areas as well'* (PA).

However, it is not clear how such a strategy could be implemented, in the absence of any spatial plan above that of the LPA, or what weight it would have in planning law (PA). There is, therefore, limited opportunity to bring forward a strategic 'plan-led' response, as discussed in Chapter Eight (8.3).

As explored in detail below (see *Competition* section, 7.42), a number of other formats within the Borough operate and deliver town centre uses which are not recognised by the local planning system, for example the Leisure Park and Roaring Meg (2.6.4). In practice, there is no statutory spatial framework, or relevant policy environment, in which all formats that there are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses can be planned or regulated (2.6.1).

Extent of town centre and impact of the 'Sequential Test'

As noted earlier, the town centre is constrained by the surrounding roads (see Fig.7.7), and defined by the physical layout. In practical terms the town centre has few parcels of land that are readily available for development. Although there are plots which are underused, including land for surface-level car parking (see Fig.7.8), these are not necessarily available, or likely, to become available within a reasonable period of time. Therefore, any proposal for a medium to large-scale town centre use, in an edge or out-of-town location, would be difficult or impossible to resist. The most notable and recent example is the permission for the out-of-town Debenhams (a large retail and commercial leisure department store). The applicant secured a consent at the out-of-town Roaring Meg retail

park as they demonstrated that suitable [town centre] sites are not available, or expected to become available within a reasonable period (in line with NPPF 2019, p.25, para 86). As one locally elected member reflected, the promoters of the Debenhams store made clear to the Council, the Debenhams store would not be located within the town centre, so it '*must'* be located at Roaring Meg retail park where it '….*trades well*….' as an anchor store (PA). The local authority did not want to miss out on the opportunity for new retail floor space, and of jobs in the borough (see Ravenscroft's conundrum, 2.4.5). It is a moot point as to what impact this decision has had on the role of the town centre, as the '….*heart of local communities*….', but it demonstrates that the town centre operates within a yet to be defined market, where other formats exist which are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses.

Town Centre Uses

Fieldwork analysis and observation shows that the economy of the town centre is particularly focussed on retail. There are few examples of mixed-use form, and these are mainly confined to Park Place and the southern section of Queensway (Fig.7.11). This is a result of the design principles followed for the new town centre – to create a retail precinct. The opportunity to increase the social 'vitality' of the place through the creation of a more liveable town centre, with increased density, finer grain built form, and mixed-use, has however been recognised by the Stevenage First Partnership. The local shift in strategy relating to the regeneration of the town centre is set-out in was the *Stevenage Central: town centre framework*, adopted in 2015.

The delivery of the Borough Council backed regeneration scheme seeks to provide a mixed-use built form to create a more liveable space. The ambitious plans would result in 1,100 new homes in the town centre, by 2021, This could deliver a much more balanced local economy, as there are few examples of mixed use currently.

An elected member explained that there is an aspiration running through the regeneration framework that there will be sustainable, and socially 'vital' elements, which include a 'public sector hub', a library, cafés, and restaurants to '….*create more interest*'. The elected member felt that the '….*quality of place*….' in the proposed regeneration scheme, was very important as was the ability for the new facilities to '….*attract people from surrounding areas'* (PA).

The strategy suggests a belief that the cycle of creating 'vitality' will deliver 'viability', and vice versa (3.3), reflecting the impact of the original town centre on the wider catchment area. However, the delivery of mixed-use built form in a mature town centre setting is more complex than other formats that are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses (Table 1.1). In effect, the town centre is penalised as being required to deliver services beyond the commercially 'viable', because of a political and community expectation that there will be a mix of uses, including socially 'vital' uses. The result is that the development carries greater commercial risk and is more expensive to deliver than, for example, a mono-use retail park.

7.4.2 Competition

A locally elected Member reflected that when town centre first started '*trading*' it had the '*wow factor',* and was different to the surrounding areas and other town centres (PA). Vincent (1960) concluded that the town centre was popular as it was '….*so pleasant to shop in comfort and safety that they [visitors] are prepared to travel considerable distances to do this, particularly as car-parking is no problem*' (Vincent 1960, p.103). In the period following the 'opening' of the town centre (in the 1950s and 1960s), the catchment of the town centre was wider than it is today, and many of the positive benefits highlighted by Vincent (1960) are no longer as attractive as the market has changed over time and competition has increased (Fig.7.12).

Findings

In line with many town centres, Stevenage is challenged by higher order, and higher quality environments in other city and town centres, as well as by other physical and virtual formats that are now commercially viable for town entre use. The social 'vitality' and, in particular, the commercial 'viability' of the town centre is also challenged by local competition, which is explored below. As discussed above, in relation to the management and maintenance of the public realm, the uniqueness, novelty, and identity of Stevenage as a new town has diminished.

'Old Town' High Street

The 'Old town' has the characteristics of a place that has organically evolved over centuries, adapting to changing challenges and opportunities. In this way the built form of the place has been influenced by the social and commercial functions over time. The built environment is at domestic scale, and there is an evident mixed-use economy, including residential uses. The 'Old town', in contrast to the town centre, is busy throughout the day, and has a bustling evening economy – in particular, it has maintained a niche commercial leisure offer which is lacking in the town centre.

There is little evidence to suggest that the 'Old town' and the new town centre compete for the same customer base, or that there is any notable dual use - that is customers moving between the two locations in linked trips. Although the 'Old town' is only around 400m from the town centre, the access route for pedestrians and cyclists is tortuous and unattractive – via either stair, ramp and bridge, or a sequence of underpasses. The challenge for the new town centre is of how it can attract more leisure-based use, and diversify the local economy:

> *'I think the established parts for [commercial leisure use] are in the Old Town. The most recent town [centre] regeneration made it clear, and the second phase of the regeneration plans have shown what is going to happen including the relocation of*

> *the [town centre] 'Spoons. People know where there is demand, and they know what is around – it will be coming sooner for everyone' (PD1).*

Failure to integrate the indigenous community, and built environment, into the 'new' town has resulted in a split economy where the 'new' town centre has been unable to attract commercial leisure, and mixed-use formats to create a place which is active throughout the day, evening and night-time. This could be an area for further research into the effective design of extended or new developments, that include town centres or town centre uses.

Leisure Park

The Leisure Park is a big-box modern area, which operates mainly in the evening and weekends. The Park is designed for easy access by car and has a cinema, bowling alley, and a number of fast food restaurants, including drive-through options. The Leisure Park is adjacent to the town centre, and in close proximity to it. However, there is little to suggest that there are joint trips between the town centre and the Leisure Park, not least due to its poor connectivity, and an unattractive route – via stairs/ramps and bridges. The route is further confused, as it passes through the leisure centre and railway station 'tunnels', which can become congested.

The Leisure Park is owned by an insurance firm, and is managed as a single asset and in isolation to other local attractions. It is not in the commercial interest of the owners of the site to offer joint leisure trips, and the design seeks deter spend leakage to other attractions, such as the town centre. The size and extent of the site means that the leisure park could not have been accommodated within the town centre, a fact which demonstrates the limitations of the sequential test (7.4.1 & 8.3.1).Observations suggest that the daytime use of the park is subsidised by overspill car parking for the adjacent railway station.

Roaring Meg and the ASDA and College sites

Further development at the Roaring Meg retail park, and the ASDA site, are evidence of the limited control of the planning process to support the '*town centre first*' policy, even in

a planned and relatively new settlement. The impact on the overall image of Stevenage is that of a ‘zoned’ town, requiring access by car, with little interaction between the various areas of interest. The number of vacant properties suggests that the need for space, from the commercial leisure and retail sectors of the economy, declined significantly during the 1980s, whilst the competition from other formats, physical and virtual, has increased.

To create a new town centre which failed to connect or integrate the ‘Old town’ high street, was a fundamental mistake, both in terms of social ‘vitality’ and commercial ‘viability’. In effect, the ‘new’ town centre was designed as a destination and attraction, oddly similar to an out-of-town retail park. The form and function of the town centre is the reason for many of the challenges it now faces, to adapt to the new commercial circumstances. This further highlights the difficulty of adapting sites and maintaining the resilience of assets in periods of crises and change, where they are overly reliant on a narrow economic base. The town centre, as a commercial hub, is particularly vulnerable to local commercial competition, which act as attractions in their own right.

7.4.3 Ownership

The ownership of assets (buildings and land) in the town centre creates another particular challenge when building resilience. As with Loughborough, the ownership of assets and land is diverse and fragmented, and there is a myriad of interests, and of agendas. However, unlike the laissez-faire and non-interventionist approach identified in Loughborough, in the case of Stevenage the research found a more proactive strategy, with the public sector intervening in the market to assemble land for regeneration through acquisition.

In general the main groups of asset owners in the town centre can be divided between the public and the private sector (Fig.7.13).

Fig.7.12: Competition



Source: Digimap

KEY: to fig.7.12: local competition

Town Centre	Old Town, High Street	Leisure Park	Roaring Meg	ASDA & College

Findings

The aspiration of the landowners is a key element when considering the ability of a place (at varying morphological levels) to adapt to shock and change. There are a number of specific characteristics to Stevenage in terms of such aspirations relevant here, which are explored below.

Public Sector Ownership

The Borough Council has taken an active role in the regeneration plans for the town centre, working in partnership with other public sector asset owners, such as Hertfordshire County Council and the CCG/NHS trusts.

One local expert, with close knowledge of the process to deliver regeneration in the town, expressed '*frustration*' in the way that public sector assets are managed, and with the challenge of working in partnership to progress physical regeneration. This was seen as symptomatic of the problem of bringing various public sector organisations together, to

promote physical regeneration, where that is not a core part of their operational business (PA).

Private Sector Ownership

The fieldwork and interviews found that there were some positive signs of private sector led regeneration, and interest locally. The Park Place refurbishment and redevelopment, aiming to deliver a mixed-use form (with new homes), is an example of the introduction of social activity as well as improved commercial opportunities. In addition to this, there are other examples where there continue to be attempts to repurpose retail space for other commercial leisure, and work space uses. However, it is most noticeable that the big-box former retail space in the town centre has been found to be the most challenging to repurpose or re-let, which is particularly the case with the former BHS unit which remains vacant (Fig.7.20).

Bringing forward regeneration aspirations for larger private sector owned sites is challenging and complex. The Leisure Park, for example, has been identified as a site for residential-led regeneration. As set out above, the site is in the ownership of L&G. It was confirmed, by a senior officer of the Council, that there have been '*constructive'* discussions with the owner. However, L&G consider that the asset is profitable in the current operational configuration and, therefore, commercially 'viable' to the company. The Council believe that L&G are generally supportive of the regeneration framework, and their intention to introduce residential-led mixed-use in the urban centre. In the view of one interviewee the timing of any redevelopment would be a corporate private decision for the company, based on commercial factors and not the needs of the community (PB1). More generally the planner felt that:

> *'At the moment things have been driven by commercial [considerations]. It's not properly co-ordinated by us* (SBC) *at this stage, most developers don't often get involved. Most other towns that bounce back [do so through] investment in retail*

units. It has to be something for Stevenage [to be aware of] as there is not a lot of built-up [commercial] demand' (PB1).

Until the 1980s the assets in the town centre were publicly owned and managed by the Stevenage Development Corporation; however, now and in line with the majority of town centres, the assets are in a number of public and private ownerships. A local Member reflected that *'....it [regeneration] would have been easier if [the assets in the town centre] remained public*….' after the closure of the Stevenage Development Corporation (PA). This was a lost opportunity for the community to share in the increased land value, and to have greater control over the development of the town centre post 1980, pointing to the local example of Letchworth (PA).

The ownership and control of land is a predominant factor in the delivery of any large-scale physical regeneration. As can be seen from the findings here, even when land and assets are in public sector ownership, there is not necessarily a joined-up, place-focussed strategy, across the public sector bodies (Fig.7.27).

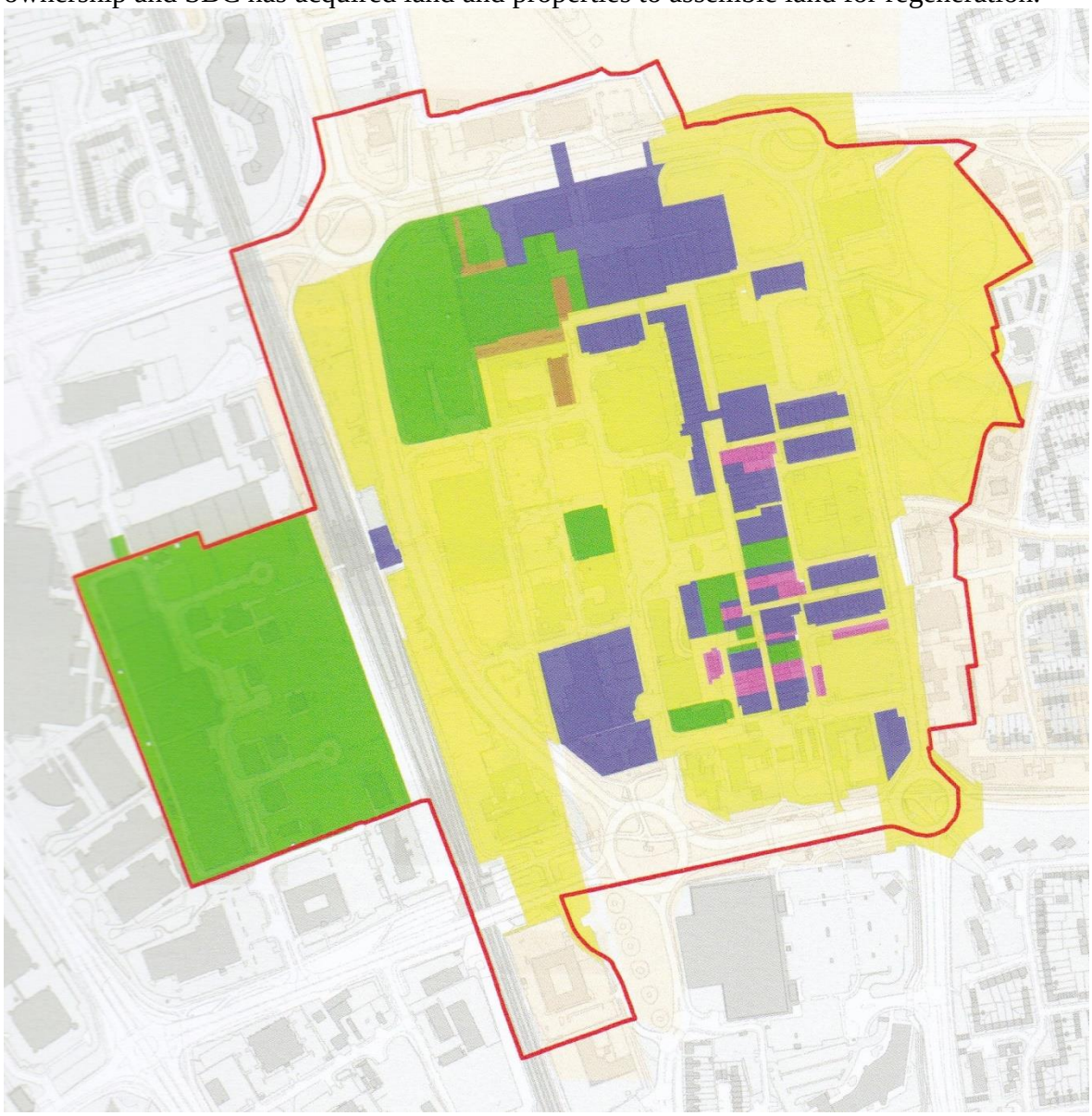
7.5 Management

This section sets out the findings from the final component of the ARM: Management – looking at how effective the current arrangements for the management of the town centre are. It analyses the local approach taken to address the challenges facing the town centre through local strategies and management initiatives, such as the town centre masterplan, to capture the 'current position'.

7.5.1 Local Strategies and Plans

SBC have taken a proactive position to respond to the challenges to the social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of the town centre. The research identified a number of local strategies that have been brought forward outside the statutory planning framework, that link to the future role of the town centre. These are explored below.

Fig.7.13 Land Ownership by Type, a large area of Stevenage town centre is in public sector ownership and SBC has acquired land and properties to assemble land for regeneration.



Source: Stevenage Central, regeneration framework 2015

Key to Fig.7.13: Land Ownership by Type					
Public Sector	Operator	Private Owner	Other Private	Unknown	Not Provided

Findings

Hertfordshire – Strategic Economic Plan – Perfectly Placed for Business: the refreshed SEP: 2017-2030

Stevenage falls within the geographic interest of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (HLEP), which is within the administrative boundary of the county of Hertfordshire. As part of the role of the business led HLEP it is must prepare a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP).

The SEP identifies the town centre as a '*jaded*' place, requiring reinvestment and an '*active development process*'. The SEP sets out how the LEP could support the delivery of the regeneration framework ('Stevenage Central') through the local growth fund, and would also seek private sector investment. The SEP emphasises the long-term nature of the regeneration of the town centre and considers that it should be based on private sector investment and commercialisation of the assets – thereby identifying a '….*sustainable financing models*' (SEP 2017, p.35-36). Although it is positive that the strategy to the regenerate Stevenage is supported by the LEP (through the SEP), it is less clear that there is an agreed governance structure. The implementation of the strategy is based on the hope that commercial led regeneration will finally deliver. However, substantial commercial led regeneration has not come forward for a number of decades now. The large-scale commercial regeneration scheme brought forward ING/Stanhope, and supported by the council, faltered following the economic crisis (2007/2008), and was eventually abandoned in 2012 (Table 7.1).

The LEP strategy does not address the structural economic issues facing the town centre, which require a detailed and funded strategy for redevelopment, thus mitigating risk of investment.

Stevenage Central: town centre framework (2015)

SBC took the lead in 2014 to commission the *Stevenage Central: town centre framework*, which was adopted by the Council in 2015 as the regeneration strategy for the town centre. The Stevenage Central plan was not intended to be a statutory plan, as the statutory plan is the Local Plan. The intention of the Stevenage Central plan was to act '….*partly as a prospectus for investment and delivery in the town centre that will allow parties to unite and capitalise upon the potential for Stevenage*' (Stevenage Central 2015, p.7). Stevenage Central (2015) set out a proactive strategy for the regeneration of the town centre (including the Leisure Park), over a twenty five year period. An elected member of SBC said that the framework was '….*doing what we want it to do*' (PA).

The masterplanning of the town centre differs from that in Loughborough. Stevenage have been more active in identifying inward investment and physical regeneration opportunities, seeking to attract development partners. Arguably, a number of factors may have influenced this differing response, such as

- the quantum of land in the ownership and control of SBC, although the Stevenage Central takes a broader view and proposes regeneration initiatives on land which is not in Council ownership; or,
- the configuration and format of the town centre, although this would not explain the more laissez faire position of Borough Council in Loughborough in relation to the big box area.

It is worth reflecting here that although the LA recognised the need to adapt the town centre in 2015, the first element (SG1) had still not secured planning permission by the early part of 2020. Moreover, as a senior officer of SBC explained, the process of selecting a development partner for the proposed first stage of regeneration had created delays of around '….*two to three years*….', and they considered that this was not helped by financial *'....cuts to the Council*....'. Turnover of staff, and subsequent challenges in recruiting

people with the right skills had had a negative impact on '*confidence*' in the ability of the LA to deliver (PB1).

> *'Yes, it was firefighting with extreme cuts on services. Regeneration is an optional, not a statutory service. Regeneration is the council's number one priority, and by putting money in the town like the [former] M&S by Queensway the council has placed money on the site and placed interest'* (PB1).

Table 7.1: regeneration proposals for Stevenage town centre in the context of local and national issues

Year	2007	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	2020
INVEST	ING/STANHOPE SCHEME												SG 1	
LOCAL STRAT									REGEN FRAME					
FINANCE	BANK CRISIS	RECESSION Q2 2008 – Q2 2009		AUSTERITY										
POLITIC										BREXIT				
HEALTH														C-19
TECH	IPhone													

The findings further suggest that regeneration is dependent upon other external matters and crises, as mapped in Table 7.1. For example, a scheme backed by ING/Stanhope was withdrawn in 2012, due to the impact of the banking crisis, and the rapid rise of virtual commercial space (2007).

> *'When the crash came we had already entered into an agreement [with ING/Stanhope]. Initial reaction was: what would we do? We still needed regeneration, so we were determined that we would enter another phase of the framework'* (PA).

The much smaller Mace backed scheme (SG-1) could be affected by potential financial and social uncertainty, such as from Brexit. Furthermore, the regeneration framework spans twenty five years, and now still has twenty years to run. A Member with an interest in the regeneration of the town centre stated that they thought that the 'austerity' measures had delayed progress, and that there is underlying risk of the economic 'cycle', and unexpected '*changes*', and that they need to '….*economic proof*….' the regeneration proposals (PA). The original 'new town' and 'new' town centre was delivered when there was control, through the Urban Development Corporation which had a clear mandate,

strategy, and commitment from the government to deliver new homes and a new town centre. A similar governance and delivery mechanism to the Urban Development Corporation is not currently available.

The mechanisms for development are further complicated by the relative uncertainty of the decision- making process, as established through planning law. As a senior member of the council set out, in no way is a planning permission for a site guaranteed. It was clear that the member was not being critical of the quasi-judicial process of decision making of the non-political local planning committee.

> *'They [the councillors] are aware of the issues; and, the planning officers and regeneration team itself understands the need to make a compelling [and policy compliant] case for proposed development to the [planning] committee. It's good to see. They [the regeneration team] are implementing frameworks, it's subjective….before it goes before planning committee [nothing is certain]. It's those choices that make a difference'* (PA).

Funding and Investment in the Town Centre

As part of the government's Local Growth Fund, funding was secured for the regeneration of the town centre, through Growth Deal 1 (2014) £15m; and, Growth Deal 3 (2017) £19m. The 'Stevenage Better' consortium has attracted development partners for a number of schemes, including the repurposing a number of retail units (such as the former Marks and Spencer unit), and the new £350m proposals for the site between the railway station and the Market Square, branded SG-1. It is evident that this funding is too little and short-term, not only to deliver the regeneration ambitions set out in the adopted regeneration framework, but in reality, to bring about the type of fundamental change that is recommended in the following section of this case study. There was also frustration that there was a '*constant requirement'* for the local authority to bid for funding, and a Member of SBC was of the opinion that the impact of this was that the regeneration team is working '*flat-out*' and that it '*takes up a lot of time'* (PA).

7.5.2 Partnerships and Stakeholders

The type of strategy and management identified for a town centre to develop 'adaptive resilience' will influence who the relevant stakeholders are who can deliver outputs, their power/influence, and role they may play (McGlynn 2000, p.88).

Findings

Management in relation to town centre, as in Loughborough, is, as noted, a complex and problematic concept. However, unlike the findings from the Loughborough case study, the participants in Stevenage identified a different role of management for (i) physical regeneration; and, (ii) marketing and promotion.

(i) Physical Regeneration

The Stevenage First partnership was created in 2014 to develop and deliver a regeneration programme. The partnership includes the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Hertfordshire County Council, SBC, and Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce. The regeneration partnership has now been rebranded - 'Stevenage Better: a place for everyone.'

In relation to the role of physical regeneration in the town centre, the Stevenage Better consortium was identified as having taken on responsibility for the delivery of physical projects. The accountability for physical regeneration is less apparent, not merely due to the challenge of identifying an accountable body, but also due to the governance of some key partners, such as the Hertfordshire LEP.

(ii) Town Centre Management

The town centre has a designated town centre manager employed by SBC within the planning and regulation service area of the Place directorate. The role of the TCM is '….*events*….' and '….*branding*….' focussed - '*Love Stevenage*' brand (PB1)(Fig.7.41).

> *'There is now [more co-ordination] for here, because we have a town centre manager in my team which is a new role [that has been re-] introduced'* (PB1).

It was accepted by an officer of SBC that the 'management' of the town centre in a broader sense – private and public space – is not '….*properly coordinated*….', as there is not the ability to manage the town centre as an '….*asset*….', due to the various interests (PB1).

> *'We are a bit more co-ordinated....as a small authority. Some parts are more disengaged like the highway as they are more separate. But, we are working on trying to bring this more together'* (PB1).

An elected Member of the authority also suggested that there was a *'....public misunderstanding*….', which leads to a '….*perception and expectation*….' that the local authority can directly '*manage*' the town centre, and has greater control than it does (PA). The perennial issue (2.4.4) of free loading was highlighted:

> *'They [local commercial landowners] might want to argue that a property is now in a better position than before. They're not actually contributing. Could it be better? It could always be better'* (PA).

However, there is always an expectation from stakeholders that the council will step in to resolve problems that occur.

'When the clock stopped; when the fountains flooded, there were complexities. I think the point here is that we concentrate on the management of the town centre and the public understands it. That our town centre manager is responsible for management, et cetera. The management of the regeneration is fully transparent' (PA).

It was evident from the interviews with local experts, that the term management was defined loosely, and not used in a conventional sense where there is 'control' (PA and

PB1). Moreover, there are limitations to respond to the crisis faced by the town centre that cannot be resolved locally or through place management initiatives.

7.6 Notes of a Reflective Practitioner

This section reflects on the research experience of the researcher who was embedded in the regeneration team, as a consultant, at Stevenage Borough Council from 2013 to 2016. The researcher remained an active participant observer throughout the primary research stage for this thesis. This part of case study two follows the same structure as that set out in case study one. In contrast to the earlier part of this chapter, the primary research here focusses on the experience of the researcher. It was concluded that this part of the primary research goes beyond commenting on fact and could compromise the individuals that took part. For ethical reasons, it was considered inappropriate to directly quote anyone: the reason for this is that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. Therefore, only comments that are widely available in the public domain and the notes of the researcher are referred to directly in this section to provide evidence.

The experience of the approach to regeneration of the town centre observed in Stevenage was in contrast to that of Loughborough, the main difference being that there was a lack of consensus in the way that the challenge facing the town centre should be addressed. This was notable in the approach taken by the Labour controlled Borough Council, and that of the Conservative Member of Parliament. As alluded to above (see 7.5.1 and Table 7.1), there have been a series of attempts over a number of years to revitalise and regenerate the town centre. This included the ambitious plans led by the consortium of ING/Stanhope in partnership with the Borough Council (see 7.5.1, Table 7.1).

Revised Approach to Regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre

In 2014 the Council started to develop a revised approach to the challenge facing the town centre, which looked to move away from a predominantly retail and commercial leisure

offer, to a greater mix of uses including residential. As set out in the Council's Executive Report (17 June, 2014):

> *It is clear, therefore, that a new 'regeneration framework' to guide economic growth and inward investment in the town centre must be developed. The proposed 'task force' will be the private/public partnership that will develop the 'regeneration framework' as well as acting as a 'regeneration body to promote and deliver the sustainable development of the town centre (SBC, 2014).*

Officers of the Council had been proposing alternatives to the large-scale retail led regeneration of the ING/Stanhope for a number of months, but there was some resistance from senior politicians. There was nervousness amongst the politicians to move away from the shopping orientated offer that had been the focus and function of the original pedestrian precinct of the original design (Vincent 1960). There appeared to be a collective nostalgia and memory of the town centre attracting visits from a wider catchment area, with a hope that this could be replicated through the attraction of new shops (which follows the theoretical approach set out in Ravenscroft's (2000) vital and viable cycle (see 3.3.1)).

The Council's change of approach to the regeneration of the town centre was not only driven by the advice they were receiving from their professional officers, but should be seen in the wider political context. On the 31 October 2012 Lord Heseltine's report '*No Stone Unturned*' was published, the significance for Stevenage Borough Council was not so much the report per se, but the role Lord Heseltine was asked to perform by the government. Early in 2014 Lord Heseltine, along with the Minister for Cities (Greg Clark), visited Stevenage in his Local Growth advisory role in the Cameron government. Lord Heseltine met with both SBC and the constituency MP, Stephen McPartland. The researcher's notes, summarised here, of the meeting provide background observations to the way in which meeting was approached by SBC and the Member of Parliament.

Firstly, the Labour led administration of SBC welcomed the interest the conservative/liberal coalition government was taking in the potential growth and regeneration of Stevenage. However, there appeared to be a degree of suspicion relating to

the possible 'agenda' and 'motivation' of the government for the visit at that point in time. At the same time a senior member of the Council's Executive Committee commented that they did not *'....care who carries out the regeneration….*' of the town centre '*….as long it happens*'. Following the visit of Lord Heseltine senior members of the Executive felt that the Council needed to be seen to be '*….getting something done….*' in relation to the regeneration of the town centre, and be seen to be taking on a 'leadership' role.

The position taken by the local MP was in contrast to that of the Council; McPartland felt that the regeneration of Stevenage could not be achieved through the local Council and he called for a new [Urban] Development Corporation (UDC) to be established. The MP argued that the new UDC would '*….be established under energetic and independent leadership….*' and that the UDC should *'....have its own planning powers and the ability to compulsory purchase the property needed*' (McPartland, 2014). This lack of trust from the local MP in the ability of the local authority to lead the regeneration of Stevenage town centre very much mirrors the wider uncertainty of successive national governments in the ability of the public sector to deliver, as discussed in Chapter Two (2.4.4).

However, the Stevenage MP's criticism was not limited to the Borough Council, but also related to the role played by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) through the development of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) (7.5.1). Stephen McPartland MP considered the SEP to be a '*….sad joke on local people….*' and that it was now time for *'....the Government to step in and take action....to establish a Stevenage Development Corporation, backed by the £2 billion fund available and regenerate our town centre once and for all*' (McPartland, 2014).

Following the recommendations of the June Executive report (17 June, 2014) the Council established the Stevenage First Partnership Board, which met for the first time in October 2014, and work commenced on the development of a new regeneration framework for Stevenage town centre (7.5.2). Following a competitive process an external consultancy

firm (David Locke Associates) was selected to develop the Stevenage Central Regeneration Framework (SCRF). Officers from SBC worked closely with the consultant team to develop the SCRF and this included a comprehensive consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders in the community. The consultation process also included close discussions with the Hertfordshire LEP and key landowners in the town centre; reflections from that process are sketched out briefly below.

Strategic Landowners in Stevenage Town centre

Consultations with four landowners stand out in the context of the experience of the researcher; these include three private sector land holders, and one public sector landowner.

Private Sector Landowners

To protect the identity of the land holders, the land in their ownership is not identified.

Land Owner One (LO1)

LO1 is an institutional asset owner and asset manager. They owned a significant parcel of land that was identified in the Framework as being strategically important for the effective regeneration of the town centre. They stated that they were comfortable to engage at an officer level, but did not want to become involved with local politicians, or be drawn into local politics. Indeed, it is worth reflecting here on some unease amongst members of the Taskforce and, in particular the involvement of the LEP. LO1 agreed to meet with officers to discuss the regeneration framework, but were very clear that they would only meet officers of the Council, and not elected Members or third parties. This did not seem to be an unusual request, in the context of previous discussions, and the commercial sensitivity surrounding their aspiration for the asset. The meeting was scheduled to take place at their office in the City of London. It was a warm and sunny morning so the team from SBC had a pre-meeting discussion outside the offices where there was a café. At that point a

member of the Herts LEP appeared, who had just '….*heard about the meeting*….', and was '….*passing by*….' so thought that they '….*would join the meeting*'. Not only had the member of the LEP not been invited, but their business interests were related to the property sector, and there was a potential conflict of interest. Clearly this was an embarrassing situation for officers, and it was highly unlikely that the person was merely *'....passing by....*' the location with spare time to participate in the meeting. The LEP member was diplomatically and firmly advised that they could not attend the meeting, as it would be likely that LO1 would refuse to meet, or if they did they would be unlikely to be forthcoming with any useful information. Moreover, it was felt that there would be a breakdown in trust between LO1 and the Council. The LEP member said that they understood this position, and that there was '…*no problem*….'. Unfortunately, it later transpired that there had been a *'problem'*, as officers had to account in some detail as to why they had advised the member of the LEP not to attend the meeting that they were not invited to. There also seemed to be a shift in the way that the member of the LEP engaged with some officers from this point.

The relationship between the landowner and the local authority was an unequal one from the point of view of delivering change, as nothing could be physically delivered without the land owners '*buy-in'*. For this reason officers had been careful to build up trust with the landowner.

Land Owner Two (LO2)

LO2 was reluctant to engage in any way with the local authority, stating that they had worked with local authorities in the past and in their experience '….*they are a complete waste of time*'. After a number of meetings and lengthy discussions they agreed to be kept-up-to date, but did not want to become directly involved in a partnership approach or as an active participant in the delivery of the Framework.

Land Owner Three (LO3)

LO3 owned a number of assets in the town centre and had a mix of tenants – including retail and hospitality (café and restaurant) operators. They were interested in finding out about the proposed Framework, but were *'....frustrated….'* by timeframes. They wanted to know what was *'....being done now....'* (in 2013/2014), and that '*….it's not much use knowing what might or might not happen ten or twenty years [from now]….*'.

Public Sector Landowners

As part of the Framework a number of sites in public sector ownership were identified as being relevant to the delivery of the regeneration framework objectives, identified by the Council. In addition to this it was anticipated that the regeneration would bring benefits to the asset owner, as well as, the operator. In one example the team working on the Framework engaged with the public sector provider, and was assured that they were speaking with the relevant asset team. However, after several months of discussion and engagement it transpired that the asset was in the 'ownership' of a different part of the same public sector organisation, and that the discussions would have to be restarted. This was frustrating, but not unusual, in the experience of the researcher who has also worked as a consultant for the Cabinet Office on the One Public Estate programme. There is frequently a misunderstanding relating to who the asset 'owner' is and who the 'tenant' or 'operator' is. Of course, the distinction is often academic in the wider operation of public sector assets (7.4.3).

Local Enterprise Partnership

Although the LEP were an active part of the Stevenage First Partnership, the relationship between the LEP and SBC was strained at times. The researcher observed this tension both at an officer level, and LEP Board member and the political interface of SBC.

Officer to the Council - around £16m was secured for the regeneration of Stevenage and the A1(m) corridor from the Government's Growth Fund, which was allocated to the LEP to manage. In the view of SBC the money had been allocated for a regeneration programme that the Council was 'leading on' and there was a feeling amongst officers that the Council should be able to access the fund without unnecessary 'bureaucracy' being attached to the funds by an unelected body. Frustration grew amongst officers, and then to members of the Council, that any request to access money from the Growth Fund was met with '….*unexpected hurdles*….' that had to be negotiated in order to provide evidence that the request met the required '*criteria*'. However, it was unclear where the requirement for evidence came from, and there was a lack of transparency relating to process. This led to accusations from the Council that the LEP were '….*making things up as they go along*….', and that employees of the LEP were *'....building the importance of their role up*….' in order to '*…justify their existence'*. It also appeared that the LEP was suspicious of the Council's approach and role.

Political Interface – the researcher's experience of presenting the SCRF to the Hertfordshire LEP Board (21 May, 2015) demonstrates first-hand the tension between the LEP and SBC, at a political level. The minutes of the meeting note that there was a presentation of the draft Stevenage Regeneration Strategy for the central area of Stevenage, and that:

> *'The plans were well received by the Board. Concerns were raised over who would run the whole project. The Stevenage First Group currently oversees the project, however ideally a delivery vehicle should be established'* (HertsLEP, 2015).

However, the researcher's observations and notes of the meeting record a much more robust discussion amongst the Board. At points the discussion became quite animated as it was suggested that SBC could not be '….*trusted....*' to *'....lead or deliver*…' regeneration, and that the Council had been trying to regenerate the town centre for decades, and had *'....failed*....'. There is evidence to support this claim (see Table 7.1), however in reality

the situation is much more nuanced and complex, involving a wide range of actors (7.5.1). It was suggested that the LEP should take '….*direct contro*l…' and be '….*the delivery vehicle*….' to progress the regeneration.

Adoption of the Stevenage Central Regeneration Framework

At a Special Executive meeting of the Council, on 21 July 2015, the Council adopted the Stevenage Central Regeneration Framework as a '….*blueprint for the regeneration of the town centre and the wider central area*….' (SBC, 2015). At this point in the process the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder and the Executive as a whole had been briefed on the report and framework on numerous occasions. The reports had also been examined through the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. Therefore, all reasonable efforts had been made by officers to ensure that the reports proceeded smoothly through the relevant stages.

However, the Framework was not universally supported post adoption, as the MP for Stevenage felt that it '….*could destroy any future town centre regeneration'*. The MP considered the Framework contained *'....ridiculous proposals*….', and that it was a '….*nonsense*….' which has *'.... wasted time and a fortune in local taxpayer's money*'. Of course, the local MP is entitled to their view, but it is difficult to find any basis for the assertion that an outcome of adopting the Framework is '….*further restricting a Developers (?) flexibility to bring forward a truly radical scheme'*. The Framework was intended to be a tool to attract investment, and is a non-statutory document that exists outside the local planning policies, so it promotes flexibility rather than constrains development. However, it is difficult to argue with the MP's conclusion that by '*Adding National Rail into the mix is adding twenty years of negotiations*....' into the process. Experience suggests that negotiating with Network Rail is challenging and protracted, not least due to their operational focus (7.3.3). With this in mind, nevertheless, it was decided that Network Rail land holdings were a key element of the regeneration. It is argued here, therefore, that MPs and the Government should look to the role of Network Rail's land

holdings in relation to promoting regeneration rather than seek to ignore the challenges or work around them. This could have been a constructive role for the Stevenage MP.

Beyond the contents of the plan Stephen McPartland highlighted his lack of confidence in the Council to deliver regeneration, that *'....for over thirty years Stevenage Borough Council have launched several regeneration plans and failed to deliver any of them*'. Here the researcher has some sympathy for the MPs point of view, and it may be that a regeneration vehicle, outside the local council, could be of benefit to offer greater focus. It is a moot point whether there should be a new Urban Development Corporation, or a different bespoke regeneration vehicle. However, it is worth pointing out here that many of the challenges facing Stevenage town centre are not unique and can be classified as generic as discussed in the following chapters, eight and nine. It is unclear whether as a member of the governing party since 2010 that Stephen McPartland has lobbied his own government to take on or investigate a new approach to regeneration.

Although the researcher stopped working with SBC as a consultant in early 2016, they have monitored progress of the town centre regeneration as part of this research. As an officer who works with SBC commented, the regeneration process has been challenging not least *'....due to the politics – with a big 'P' and small 'p'*.

Some of the practitioner reflections sketched out above relate uniquely to the experience of the researcher of the location – Stevenage. However, there are themes that transcend the experience of the researcher that are generic. For example: (i) regeneration of town centres are complex and uncertain; (ii) there are a myriad of stakeholders with varying and shifting strategies and agendas; (iii) publicly owned assets are not managed as 'one public' estate; and, (iv) network rail are a key strategic asset owner and operator across many town centres.

Fig.7.14: Town Square, designed by the architect Leonard Vincent.



Source: author, 17/01/2020

Fig.7.15: Market Street - Town Square Conservation Area.



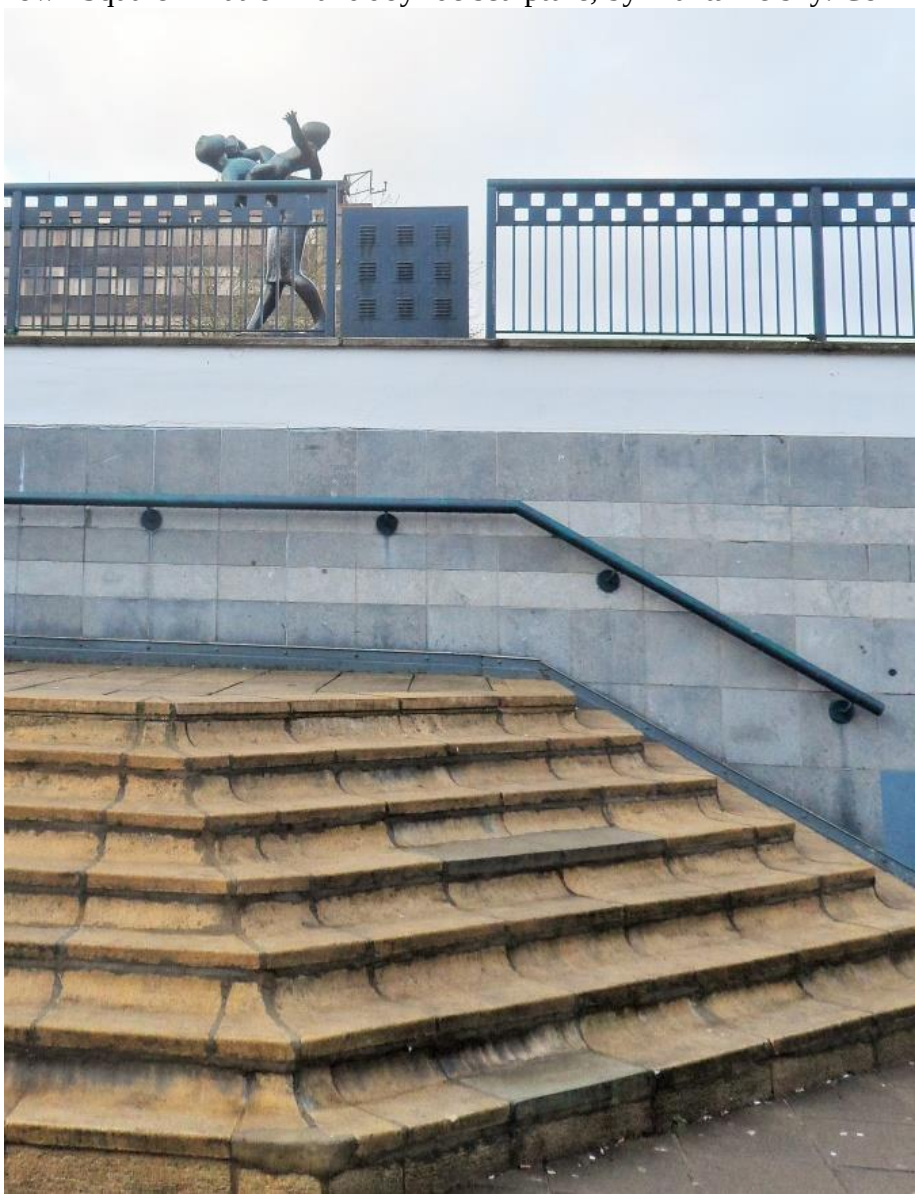
Source: author 17/01/2020

Fig.7.16: floor sign on entrance to the town centre, a sign of confidence in the town centre.



Source: author 16/01/2020

Fig.7.17: Town Square - Platform and Joyride sculpture, by Franta Belsky. Commissioned.



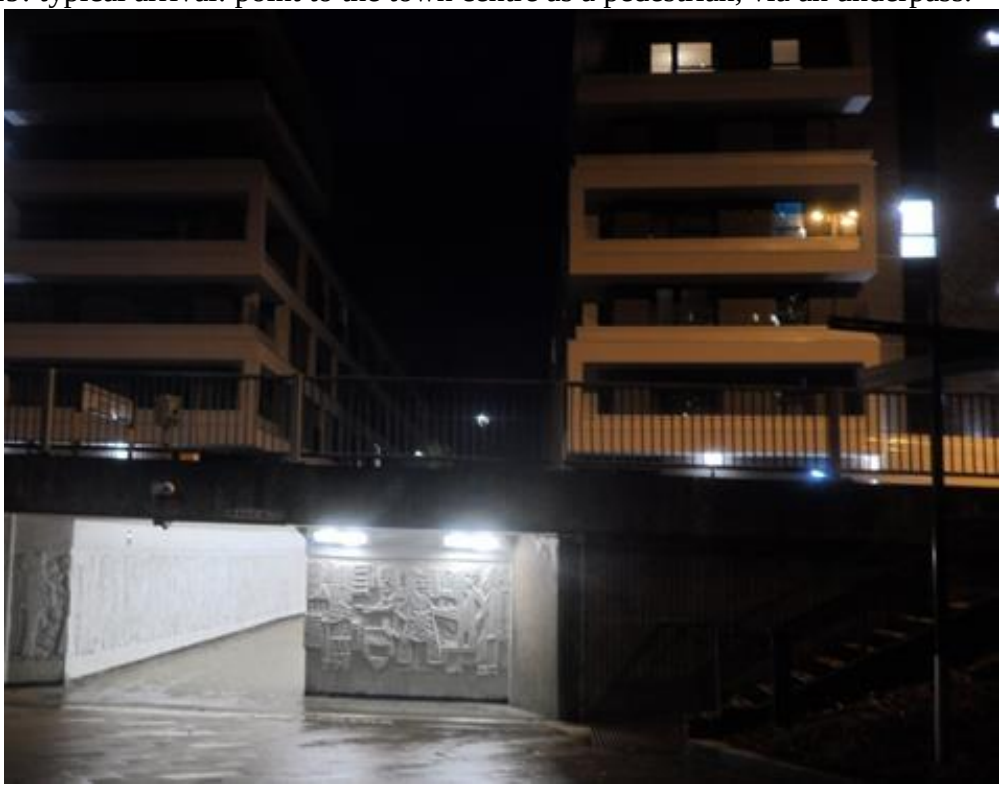
Source: author, 17/01/2020

Fig.7.18: typical arrival point: to town centre, route is through service areas.



Source: author, 17/01/2020

Fig.7.19: typical arrival: point to the town centre as a pedestrian, via an underpass.



Source: author, 16/01/2020

Fig.7.20: former BHS store, challenge of converting big box, mono-use units.



Source: author 16/01/2020

Fig.7.21: segregated cycle lane with pedestrian crossing point, and road above



Source: 17/01/2020

Fig.7.22: negative impact of the bus station on legibility and permeability of the town centre.



Source: author 17/01/2020

Fig.7.23: entrance to Stevenage railway station from town centre.



Source: author 17/01/2020

Fig.7.24: office stock prior to conversion to residential use, using PDR



Source: author 07/03/2014

Fig.7.25: mixed use and ageing housing stock



Source: author 17/01/2020

Fig.7.26: Park Place refurbished and extended block, introducing residential-led mixed use



Source: author,17/01/2020

Fig.7.27: Town Square West, detail showing part of the ‘functional’ modernist design



Source: author, 17/01/2020

PART TWO

7.7 Discussion – Key Findings

The second part of the chapter discusses the key micro-specific findings from the case study, which are summarised in Table 7.2. The discussion is organised around the key themes of place, deliverability and management.

7.7.1 Place

Key Finding SP1 - the masterplanning of Stevenage as a New Town was flawed.

The design of the new town failed to integrate the existing High Street - what is now referred to as the 'Old Town' – with the design for the town centre. The underlying functionalistic design principles for the new town resulted in a separation or 'zoning' of uses. The infrastructure was designed for the swift movement of vehicles, having a negative impact on the quality of the pedestrian and cyclist experience as well as reducing the legibility and permeability of the place (7.3.2)

Key Finding SP2 – built form reflects the modernist architectural style of the time.

Whilst much of the original architecture of the new town centre remains intact, and is identifiably Stevenage, the uniformity of design in the core streets limits the adaptability of the town centre to react to change or crisis. The design principle creates a sterile, mono-functional environment, with little visual variety and one that is deteriorating structurally at the same time, due to the methods and materials used in construction (7.3.3).

Key Finding SP3 – the town centre was designed as a commercial hub for the post war market

The dominant use is retail, and there is evidence, as with other town centres, that there has been a contraction in the requirement for floorspace (7.3.3). This is clear in the closure of anchor stores, such as, BHS and M&S - resulting in redundant space including big-box units. The time and duration across the day of activity is particularly influenced by the trading hours of shops, which are open during the day with little evening or night-time activity (7.3.4).

The most salient challenge to the social and commercial *relevance* of the town centre for the future, are

- the physical structure of the built environment, in particular, the quality of the pedestrian experience – this would require substantial rethinking and redesign of the town centre, including structural change which would be a complex, expensive programme of work. However, the securing of finance to resolve these issues may be problematic, given the scale and cost of the intervention; and,
- the types of use and the time that the town centre is active and attractive for what Gehl (2011) refers to as 'resultant' social activities. It seems unlikely that this will be driven solely by the private sector and would require public sector funding and intervention, looking back to the '*pioneering*' history, but reinventing itself as a town that puts people first and joins-up uses (Gehl, 2011).

There is an opportunity to diversify the economy of the town. Stevenage could build on the '*pioneering*' spirit of the town, as the first new town, and become an experimental place. To test innovative ways to adapt and respond to both the housing crisis and the challenges facing town centres. It would, thereby address the issue of the *relevance* of place through the renaissance of the town centre, as residential-led with a broader mix of social, civic and commercial uses.

7.7.2 Deliverability

Key Finding SD1 – planning system does not reflect the challenge of new formats and market

This case study highlights the localised nature of the planning system, which is confined by the arbitrary boundary of SBC. Analysis of local planning policies finds that, although compliant with the NPPF (2019), it does not relate to the yet to be defined market in which the town centre now operates, as other formats, both physical and virtual, are not captured as part of the planning system (7.4.1).

Key Finding SD2 – the town centre cannot compete due to disaggregation and simplification of formats

The town centre does not compete with other locations in a conventional commercial sense. As the requirement for physical space has reduced, the commercial relevance of the town centre has become degraded, with operators seeking space in the more attractive High Street in the 'Old Town', or the less complex edge and out-of-town sites, which are managed as a single commercial asset, focussed on commercial 'viability' to maximise profit (7.4.2). A senior elected Member of the Council explained that the town centre '*must*' also be socially 'vital', which means, in the case of the town centre, it will continue to be a more challenging and financially risky location in which to invest (PA).

7.7.3 Management

Key Finding SM1 - a proactive approach towards the regeneration of the town centre

SBC have taken a proactive and lead role to respond to the crisis facing the town centre by adopting a strategic framework, which includes proposals for land not in their ownership (7.4.3 & 7.5.1).

Key Finding SM2 - secured government funding and private sector investment.

The regeneration framework has helped secure Government funding, and select a development partner for the first stages of the regeneration. It may not be a coincidence, but the last time major development in and around the town centre happened, it was delivered through the Development Corporation. The Corporation had control and the long-term commitment of funding to deliver it. Future research might investigate whether the indirect action of the Government to firefight crises is effective, or if intervention should be place focussed and seek to deliver sustainable, local and mixed-use development (7.5.2).

PART THREE

7.8 Recommendations

The following section sets out a number of the micro-specific (MS) recommendations which take into account the findings from the Stevenage case study. The recommendations have been developed using the diagnostic stage of the Adaptive Resilience Model (ARM). The recommendations were presented and tested through interviews with eight. The recommendations relate to the three themes of the ARM: Place (P); Deliverability (D); and, Management (M).

7.8.1 Local initiatives: measures to develop structured adaptive resilience

The research identified a number of measures that could be implemented locally to develop an adaptive resilience framework for the town centre. The implementation of these would require a form of partnership, as no entity has the mandate or capacity to deliver.

Local Recommendation One

Stevenage town centre future task force
Build on the success of the partnerships to regenerate the town centre. Formalise the partnership further to de-risk and attract public and private investment, for example by creating a legal structure along the lines of the Urban Development Corporation, a limited company, LLP, etc. Stevenage town centre, in line with its '*pioneering*' history as the first new town, should be used as a test-bed and create a blue-print for adaptive resilience - building an innovative approach to a renaissance for town centres.

A regeneration expert strongly agreed with this recommendation and pointed to the Stevenage Development Board (SDB) which has been set up, and has '….*representatives from the public, private and community/voluntary sectors*' (PJ). The SDB met on a monthly basis as the Town Investment Plan was being prepared, but it is expected that it will revert to meeting quarterly. A senior elected member felt that the SDB was already delivering many of the actions proposed, and that this was a *'....complicated way of describing what Stevenage First have been doing'* (PK).

The SDB is an informal partnership, a regeneration expert explained that it has '….*been designed to be turned relatively easily into a legally constituted body [which] could be a LLP or other legal body'* (PJ). A senior planner agreed that a more formal structure would be appropriate (PB2). Although the partnership could be turned into a body along the lines of a development corporation, '….*at present, the Government seems to have no appetite for DCs*' (PJ). Therefore, without primary legislation this is not an option. Moreover, a local member was '*Not sure that the UDC model would add any value'* (PK).

Local Recommendation Two

Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework
The adaptive resilience framework should refresh the regeneration framework, building on the Stevenage Central framework, for the future aspirations of the town centre which sets out a path to create adaptive resilience. The framework would be organised over a timeframe and be reviewed annually, as part of the annual community monitoring. The timeframe of the Regeneration Framework should enable a strategic approach to a responsive adaptive resilience plan. Therefore, the timeframe should look at the long-term 11-30 years, the medium-term 3-10 years and the short-term 1-2 years; accepting, of course, that longer term planning will be less precise, but offer a planning mechanism to prepare for key pressures, such as climate change and population growth.

SHORT TERM								MEDIUM TERM								LONG TERM
YEAR ONE				YEAR TWO				YEAR								YEARS
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	YR10	YR11-YR30

A senior planner was neutral as to the benefits of a local adaptive resilience framework, and said that '*It is extremely hard to plan for over ten years with any certainty*' (PB2). A regeneration expert felt that the Stevenage Central Framework had *'....to some extent been updated*' (PJ). The work that the SDB is carrying out on the proposed bid to government for funding through the Town Investment Plan has refreshed and revised the regeneration framework for the town centre. One regeneration expert thought it would be appropriate, and '*timely to revisit the Framework*' once the Town Investment Plan is submitted (PJ). They also pointed to the planning application for the first stage of significant regeneration as set out in the framework, identified as the SG1 scheme, and they felt that the progress made '….*is testament to its strength and longevity*' (PJ). A senior planner agreed that, in general terms, the physical regeneration, as set out in the Stevenage Central Framework, is

non-controversial and policy compliant. However, it has taken a number of years to bring forward a planning application for SG1, and work on site is yet to commence. A participant felt that the physical regeneration had been '….*delayed by political [central government] interference*' (PB2). Although, '….*once one or two developments come forward*….' that will in effect '….*establish a market'* (PB2). They felt that '*It is important to get those initial ones*….' started (PB2).

Local Recommendation Three

Stevenage town centre strategic asset management framework
The town centre Stevenage local asset management framework (SLAMF) is designed to be a delivery mechanism for the regeneration framework, enabling a practical method to understand the aspirations of land owners, identify opportunities for inward investment, flag up risks and develop a proactive implementation of the framework. The Partnership could look to set-up an asset delivery vehicle, as the work of the *Stevenage town centre future task force* is progressed. This framework allows a targeted approach to assets that are: (i) in public ownership, through initiatives such as the One Public Estate; and, (ii) in private ownership.

A senior planner strongly agreed with the proposal to set-up the town centre strategic asset management framework. They agreed that publicly owned assets should meet local spatial aspiration, and that there should be a close working relationship with the private sector (PB2). A regeneration expert agreed that Local Recommendation Three would be beneficial to regeneration, and that the SDB would be the *'....logical body to take this forward'* (PJ). They also felt that local, publicly owned assets, should be *'....held under collective public ownership....to secure maximum value*….' (PJ). That by not having '*collective public ownership'* this can lead to '….*one public body negotiating with another*….' and potentially miss an opportunity to use the '….*public estate as a whole*….' to realise *'....local spatial aspirations'* (PJ).

Local Recommendation Four

All business is local – support local business
As part of the strategic response to the future form and function of the town centre an adaptive resilience approach to town centre uses would be key to developing a more diverse, socially 'vital', and commercially 'viable' economy in the town centre, creating a more diverse economy that delivers a mix of commercial and social uses, including homes: ▪ diverse social and commercial ecology: review and rationalise inward investment; and, ▪ Stevenage business: all business is local, so focus on the local needs of business, suppliers and customers.

A senior elected member strongly agreed with this recommendation (PK). From conversations that the researcher has had in the past with the major businesses in Stevenage, it is clear that there is a preference for corporate events and meetings to be held outside Stevenage, or in the 'Old Town' area. This was echoed by a regeneration expert, who has observed '….*a big divide between those businesses that are global in nature but happen to be located in Stevenage*….', and those businesses that are '*truly local'* (PJ). The regeneration expert felt that an improved relationship would be an opportunity, and '….*vital that in order to encourage those corporates to stay, they need to be tied into the local economy through supply chain and skills'* (PJ). However, these are things that will take *'....time and resource*….' to support and secure (PJ). Whilst the regeneration expert agreed with this recommendation, they expressed the view that '….*in the current very tough climate, it may be a case of securing any potential inward investment using the pull of town centre and public investment and the cluster of science and technology businesses present in the town'* (PJ).

Local Recommendation Five

Experience and time of activity
It is recommended that the type of uses in the town centre are expanded and intensified to diversify activities across a longer time span to encourage resilience. In general terms the time of activity in the town centre follows the operational hours of the two dominant economic uses: retail and, to a lesser extent, commercial leisure. Greater emphasis should be given to the creation of a more 'liveable' town centre with a mix of uses both vertically and horizontally and bring forward the growth in the number and variety of homes available in the town centre. It is important that the new homes are high quality and well designed so that they are desirable places for a cross section of the community to want to live in the town centre and avoid the concentration of any one group. Opportunities to explore home working should be taken in the design of residential space, this should include: appropriate technology to support new ways of working and that homes are designed with sufficient space to accommodate a healthy mix of live and work activities (for example making sure that there is sufficient space for living and working). Options to expand new ways of working within the town centre and collaboration to increase enterprise and innovation should be explored with institutions, such as higher education providers and business focussed groups. This should include an innovative approach to continuous learning and exhibiting, to celebrate the unique character of Stevenage through investment in areas such as art, both formal and informal. With a more diverse mix of uses, including residential, the local economy will be less reliant on the retail and commercial leisure sectors for the commercial 'viability' and result in an improvement of resilience of Stevenage town centre.

A regeneration expert strongly agreed with recommendation Five, and that it '*chimes*' with a number of objectives of organisations (the interviewee referred to: Grimsey and Grimsey II reports; Centre for Cities report Open for Business (February, 2019), that are looking into the challenges faced by town centres (PJ). A senior planner felt that the way the town centre operates needs to be rebalanced, to ensure that '*….social interactions of our local places*….' are encouraged (PB2). The senior planner urged that there needs to be a mix of uses; that allowing residential under 'town centre uses' should not incentivise a dominance of ground floor residential (PB2). A senior elected member strongly agreed with the comments on *'....home design, to incorporate flexible home working space....*', but pointed out that the issue *'....is not confined to Stevenage....*', and should be seen as generic issue (PK). The councillor warned that:

> '*We need to be conscious of the social frictions that may occur – more aspirational people buying up better quality homes within the regeneration area will create a demand for higher quality hospitality venues in the town centre – e.g., café society atmosphere, and this will displace the historic demographic of the town, who will feel left out?'* (PK).

The researcher was aware that throughout the interviews the way in which differing groups (such as gender, age, and ethnicity) might or might not use the town centre was not explicitly raised, beyond the comment by PK, above. It might be concluded that the status of the town centre, predominantly perceived as a public space, meant that there was a tacit acceptance by the participants that the town centre 'belongs' to all in society. However, this is speculation and might be an area for future focus (10.6).

Local Recommendation Six

Improve the quality of the built environment

The town centre of Stevenage is no longer 'vital', as there are now other physical and virtual formats that people can use for *necessary* activities. This means that it is of greater importance for the quality of the physical environment to be good (Gehl 2011). The case study has analysed a number of elements that make-up the built environment of the town, that might or ought to influence the decision making process of users, conscious and non-conscious, to visit the town centre. This area is one in which the local authorities have the most responsibility and control that are specific to Stevenage and could be implemented locally:

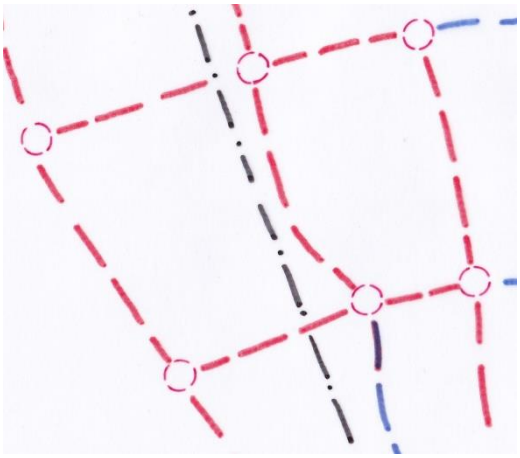
- *locally distinctive Stevenage*: the built form is a key part of the town centres authentic character as a post-war new town and the core main town centre street pattern and the buildings in the Town Square should be renovated and maintained. Stakeholders should formulate and adopt a Stevenage design guide to manage and influence the design of future development;
- *places between buildings, streets and squares* – key places and spaces: the design and management of the public realm in Stevenage town centre is of variable quality and confused in places: this area is one in which the local authorities have the most responsibility and control. It is evident that SBC has engaged in improving parts of the built environment. These are the areas, it is argued here, that have a significant impact on the perception of whether a place is well managed and safe. A programme of coordinated projects to enhance and improve key places and spaces should be created and implemented. This would be an achievable goal and the pace of the delivery of improvements in the built environment should be increased, although it may call for reprioritisation or additional funding;
- *formal art* – there are a number of examples of public art in Stevenage town centre,

many of which are integrated into the built environment and give a sense of place. In line with the design approach, a public art policy should be created and opportunities identified to continue the tradition in and around the town centre;

- *big-box format areas* - the LPA should work in partnership with land owners and operators, for example the former BHS site, to minimise the negative impact of the big-box areas: including edge and out-of-town locations e.g. the ASDA area, Roaring Meg, the Leisure Park. However, this is also a generic issue which should be reviewed at a national level as part of understanding the *value* of places;
- *vehicular traffic passing around the town centre* - vehicular traffic using the town centre as a through route should be prevented. Physical works to integrate the town centre with the rest of the town should be prioritised. The redundant road network should be repurposed for environmental improvements and to enhance the walkability and cycle-ability of Stevenage and areas of interest, including additional and enhance green and blue environmental improvements. Drawing # shows the existing road network with A roads shown in red. The proposed new road network with all town centre roads redesigned as shared space, shown in green. It is further proposed that the broad Lytton Way road, which is four lanes wide, should be completely removed and replaced by a new active use which could include a linear park area (#).

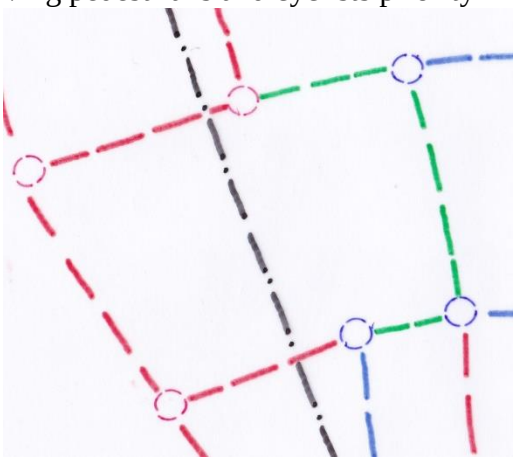
Fig.7.28 vehicular traffic passing around the town centre

Existing road infrastructure, town centre surrounded by A road network



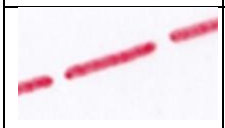
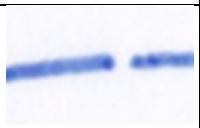
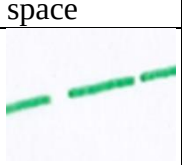
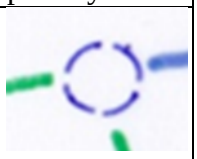
Source: author

Proposed road infrastructure, removal of Lytton Way and downgrading of A roads giving pedestrians and cyclists priority



Source: author

KEY to Fig.7.28

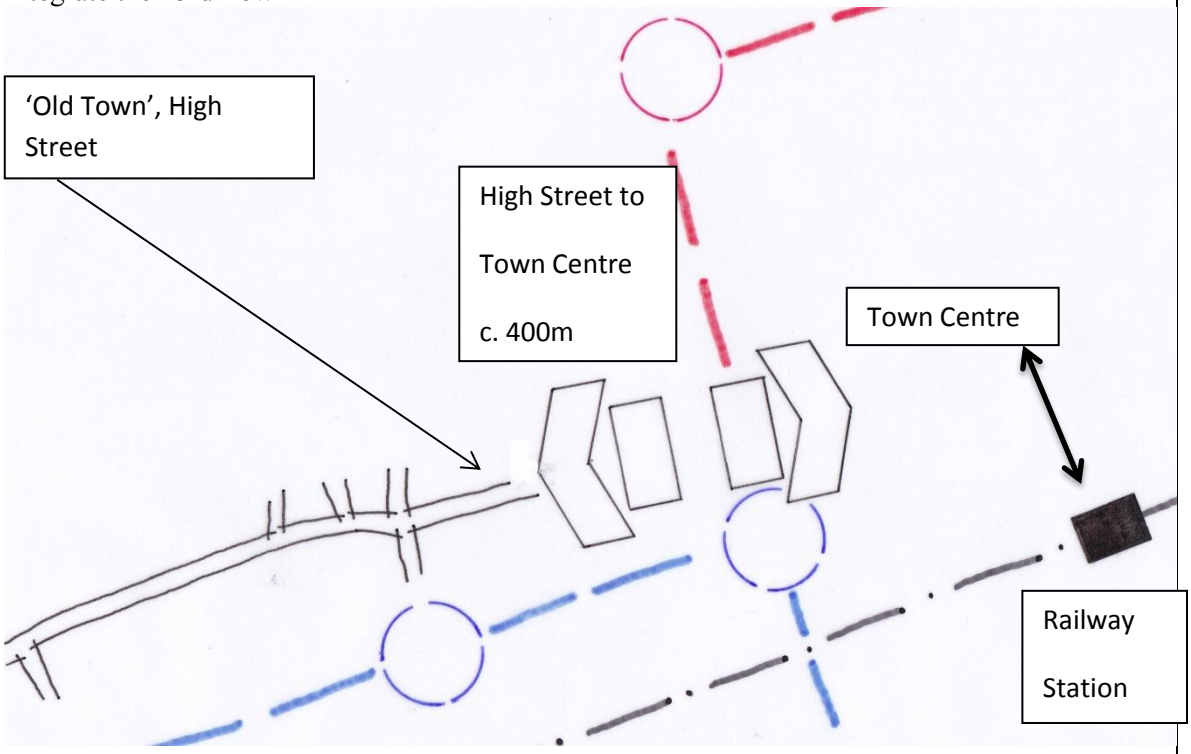
Road: A road	Road: B road	Movement priority: shared space	Rail Line	Node: vehicular priority	Node: pedestrian & cyclist priority
					

- *connecting the town centre*: the town centre should be a hub where other strategic and key parts of the community and economy can be accessed by walking, cycling or public transport. All routes in and out of the town centre should be at grade level, removing the necessity to use underpasses, ramps and bridges. This is particularly important within the town centre: (i) connectivity between the town centre and the 'Old Town' (Fig.7.29); and, railway station corridor which is poor and dominated by the priority given to trips by car, meaning that it is accessed via a utilitarian designed bridge over four lanes of fast moving traffic and offers a poor gateway to the town centre.
- *operational use of the Leisure Park should be reviewed*: with a focus on delivering

new homes and a mix of uses around the town centre which removes the barrier of the railway. One solution might be for a smaller version of the construction platform over Hudson Yard New York. Creating new space with construction over the railway line to join the places of interest at grade and remove the clumsy and unattractive sequence of stairs, ramps and bridges (Fig.7.44).

Fig.7.29 Connecting the town centre – with the 'Old Town'

Integrate the 'Old Town'



Source: author

KEY to fig.:7.29

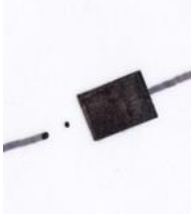
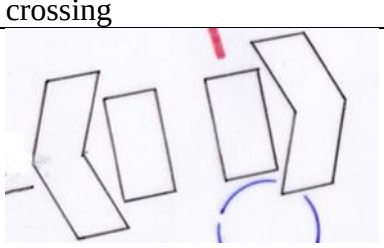
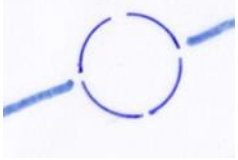
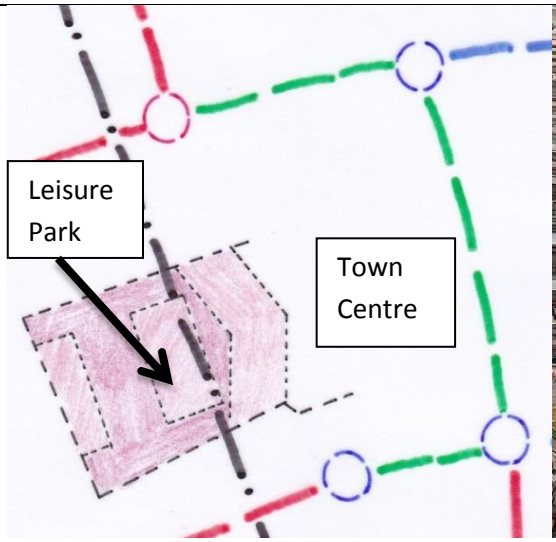
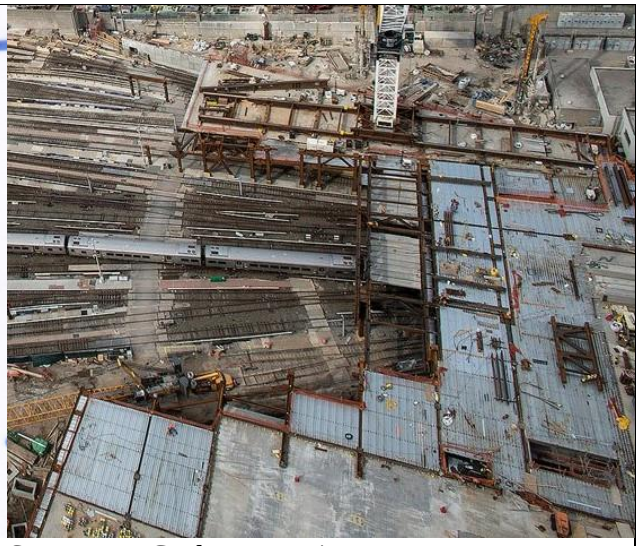
Railway & Station	Shared space & at grade crossing	Improved route & at grade crossing	Main road structure
			

Fig.7.30 Operational use of the Leisure Park should be reviewed

Hudson Yard, New York – construction platforms



Source: Author



Source: Cashin, P./Met Transportation Authority

KEY to fig.7.30

Road: A road	Road: B road	Movement priority: shared space	Rail Line	Node: vehicular priority	Node: pedestrian & cyclist priority

- *bus station*: the current bus station area operates as a bus depot; with maintenance and the laying over of busses. The plan to reclaim and improve the built environment from the bus depot is a common sense plan. However, by creating a new bus station elsewhere in the town centre appears to merely move some of the problems on, for example: (i) safety – the design means that buses would have to reverse out of the bays, this design was found to be unsafe by the HSE at the Banbury bus station and required extra safety measures and the employment of staff to supervise the buses when reversing - this has been an ongoing cost to the local authority, Cherwell District Council; (ii) integration to the rest of the town centre – would be better serviced by on street bus stops and would be a more effective land use.

A regeneration expert agreed with this recommendation, with the exception of the '*….new bus station that is modelled on the new bus station in Lincoln (plus others)*' (PJ). The

regeneration expert felt that to their '….*knowledge, all of these ideas are to a large extent being implemented in the various new schemes and projects for the town centre*….' (PJ). They expressed the view that the schemes and projects are '….*closely informed by the Central Framework document which has already stood the test of time*' (PJ). A senior planner agreed that the most of the recommendations are being implemented, with the exception of the proposed road and pedestrian network alterations which would be controversial, complex and costly (PB2). A senior councillor said that he would:

> '….*question suggestions on Lytton Way. This serves the transport hub and, whilst I agree that this area should be pedestrianised to a great extent, to provide pedestrian connectivity, we can't ignore that people will still want to drive to and park here – buses need to move as well'* (PK).

This appears to back up the officer's concern that the recommendation would be controversial, and suggests that political support for radical proposals in the built environment is difficult to secure. (This is also the researcher's experience). The senior planner also agreed that there is not a huge amount more that LA could do locally, due to budget and policy constraints, which they considered was a '….*good reflection*….' of the current position (PB2).

7.9 Conclusions

Stevenage town centre was selected as the location for the second case study (5.3.3). The ARM is designed to capture data at both the (i) micro-specific level, explored in this chapter; and, (ii) macro-generic level, explored in the following chapter (eight). The findings from the case study indicate that the town centre has few characteristics of a place that is resilient to shock and change. Following a forensic inquiry into the town centre, through the use of the Adaptive Resilience Model, a number of key findings emerged across the three themes: Place, Deliverability and Management

Place

There has been some change in the relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' in Stevenage, although observations suggest that the changed relationship has been less evident than that experienced in Loughborough (see chapter six). Stevenage town centre has never been a 'vital' place, as it is not *necessary* to visit the town centre, as there are other physical formats, including the original town centre, now known as the 'Old Town', providing all services and local amenities. Indeed, this is one of the key weaknesses in the design of the new town. The new town centre was designed and built as a modernist, freestanding place, as part of a 'zoned' masterplan. Like many of the New Towns, Stevenage town centre was designed around the perceived commercial requirement to serve the new town population, and the hinterland, to be managed as a single asset by the Development Corporation, until 1980. The focus of the town centre was already on commercial 'viability', with few examples of socially 'vital', mixed-use. The case study revealed similarities between Loughborough and Stevenage, in the type of built form introduced to the town centre post 1980, with the introduction of big box mono-use built form. This emulates the privately managed built form of the malls, and the out-of-town destinations.

Deliverability

Stevenage town centre operates in a very different market to the one in which it was designed for, and operated in P1 (1945-1979) and P2 (1979-2007). The national planning framework (2019) has not responded to the changed market environment, and approaches the crisis facing town centres in isolation, to other formats. Without an understanding of the changed market and environment in which town centres exists, the relevance and value of all town centres as a social and commercial hub is at risk of further decline. The additional 'value' of Stevenage town centre comes from its 'complex social' and 'commercial ecosystem'. The opportunities for town centre to generate 'value' as a 'complex social' and 'commercial ecosystem' is recognised in the adopted regeneration framework. This case study suggests an opportunity to secure the *relevance* of the town centre, by improving the quality of design, diversity through mixed uses, including homes, and, therefore, build on the identity of place (Butina Watson and Bentley, 2007).

Management

To refer to Stevenage town centre as a cohesive managed space is problematic and, the evidence indicates, erroneous. However, in contrast to the findings from Loughborough, the research uncovered a more proactive response to regeneration in Stevenage, which includes a more structured partnership framework. Although there is an adopted regeneration framework for the town centre, this has little weight in planning terms, and progress to deliver regeneration and adapt to changing circumstances, has been slow. Moreover, the research shows that regeneration initiatives have been proposed for the town centre over a longer period, c. 15-20 years, but without successful implementation. This indicates the challenge of delivering regeneration within the town centre. The timeframe suggests actions available to the Stevenage Development Board are limited locally, due to budget, policy constraints, and capacity to deliver.

Using a ‘building block’ approach, a number of recommendations were put to four local experts, that the local community and stakeholders could use to improve the adaptive resilience of the town centre. Although a number of actions have been highlighted that can be implemented at a local level, the research suggests that the crisis facing town centres is a structural one. The commercial market in which the town centre operates has fundamentally changed, and requires action at the national level to ensure that the town centre remains relevant as a commercial and, an increasingly, social hub into the future.

With the government focus on the housing crisis, and the challenges facing town centres, the logic of permitting and maintaining zoned areas for retail and commercial leisure is flawed. The government should look to town centres as a solution to the housing crisis, making financial and political investment available for places like Stevenage with good communication links. There is an opportunity to increase the numbers of people living in town through the delivery of good quality residential-led mixed-use development – rebalancing social ‘vitality’, and commercial ‘viability’ locally. Stevenage town centre, in line with its ‘*pioneering*’ history as the first new town, could be used as a test-bed and develop a blue-print for an innovative response to the renaissance of town centres.

Table 7.2: Key Finding, Evidence and Recommendation

KEY MICRO-SPECIFIC FINDING	EVIDENCE	RECOMMENDATION	UID	Research Question
Key Finding SP1 - the masterplanning of Stevenage as a New Town was flawed.	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis; Document Review	*1. Stevenage town centre future task force* *2. Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Stevenage town centre strategic asset management framework* *4. All business is local – support local business* *5. Experience and time of activity* *6. Improve the quality of the built environment*	SP001:(i)	1 2 3
Key Finding SP2 – built form reflects the modernist architectural style of the time.	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis	*1. Stevenage town centre future task force* *2. Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Stevenage town centre strategic asset management framework* *4. All business is local – support local business* *5. Experience and time of activity*	SP001:(ii)	2 3

		6. Improve the quality of the built environment		
Key Finding SP3 – the town centre was designed as a commercial hub for the post war market	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis	*1. Stevenage town centre future task force* *2. Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Stevenage town centre strategic asset management framework* *5. Experience and time of activity* *6. Improve the quality of the built environment*	SP001:(iii)	1 2 3
Key Finding SD1 – planning system does not reflect the challenge of new formats and market	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis; Document Review	*1. Stevenage town centre future task force* *2. Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework*	SD001:(i)	1 2 3
Key Finding SD2 – town centre cannot compete due to disaggregation and simplification of formats	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); historical analysis; Document Review	*1. Stevenage town centre future task force* *2. Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Stevenage town centre strategic asset management framework* *5. Experience and time of activity* *6. Improve the quality of the built environment*	SD001:(ii)	1 2 3

Key Finding SM1 - a proactive approach towards the regeneration of the town centre	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); Document Review	*1. Stevenage town centre future task force* *2. Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework* *3. Stevenage town centre strategic asset management framework*	M001:(i)	1 3
Key Finding SM2 - secure government funding and private sector investment.	Interviews; Observation (fieldwork); Document Review	*1. Stevenage town centre future task force* *2. Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework*	M001:(ii)	1 2 3

Chapter Eight: The Contemporary Town Centre, Macro-Generic Findings

8.1 Introduction

This chapter partially addresses research objective four, which is completed in chapter nine:

Apply, test and develop a conceptual analytical framework through a pilot case study to

(i) forensically investigate and assess the impact of the crisis on a town centre (Table 1.3).

Chapter Six and Chapter Seven examined the research findings from the micro-specific perspective; this chapter discusses the findings from the case studies, combined with the practice and research experience of the researcher, through the macro-generic lens (Table 4.6).

The structure of the chapter follows the diagnostic stage of the research framework (ARM), setting out the key findings and findings through the three themes – Place, Deliverability and Management. The macro-generic findings are used to develop a set of recommendations, which are presented in Chapter Nine, which addresses the final steps of research objective four:

(ii) propose recommendations for the development of a strategic response to promote the relevance of town centres; and,

(iii) test the recommendations and potential effectiveness if the proposed recommendations.

8.2 Macro-Generic Findings

The primary case study research indicates that the crisis facing town centres cannot be resolved at a local micro-specific scale. Indeed, to seek to consider the crisis in isolation, as one relating to a geographic entity identified as the English town centre, is to misunderstand the research problem (1.2). The town centre is part of a broader system of commercially 'viable', physical and virtual, formats (see Table 1.1), capable of delivering town centre uses, and constitute complex and dynamic threats which have developed over decades at a generic national scale. The following section discusses the evidence from the primary research, and the experience of the researcher, relating to the problems that are identified as being common across English town centres.

As we have seen, the town centre is now just one format that is commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses. There are a number of formats that are commercially 'viable', physical and virtual which includes (Table 1.1). A planner interviewed stated that the *'....government [have been] willing to support retail growth in such centres'* (i.e. formats at the edge of town centres and in out-of-town locations), creating commercially 'viable' space without the requirement or need for civic or socially 'vital' town centre uses (PC1)(2.6.2). The next section of this chapter sets out the macro generic findings by ARM theme.

8.3 Place

8.3.1 Form and Function.

Key Finding - Place(i): the town centre is an authentic and complex social, civic and commercial ecosystem

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The town centre is the traditional hub of the community, which was recognised by the participants in this research, and by the government through planning policy (NPPF 2019). It is in the complexity of the place that the '*value*' of the town centre is to be found. The

town centre should not seek to emulate the mundane character of a shopping mall or retail park, but celebrate the authentic and unique qualities. However, it is this complexity that means that the town centre is the most challenging format for the delivery of commercial town centre uses, meaning that this should be recognised and supported through national and local planning policy and strategies.

Findings

The role of the town centre has changed and evolved over the historic span covered by this research (1945-c.2020).The function of the town centre shifted from being a place where people lived and worked, having access to essential goods and services to one which is no longer 'vital' for necessary activities, such as administrative tasks and chores (Fig.8.11 and Fig.8.12) (3.2.1). The decline of some town centres as a 'vital' place accelerated in P3 (2007-present) with the rapid expansion of the virtual format for retail and necessary activities – meaning that some town centre are at risk of losing, physical and psychological, *relevance* or having a meaningful role in the community (2.7&3.2).

Big Box, Mono-Use

There are examples across town centres in the UK, where the requirement for commercial 'viability', in particular mono-use and big box built form, has been the priority. As one interviewee reflected, there was a concern that multiple retailers (the '*chains'*) would not invest in the town centre due to the '*size and space*' of available units, and that the retailers would then locate to the edge or out-of-town locations (PD1)(Fig .8.1 and Fig.8.2).

It is not only the aesthetic quality of the built form which mimics out-of-town sheds, but how it is integrated into the town centre. This can be seen from the examples in Fig.8.3 & Fig.8.1, and in broader development in the built environment to deliver the best financial return to investors. The built form of the big-box is homogenised, simplified and replicated. However, as documented in the case studies, mono-use and big box

development can have a negative impact on the quality of the environment, the image and social 'vitality' of place (Table 8.2).

The big box type of development in the town centre is less resilient and adaptive to changes in the economic environment. This is evident in the impact of restructuring in the market, which has seen the demand for 'bricks and mortar' space decline, and the big space retailers fail or restructure their operations, such failures include: BHS, Woolworths, Mothercare; and, operational restructuring including Marks and Spencer, House of Fraser (Fig.8.2)(2.6.3).

In the practice experience of the researcher developers, and end users frequently argue that mixed-use development is not compatible with their business and operating models, which call for a single use and often access to parking, including free to use surface car parking. There is therefore a challenge to identify the 'value' of mixed-use form, with active frontages, and to find a balance with the need to deliver economic growth, and attract inward investment in the town centre. A senior elected member felt that the 'operators' need to change and adapt, but considered that some retailers are the '….*slowest to adjust*….' (PA).

Findings

Quality of the Public Realm

The ability of local authorities to manage and maintain the public realm was inhibited by the austerity measures introduced by the Conservative led coalition government (2.6.1)(May et al. 2020, p.210). What affects the austerity measures had on the quality of the built environment is difficult to gauge or to generalise. However, interviewees pointed to the need for the public sector to prioritise spending due to 'new' austerity measures that had a negative impact on the ability to create and maintain a high quality environment in the public realm (Fig.8.8 & Fig.8.9)(PB1, PE1).

Maintaining quality in the Built Environment

The variety and number of actors that either have a responsibility to maintain the public realm, or have statutory powers to carry out works in the town centre has created additional complexity and uncertainty (Fig.8.3). Although, there are criteria in place for the quality of utility works in the public realm there is not always an overview, or the capacity to ensure, that the works are completed to the required standard, or with the correct materials (Fig.8.4).

This research did not set out to review the availability and appropriate skill set of the workforce; however, a number of interviewees pointed to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining people with the skills and experience to manage the built environment effectively (PB1, PC1 and PE1).

Connectivity and Movement - Vehicular and Pedestrian Conflict

The research findings highlight the continued dominance and priority given to the private car in the town centre. Outside the pedestrianised streets it was observed that the pedestrian is subservient, and it is evident that the built environment is designed to allow vehicular traffic to pass through and around town centres unimpeded and swiftly (Fig.8.5). The principle of a hierarchy of movement is not new, but there is evidence that it has been inverted in many locations - the movement hierarchy should be reviewed and reprioritised in the town centre to give the pedestrian priority (see Manual for Streets, 2007).

The road network often creates barriers, and hard edges to a town centre. In some cases such as Loughborough, this has the effect of discouraging walking to areas of interest, such as public transport hubs, or parks and historic spaces. Not all of the roads that run through town centres are necessary. Traffic that is transiting through the town centre to reach another destination should be removed or redirected. The findings from the research suggest that this will not only reconnect the town centre and other areas for pedestrians, but

also improve the environment by removing superfluous street clutter, infrastructure and pollution - creating opportunities for linear or pocket parks.

8.3.2 Time and Type of Activity

Key Finding

KFP(iii): town centres should be active places throughout the day, evening and night-time

Jane Jacobs writing in the 1960s, identified the fundamental danger of creating places that are focussed on commercial 'viability', and that have little or no relationship to social 'vitality'. This research finds that this remains true today (Jacobs 1961). The adaptive resilience of the town centre will be improved through a more balanced economy, and mixed-use development, including the provision of good quality new homes (the 15 minute cities concept). Moreover, this will promote the recreation of communities, and improve passive surveillance, reducing reliance on invasive methods, such as CCTV (Kelling and Coles 1996).

Findings

The research has captured the experience of place through extensive fieldwork observation as a 'snap-shot' at random times from the perspective of the visitor. One observation from the case studies, is that there is often a general rhythm to the experience of the operation of the town centre during the day, the evening and the night-time (PG1). The level of activity is dependent on a number of variables, such as time of year, weather conditions, commercial and social amusements. For example, the early evening period in Loughborough is the time that young people (those old enough to be out in the town centre, but not old enough to access other places of entertainment such as pubs) congregate outside the McDonald's. In the evening and night-time it is the general characteristic of streets without residential or night-time uses to be empty, and with very little footfall – which can make them feel unwelcoming, neither being 'vital' or 'vibrant'. Residential led

mixed-use in the town centre underpins resilience through informal surveillance and can introduce a feeling of community into a town centre.

Although some commercially 'viable' space outside the town centre seeks to imitate the social role of the town centre, to increase the attractiveness of the place and extend the 'dwell' time of the customer, the motivation is commercial 'viability' as an end in itself, and can result in settings that lack the complexity of the town centre. This argument, to an extent, can be extended to the virtual spaces, in that there is a social aspect to the on-line experience (such as, Facebook, email, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.), although this tends to be further removed and separated from the commercial experience. Physical formats, other than the town centre, often intentionally create a phoniness or hyper-real element to planned social interaction, which cannot replicate the civic experience, although it offers part of the social experience, the purpose, is commercial (Zukin 1993; Rao & Dovey 2021)(Figs.8.6 & Fig.8.7). Therefore, part of the value of the town centre comes from the authenticity of the place.

The research finds that the 'potential' users and use of the town centre are broader and more complex than those in other formats (Table 1.1). To identify and categorise the 'potential' users and use of a town centre is problematic; not least due to the dynamic, unpredictable and transient nature of the town centre as a place. In theory, and as captured through the evidence and findings presented in the previous two chapters, the town centre is a place that is recognisable (6.3.3 and 7.3.3), and available to all of society to visit. However, the findings from this research highlight that there are many factors that influence the relevance and potential use of a town centre; and, that these might change or shift due to different variables – as was observed through the research fieldwork. The use or potential use of the town centre can be influenced by the atmosphere or perceived atmosphere of a place (2.6.2) by differing groups (Steadman et al. 2021). For example, the researcher noted a change in atmosphere in streets that were busy during the day and felt

safe, but were then quiet and deserted at night. The shift from feeling safe to a more uncomfortable experience was most notable where there was a lack of passive security or in confined spaces, such as underpasses (6.3.4 and 7.3.4). The experience of and perceived *relevance* of place is specific to the individual, and might be influenced by a number of variables which impact sectors of society in different ways (such as age, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic group, etc.) (Steadman et al. 2021). The requirement for town centres to be an inclusive place, for all of the community, is explored further in the development of a new theory, and theoretical concept for the town centre in the following chapter (9.2). However, this research does not set out to, and is not intended to consider whether a 'type' of user can or should be identified, and defined in relation to their potential use of the town centre. The opportunity to investigate differing groups and their potential use of town centres is recognised as being an important area for future research into the relevance, and use of town centres (10.6).

A Hub for Civic, Ceremonial, Events and Festivals

The experience of the town centre is enhanced further by civic events, such as a market, a fair and civic ceremonies, like Armistice Day. With the decline of necessary activities, some commentators have highlighted the need for town centres to be about the experiential. The use of the experiential terminology to be problematic - all places are about experience, either conscious or sub-conscious, positive or negative (2.6.2). There are examples of the town centre 'experience' being a commercially 'viable' commodity, ranging from what is called street dressing – '*off the peg*' street dressing products can be purchased to '*diversify town centr*es' and which '….*offer more than the traditional shopping experience*'; and, to specialist markets and pay to enter events and festivals (Fig.8.10).

Events should not be seen as only a commercial opportunity to raise revenue through the leasing of public space, but as a way to enhance the existing and authentic '*offer*' of the town centre (PG1). The commercialisation of public space is demonstrated, for example, in the use of Broad Street in Oxford as a venue for events such as the pay to enter 'traditional' experience of a German beer festival (August 2017), or its continental themed Christmas market (December 2019)(Fig.8.10).

Broad Street has a history in its own right, it is architecturally and aesthetically a key space in the historic context of Oxford. Pevsner (1974) describes Broad Street as a '….*street highly enjoyable for the walker in search of town-scape*' (Pevsner 1974, p.312). The point illustrated here is that, although well meaning, care needs to be taken to ensure that events do not distract from the authenticity of place.

There is a further question in relation to the experiential, which is whether it enhances the experience of a place, and is successful for that place and all stakeholders. It is questionable, for instance, if visitors to Oxford are seeking to have a 'unique' experience of a traditional German beer festival or a temporary Christmas market. Although some places, such as Oxford have a strong identity, and can accommodate events, the impact on 'resident' business is not clear. Further research is needed to test if the events have a positive outcome on revenue or enhance the sense of place. Of course, it may be that the visitor would wish to enjoy all of these components in the city.

8.4 Deliverability

8.4.1 Spatial Planning Policy

Key Finding

Key Finding - Deliverability(i): spatial planning and decision making is localised, introspective and opaque

This research finds that the crisis facing the town centre cannot be resolved at the local level, on an individual town-by-town basis, but that it requires a joined-up national approach. The decision to remove a spatial planning framework above that of the LPA has had a detrimental impact on the ability to deliver a plan-led system at the strategic level. This research points to a local focus of the planning system in England, and in particular its policies in relation to the town centre, is an impediment to a plan-led system (2.6.1). However, it is recognised that further research in this area is necessary to gather further data in order to develop a broader evidence base.

Findings

Statutory Planning Framework

This research suggests that an understanding of the de facto new, but undefined, market in which town centres operate is yet to be developed. The planning system does not offer a plan-led framework for other commercial formats to deliver town centre uses. Instead, it focuses on the town centre almost in isolation (NPPF 2019). It has been the policy of many providers to move services from physical assets such as a post office, banks or the local council, which have higher costs and overheads, to a virtual environment (Figs.8.19&8.20).

One interviewee with expertise in regeneration said that: *'..... I don't feel that the planning system has even begun to keep pace with that change'* in relation to the market and new formats (PJ). The research identifies an opportunity to 'think big' in order to capture the 'value' of the town centre.

One overarching conclusion with respect to the concept of deliverability is that some elements of primary legislation require revision and amendment, in relation to the effective planning for town centres. There are three significant areas that call for revision. These relate to:

(i) the requirement for a broader spatial planning framework;

(ii) revised primary planning legislation and national planning policy; and,

(iii) a new approach to decision making process, specifically in relation to the town centre and including all formats.

(i) Strategic Spatial Planning Framework

Spatial planning in England focusses on the arbitrary borders of the local planning authority (LPA) which, outside London, is the administrative boundary of the District or Borough Council (2.6.1). The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) introduced a 'Duty to Cooperate' to LPAs, but this does not create a framework for spatial planning in any meaningful way, and was not a *'....replacement for proper strategic planning*' and *'....cross-authority cooperation….that was previously commonplace has been lost….'* (PC1). Current spatial planning is introspective, which leads responses to the crisis being almost exclusively locally focussed. It is open to the government, as the demand for space from the retail and commercial leisure sector continues to contract, to directly manage the formats and locations where town centre uses can be permitted (KFD(ii)).

(ii) Planning Legislation and National Planning Policy

The foundation for the TCPA (1947) was laid through the principles of what the Beveridge Report (1943) referred to as a need to '….*have planning on a national scale, boldly overstepping the traditional boundaries of urban council, rural council, county council. Boldly overstepping the interests described so often as vested*….' (Kynaston 2007, 31)(2.2). This research finds evidence to suggest that there has been a conscious shift from a plan-led system, in particular beyond the LPA boundary, which accelerated in P3(2.6.1). Furthermore, the shift away from strategic spatial planning has influenced by other factors, including vested commercial interest, and a move further towards political ideology - in particular, laissez-faire neo-liberalism (Marshall 2020)(9.6.1).

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

Planning law requires that the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) NPPF must: '….*be taken into account in preparing the development plan, and is a material consideration in planning decisions.*' It can be questioned whether the basic principle of the NPPF (2019) that the '….*purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development*….' is being delivered in relation to the town centre (NPPF 2019). Town centre uses have been permitted in physical formats outside the town centre, not because these are sustainable locations, but because they provide commercially viable investment opportunities. It is argued here, that the de facto development of 'zoned' edge and out-of-town development does not comply with the spirit of the planning system, the plan-led approach, and planning policy. Moreover, it is hard to see how it complies with the key tenet, that development should be sustainable. The following discussion analyses the macro-generic impact of specific elements of national planning policy on the town centre.

Ensuring the vitality of town centres (Chapter 7 NPPF, 2019)

The policy appears to seek to secure the social 'vitality of a town centre as a priority, and suggests a weakening or removal of the link between 'vitality' and 'viability' in the town centre context. It seems that the tension between the concepts of 'vital' and 'viable' has been pre-empted through the redrafting of the NPPF (2012 and now revised in 2019), with the withdrawal of the concept of a commercially 'viable' town centre from planning policy.

The NPPF (2019), in line with previous policy documents relating to town centres, does not define what is meant by the key terms 'vitality' and 'viability'. However, amongst participants in the research, there was consensus that: (i) 'vitality' related to the social; and, (ii) 'viability' related to the commercial character of the town centre (PB1, PC1, PD1, PF1). The NPPF (2019), as set out above, is a material consideration in planning decisions. Therefore**,** in the field of planning where quasi-judicial decisions are made relating to planning applications, it can be asserted that there is a need to clearly and unambiguously define the terminology in use (2.6.2). For the purpose of this research, the concepts are defined (3.3).

These research findings raise questions about the validity of the concepts of 'vitality' and 'viability' in relation to the challenge, and in some the crisis, that the town centre faces. A senior planner felt that town centres are '*judged*' on the terms 'vitality' and 'viability', but questioned whether they should be expanded or reviewed (PE1). In interviews with a number of planners, the definition of the terms was tested further, and there was a general view that they *'….trip off the tongue….'* (PE1), without a full understanding of the meaning. One interviewee felt that:

> *I guess the reason for those two words or linking them together is that it's not enough just to be viable you know you'd hope that the two feed off each other in sense of it, probably one without the other but I think it does remind you that there's a social aspect as well….*(PD1).

A number of interviewees questioned whether the phrases really had any meaning (PC1, PD1). Moreover, one said that at times the use of commercial 'viability' in relation to the town centre is a *'....dirty word....*' (PC2). One planner felt that they had more than one experience at appeal where the planning Inspector took a very narrow interpretation of the impact that development can have on the 'vitality' and 'viability' of the town centre, and that this '*undermines*' the plan-led approach; further, that they were not confident that they had considered the letter and spirit of the policy (PC1). Indeed, the researcher has also experienced occasions where the interpretation of 'vital' and 'viable,' and the application of the sequential test, has resulted in a perverse decision at appeal.

The fact that other commercially 'viable' formats have matured and increased, without the requirement for those formats to socially 'vital', puts the town centre at a disadvantage in a new market setting which is focussed on returning commercial 'viability'.

Network and Hierarchy of Town Centres

The NPPF (2019) states that: '….*planning policies should: define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability*….' (2.6.2). The case studies demonstrate that the strategic position of the town centre is often viewed within an artificially confined area, generally not related to other town centres or with other formats. In the current planning system the aspiration to develop a network and hierarchy of town centres is not practical, or effective, as there is no spatial planning policy beyond that of the arbitrary boundary of the LPA (NPPF 2019, p.26 para 85(a)). This potentially limits the effectiveness of future spatial planning, and broader 'management' of the town centre. Networks and hierarchies could be developed through non-statutory agreements, or the 'duty to cooperate' (NPPF 2019 p.10 para24). However, in practice this would be cumbersome and have little weight in terms of planning law.

Turning to the findings from the case studies as an example:

(i) Charnwood Borough Council has two places which are identified in planning policy as town centres – Loughborough and Shepshed; and,

(ii) Stevenage has one place, which is identified in planning policy as a town centre – and that is *the* town centre

Identifying a hierarchy of centres within the LPA area is an academic process. This policy is of very little practical use if confined to the town centre format, since they are too localised and constrained.

The Sequential Approach

Planning policy has been consistent over the last thirty or so years, following what was called the 'town centre first' approach through the 'sequential test' introduced in the late 1990s (Planning Policy Guidance 6: Town Centres and Retail Development. June, 1996) (Table 2.3).

There has been reluctance from successive governments (P2&P3) to create a policy environment whereby town centre uses are to be delivered only in town centres. Edge and out-of-town development has been regarded in practice as a valid format, necessary for large retailers, in particular, to deliver their business models, and as a way to deliver regeneration (2.4).

The acceptance of large scale shopping centres on the edge or out-of-town has practically been adopted through the town centre policies, in that where a large retail or shopping centre cannot be developed in a town centre, or within a reasonable period of time, having followed the 'sequential test' the LPA will then have to permit the development outside the town centre (NPPF 2019, p.25 para 86). The 'sequential test', in practice, became irrelevant with the requirement for larger footprint development, the big box and out-of-town retail park formats (2.6.2).

Table 8.1: characteristics of locations outside the town centre compared to the town centre

Characteristics of Locations outside the town centre	Characteristics of a town centre
▪ Commercially focussed ▪ Mono use, retail and commercial leisure use dominates ▪ Managed asset ▪ Only visit to consume, purchase or showroom ▪ Free surface car parking, limited by time and use restrictions ▪ Self contained – space is inward looking to retain customers and visitors ▪ Private property – people can be excluded and activities restricted ▪ Service charge payed by the operators ▪ Area is proactively managed – CCTV, security, lettings, dedicated site management, cleansing, marketing, etc. ▪ Public areas are private realm ▪ Managed opening hours – it can be closed	▪ Public spaces are always open and normally always accessible (unless there is a legal restriction on a individuals movements) ▪ Large variety of stakeholders, including a number of asset owners ▪ Car parking charged and restricted ▪ People visit the area for a variety of reasons – including civic purposes ▪ Area is not managed as a single entity or asset – different agencies will have responsibility for security, maintenance, cleansing, marketing, etc. ▪ No proactive management or control over leases or the types of business that can operate out of the centre. ▪ May be evidence of antisocial behaviour and societal issues.

Achieving well-designed places

Chapter twelve of the NPPF (2019) sets out the national policy approach to well-designed places. The design policy in the NPPF (2019) is always going to be very limited in its reach, and in influencing the quality of the urban environment, as it is only relevant in situations where a planning permission or a planning intervention is required.

Although the NPPF (2019) touches on some urban design principles, it is more geared towards the aesthetics of the building and commercial needs of the operator, which is evident here: '….*reconciling local and commercial interests*….' (NPPF 2019, para 128). Good design is not limited to the aesthetic of a building, but is also essential in the form and function of the built environment, which includes the use of the buildings (Fig.8.1 & Fig.8.2). The research findings highlight the reality that the design and use of the built environment has been dictated by the commercial needs of users (8.3.1). The opportunity

open to the LPA to influence the design or use, including a mix of uses (Table 8.2), is limited as demonstrated here: '….*design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development*…' (NPPF 2019, para 130).

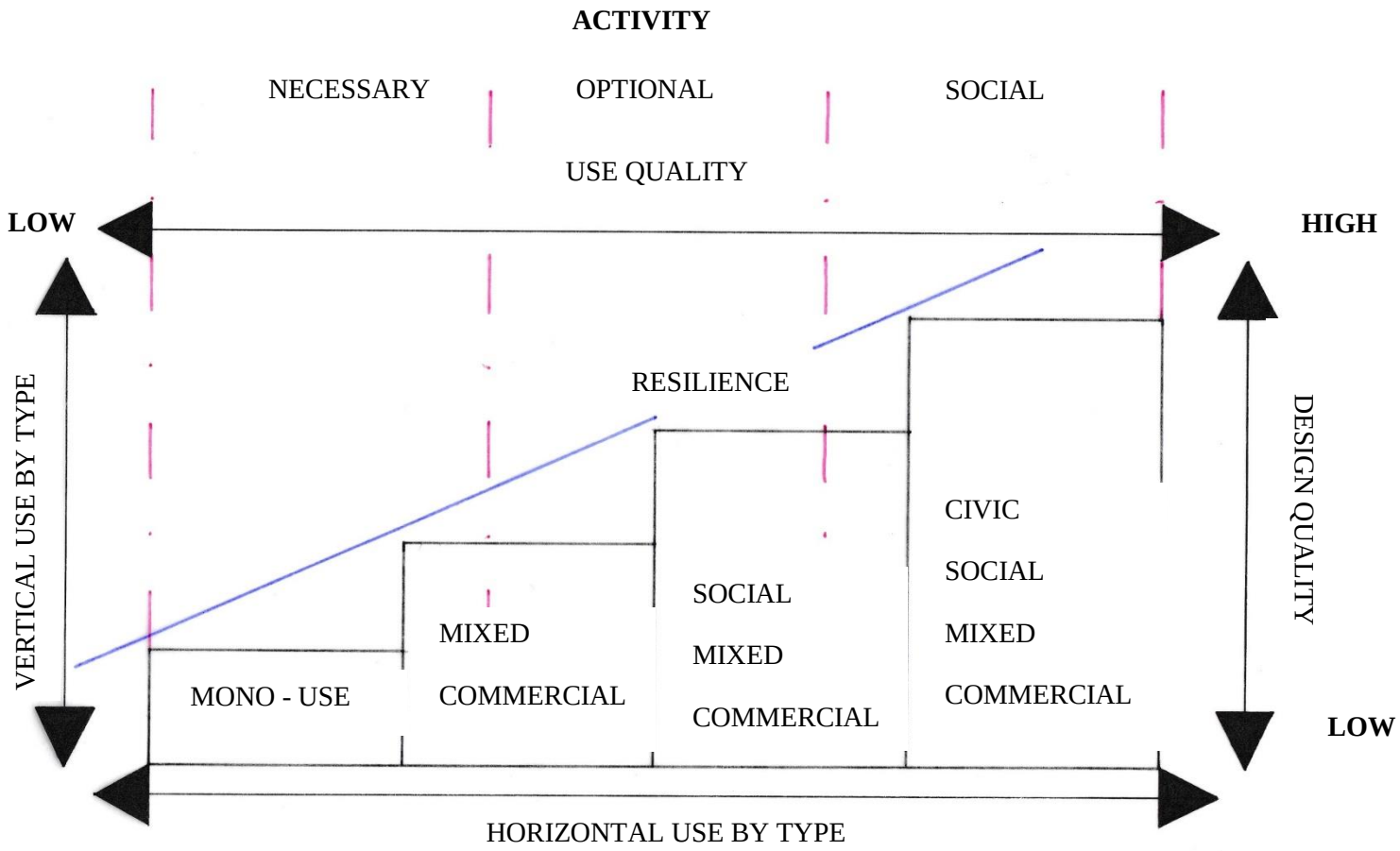
The provision and integration of new homes, into places that deliver town centre uses, is particularly important at this time of crises relating to the environment and delivery of sufficient numbers of residential units. To ensure that there is sustainability, the form and function of all places that have a town centre use should be genuinely residential-led mixed-use – both vertically and horizontally (Table 8.2).

The Vertical and Horizontal mixed-use model (Table 8.2)

The Vertical and Horizontal mixed-use model conceptualises the positive impact of vertical and horizontal mixed-use, commercial, social and civic, on the relative resilience of place, with reference to the concept of design quality and use quality (Table 8.2). The model adapts and further develops Gehl's theory that as places cease being 'vital', the quality of the built environment to attract people to visit and dwell becomes more important (Gehl 2011, p.11-13)(Table 4.5).

The promotion and delivery of good quality homes back into the town centre offers benefits that are both socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable'. As part of a mixed-use solution they also offer adaptive resilience. However, there should be caution that the 'uses' in the town centre do not, particularly on the ground floor, lurch from over reliance on one sector of the economy to another - residential.

Table 8.2:*Vertical and Horizontal mixed-use model*: theoretical model demonstrating the positive impact of vertical and horizontal mixed-use, commercial, social and civic, on the relative resilience of place, with reference to the concept of design quality and use quality (adapted from Gehl 2011).



(iii) Decision Taking

Whilst the primary focus of this research does not set out critically to evaluate the decision taking process, or the role of the decision maker, it is appropriate to briefly reflect on the way in which decisions are taken, and the impact that this has on the town centre.

In general terms, the decision takers in the current system, both in strategic matters and in determining planning applications, are the elected members of the local authority, for strategic matters, and members of the planning committee, for the determination of planning applications (see Local Government Act 1972). The Planning Committee is made up of elected members who are often lay people. They are selected from across the Council, and the Committee is expected, therefore, to be non-partisan and impartial. Their role is to represent the opinions of the local community. A Member of the Planning Committee may have an opinion on a planning matter, but they are obliged to take into account all of the relevant factors, and respond to an application for planning permission with an 'open mind', until they vote (see Localism Act 2011, s.25). The Committee is advised by a planning officer[s], and there will be a recommendation advising the Committee. The committee is free to either agree or disagree with the planning officer's advice. If planning permission is refused, planning law requires that this must be for material planning reasons.

The applicant has the right to appeal to the Secretary of State if permission is refused, and they are dissatisfied with that decision. However, there is no third party right of appeal. This means that if a member of the public or interest group, for instance, is dissatisfied that the application was permitted, there is no recourse. Although an application can be made to the High Court for Judicial Review, which is available in certain specific circumstances, which include a challenge to the lawfulness of a decision by a public authority.

The case studies suggest that development proposals relating to town centres and town centre uses are often considered in isolation, and on local matters. The absence of a spatial plan above that of the statutory Local Plan, covering the arbitrary geographic entity of the council, is an impediment to decision taking. This means that decisions are generally taken on local issues. At the time of local Government Act 1972, a local response to the town centre was appropriate (2.2). However, the situation relating to the town centre and town centre uses has become increasingly complex and nuanced. Moreover, Ravenscroft et al (2000) identified a '*serious spatial dilemma'* for local decision takers - face losing out on key inward investment generated by retailers and leisure operators, or endorse out-of-town development (Ravenscroft et al. 2000, p.1362)(2.4.5).

The temptation to permit any development that delivers inward investment and local jobs is increased further by lobbying, and by the relative short-term political cycle of local elections. That is not to suggest that the planning committee system is in any way systemically or in itself corrupt, but that members have a number of concerns, and a particular relationship with the local area and the electorate. The influence of the private sector and of commercial interests has sought to react to the impact of the austerity measures on LPAs. This is seen, for example, in the reliance of LPAs on private sector consultancy support and the 'privatisation' of the design panel. It is now the norm for the applicant, rather than the LPA, to pay for and arrange the 'independent' design panel. The findings of the 'design panel' are taken into account and influence the recommendations on the planning application. It would seem appropriate, therefore, to review the decision making process, at least in relation to the town centre use formats, so that decisions are objectively based with a strategic overview of the impact that they are likely to have socially and commercially, that go beyond the LPA boundary.

Town Centre Uses

A consequence of the asset managed edge and out-of-town format has been the creation of a cartel-like business model. The asset managers seek to secure established multiple businesses, that are 'high street' names, knowing that well-known brands will generate consumer interest and footfall, whilst also being a secure tenant.

Access to these formats to independent business or start-up enterprise is generally not possible, thereby limiting innovation and new business growth. In contrast, the town centre is a location in which start-up businesses can find space (Fig.8.14).

Competition

Key Finding

KFD(ii): the town centre is one format which is commercially 'viable' for town centre uses

The findings call into question the relevance of the concepts of social 'vitality', and commercial 'viability', as the town centre is the only format in which the concepts remain, or were ever, pertinent. New physical formats have been permitted, intended to deliver traditional town centre commercial uses, but they have not been captured within the planning system (8.3.1). The absence of effective regulation that has delivered space outside the town centre for town centre uses has created banal commercial space (Reeve 1996). In contrast, this research shows that it is the town centre that offers an authentic, complex social, and commercial ecosystem. To maintain the town centre for all parts of society requires improved planning and an explicit approach to adaptive resilience.

The requirement demand for commercial bricks and mortar fell in P3 and that trend continues (Table 2.6) and thus attracting new operators or repurposing big box units is likely to be more challenging across all existing physical formats. The decline in the demand for retail space should be managed across the physical formats. The NPPF (2019)

states that Local Planning Authorities should promote the long-term 'vitality' and 'viability' of town centres, and allow a mix of uses. The NPPF (2019) instructs LPAs to define networks and hierarchies of town centres. However, this is likely to be impractical, and will have no effect as it is in isolation to a new and quickly adapting and as yet to be defined market (2.6.2) (NPPF 2019, para 85(a) p.25). Therefore, the network and hierarchy of space should respond to places, which operate and deliver town centre uses, rather than focus on the town centre. Failure to do this will lead investment to other less complex, and more cost-effective space than a more challenging town centre environment, which perpetuates a cycle of decline.

Findings

The NPPF (2019) states that: '*Main town centre uses should be located in town centres*….'. The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) stipulates that a wide range of complimentary uses can support the vitality of town centres. These include 'residential, employment, office, commercial, leisure/entertainment, healthcare and educational development' (NPPG). It may be that this is not an exhaustive list, but it seems odd that 'shops', or more generally retailing, is not mentioned in the list, or the 'Planning for town centre vitality and viability' section. Nor do the uses correspond to the Use Class Order definitions (TCPA (Use Class) Order 1987, as amended). What is clear is that what regarded to be 'town centre uses' is now more complex and nuanced.

Successive governments have sought to indicate their support for the town centre, whilst at the same time permitting other formats, including the release of new land for edge and out-of-town for investment and development. Ironically, the threat to the town centre was not considered an economic one, that there is a finite number of customers to share around the formats and, therefore, a limit to the commercial 'viability' of places. (2.6.3).

The development of other physical formats, in edge and out-of-town locations, can be characterised as being big-block, retail and commercial leisure with access to free and often surface car parking. The edge and out-of-town format of development is less complex than development in town centres, and is more straight forward to operate and manage as a single commercial asset, without the requirement for socially 'vital' uses (Table 8.1).

Ownership

KFD(iii): A challenge to the effective stewardship, regeneration and development of the town centre comes from the myriad of asset owners in the town centre.

The nature of ownership is the key difference between the town centre and other physical formats which are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses, and characterised by an asset strategy with a commercial business plan governing leases and tenant mix. Some commentators have proposed solutions to this, which have included a 'commons conservator' approach, to manage assets on behalf of the public and private sector at a local level (Dobson 2015, 255-259). It seems highly unlikely, however, that asset owners would agree to delegate the management of their assets to local groups in this way.

Compulsory Purchase Powers (CPO)

The research and experience of the researcher highlights the reality that there is a reluctance to use Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) in town centres due to political sensitivity, as well as the cost and complexity of the process. One proposal from the HCLG select committee inquiry was that compulsory purchase powers be reviewed, so that land assembly and property acquisition by the local authority is streamlined (HCLG 2019). A regeneration expert agreed with this approach, and that CPO should be part of proactive strategies (PD1). In the current system, where formats outside the town centre can continue

to operate or be granted permission to deliver town centre uses, this would have a limited impact.

If other formats remain available, it can be expected that there will be limited or no commercial end users for the space due to the decline in the demand for bricks and mortar (2.6.3). It makes no difference if the property is in the ownership of the local authority, or if it is privately owned, if there is no end user. In fact, the property would be a financial burden to the local authority and not resolve the issue if there is no opportunity of finding a ground floor tenant.

8.5 Management

Local Strategies and Plans

Key Finding

Key Finding - Management(i): the crisis facing the town centre cannot be resolved through place management alone

As we have seen, the crisis facing town centres changed and intensified in P3, but the approach to the crisis has been remarkably consistent to P2 (2.6.2). Interventions and strategies to maintain the 'competitiveness' of the town centre have been to emulate the approach to privately managed assets – the malls and the out-of-town destinations – to simplify management, design and form. Space is developed to deliver a commercial operation, and to 'privatise' and sanitise the management of the public realm. This research has found little evidence to support the suitability of the management concept and intervention, on its own, to resolve the underlying cause of the crisis facing town centres.

Findings

The current approach to the town centre does not acknowledge the fundamental threat to the *relevance* of the town centre as a socially 'vital' as well as a commercially 'viable'

place, at the heart of the community (2.6.3). Town centres are too complex and disparate a space, with many stakeholders, and disparate agendas, for them to be considered to be managed in any conventional sense. The findings indicate that to consider that the town centre is or can be 'managed' is a misnomer in the current governance environment (Fig.8.13).

8.5.1 Partnerships and Stakeholders

Key Finding

KFM(ii): governance and accountability for the town centre is opaque

There are a myriad of organisations and individuals, both within the public and private sector, who have an interest in the town centre. However, the governance structure is unclear, poorly defined, and no single organisation has responsibility for the 'management' of the town centre. It follows that no single organisation has accountability. What is meant by the term 'management' in the context of the town centre is ambiguous, and a paradox.

Findings

The 'management' of the town centre is not a statutory function, and there is no formal requirement for local strategies. Identifying macro-generic findings through the research has been difficult, beyond noting that there is a wide variance between local approaches – including an absence of uniformity, agreed approach or methodology. This inhibits the potential to develop a strategic or practical approach to the adaptive resilience of place.

8.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented a set of macro-generic findings, captured through the implementation of the ARM. The findings follow the three themes of the ARM.

Perhaps, the main finding of this research is that the crisis facing town centres cannot be resolved at the local level, on an individual town by town basis (Key Finding (KFD(i)). The challenge facing the town centre is a shifting one, and part of a wider economic readjustment of the retail and commercial sectors. The economic and societal change call for a re-imagining of the role of the town centre within a new market structure (KFD(ii)) (Fig.8.15 & Fig.8.16).

Theme One – Place

The town centre is an authentic, *complex social and commercial ecosystem*: this is the value of the town centre - as a commercially 'viable' but also socially 'vital' and civic place which cannot be reproduced by other formats (KFP(i)). There is a human connection to the town centre as the civic hub of a network of centres. The findings support the theory that, as our exposure to both globalisation and the virtual world expands, the importance of a connection to a local place will become more relevant and apposite (KFP(iii)). The analysis presented in this chapter, demonstrates that the relationship between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' has changed, and this is apparent in the time of activity, and in the urban form in town centres. There is an overreliance on the retail and commercial leisure sectors of the economy, with many operating out of mono-use units (KFP(ii) and KFP(iii)).

Theme Two – Deliverability

The local focus of the planning system in England and, in particular the government's agenda in relation to the town centre, is an impediment to a plan-led approach. The planning system, policy framework, and decision-taking processes, are not effective in

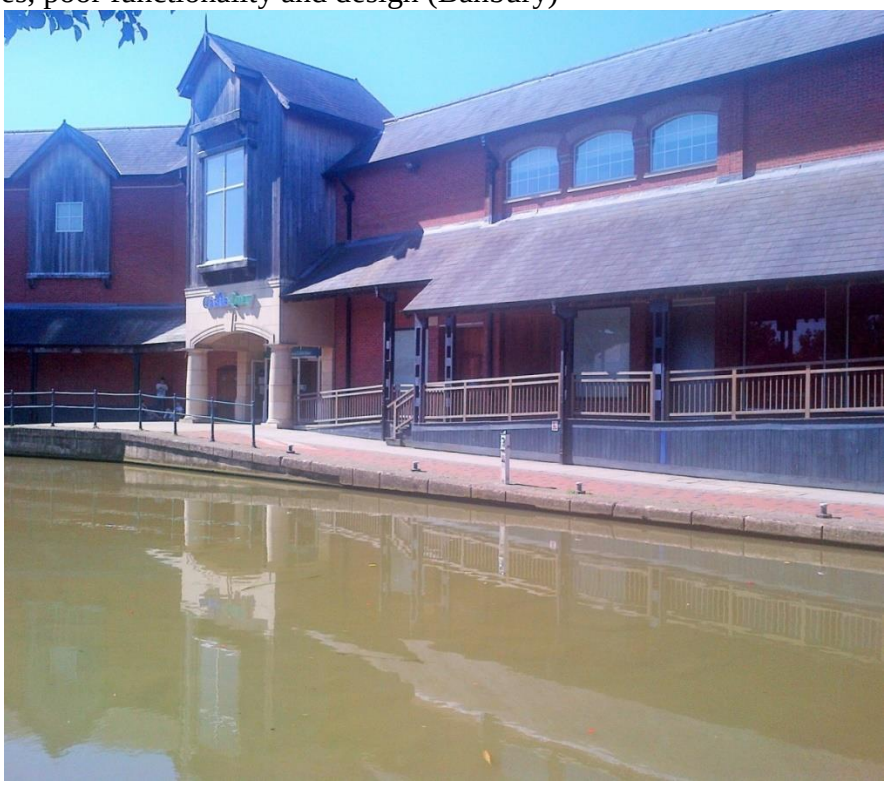
relation to the future role of the town centre – it is localised and introspective, whereas the challenges are of national (if not global) significance (KFD(i)). As the need for traditional bricks and mortar space contracts, the benefit of a mixed-use and diverse economy takes on greater importance in the town centre. However, the town centre is just one format that is commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses (KFD(iii)). If the contraction of retail space is not pro-actively managed, there is a risk that the de-facto zoning of essential uses in the asset managed edge and out-of-town formats will reduce town centre sustainability, and increase social inequality, for example through food deserts(2.6.1)(KFD(ii))

Theme Three – Management

Although the crisis facing town centres has changed and intensified over the last few decades, the approach to it has been broadly and remarkably consistent. Interventions and strategies to maintain the relevance of the town centre to date have been to emulate the approach taken to privately managed assets – the malls and the out-of-town destinations. In essence this has involved simplifying management, design and form. Spaces have been developed to deliver a commercial operation, and to 'privatise' and sanitise the management of the public realm. It is clear through an analysis of the town centre through P2 an P3 that place management cannot effectively address the challenge and now crisis faced by the town centre (Chapter Two)(KFM(i)). The findings point to the need for town centres to move beyond janitorial and marketing solutions, although both those areas have a place in the overall approach (KFP(ii)), to a more strategic and defined partnership approach that can enable adaptive resilience (KFM(ii)).

The next chapter sets-out a series of recommendations that could be implemented in practice. A new theory for the town centre is proposed, and the theoretical concepts of the *INTRICATE* town centre are introduced. This builds on the key findings of the research to offer a theoretical approach to the crisis facing the town centre.

Fig.8.1: commercial requirement for big box and mono-use form leading to missed opportunities, poor functionality and design (Banbury)



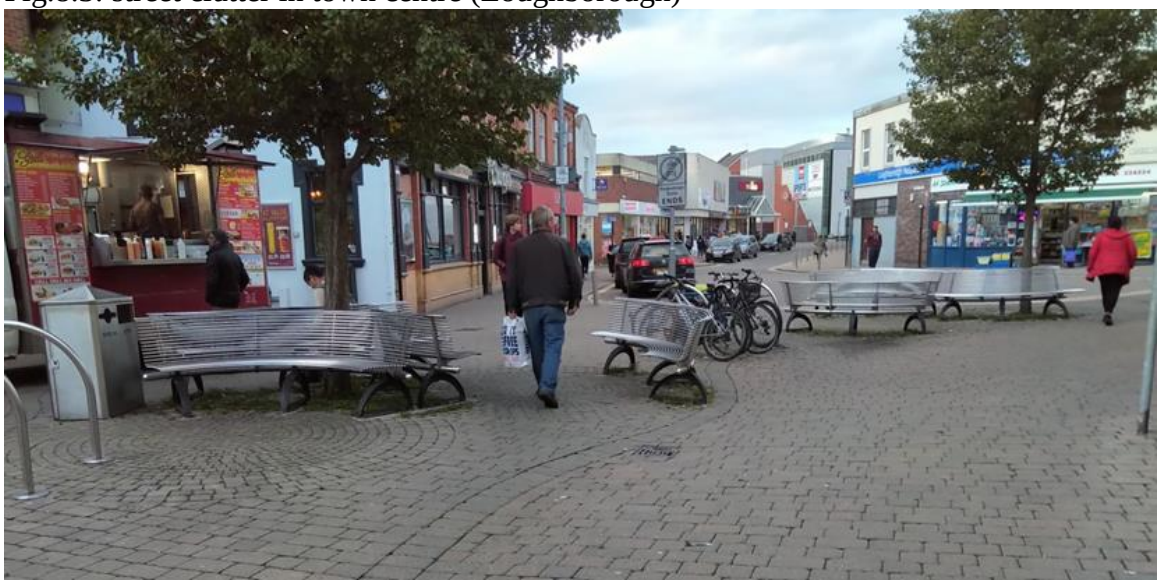
Source: author, 19/07/2016

Fig,8.2: example of big box, mono-use commercial development designed to the requirements of specific retailers – both have now ceased trading (Banbury)



Source: author, 19/11/2007

Fig.8.3: street clutter in town centre (Loughborough)



Source: author, 05/11/2019

Fig.8.4: poor operational management of the public realm, detracts from the experience of a place (Oxford)



Source: author, 05/08/2007

Fig.8.5: Kettleing the pedestrian, (Banbury)



Source: author, 28/11/2007

Fig.8.6: ‘street trading’, in privately managed retail and commercial centre - Bicester Village (Bicester)



Source: author, 18/12/2013

Fig.8.7: Seattle café culture, mimicking café culture in a privately managed retail park - Gateway (Banbury)



Source: author, 15/05/2019

Fig.8.8: Landmark at end of street, (Durham)



Source: author, August 2016

Fig.8.9: Street Dressing obscuring landmark (Durham)



Source: author, August 2018

Fig.8.10: German Beer Festival, Broad Street (Oxford)



Source: 17/08/2017

Fig.8.11: Closed bank branch, administrative tasks and chores move on-line, removing necessary activities (Oxford).



Source: author, 2016

Fig.8.12: Decommissioned ATMs: closure of free to use (ATMs) in urban centres. (Oxford)



Source: author, 2016

Fig.8.13: Managed commercial space – Gateway. (Banbury)



Source: author, 01/02/2020

Fig.8.14: Town centres offer a location for start-up and independent businesses. (Banbury)



Source: author, 19/07/2016

Fig.8.15: Identifying the ‘value’ in town centres?



Source: https://brandhub.ft.hub

Fig.8.16: Wider and urgent social challenges. Loughborough



Source: author, 27/08/2019

Chapter Nine: Macro-Generic Recommendations, new theory, and theoretical concept

9.1 Introduction

Chapter Nine addresses and completes research objective 5: *to make theoretical and practice oriented recommendations for potential further steps to build on the findings of the research programme.*

The chapter is organised into two parts:

Part One - sets out a number of theoretical recommendations developed following the Diagnostic (Place Analysis) stage of the ARM, which relate to most town centres. The theoretical recommendations were presented to ten experts in the relevant field of planning and urban design, and included elected members of local authorities. Their opinions on the validity of the recommendations were sought and tested to see whether they were generally supported (Table 5.10). Finally, the new theory – the Complexity of Urban Ecology, and the theoretical concept of the intricate town centre are presented.

Part Two - discusses the potential impact that the C-19 crisis could have on the recommendations proposed here, and on the ability for town centres to remain relevant as social and commercial hubs. The C-19 crisis unfolded soon after completion of the primary research stage, however the thesis would be incomplete if it was silent on the implications of this crisis. The longer term impact that the pandemic has had on the way in which we use places, and spaces is not clear. Furthermore, it would be a missed opportunity not to learn from the experience. In many respects, the crisis has further highlighted the reason

why this research area is of importance, as it relates to a real-life problem in relation to the balance between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' in general, and with regard to the town centre specifically. The potential to convert the ARM as a research framework to an analytical tool that can be used in practice, the Practice ARM or PARM, is analysed in Appendix VI.

Part One – *Presenting the theoretical recommendations*

9.2 Testing the Macro Generic Recommendations

This section sets out the macro-generic (MG) recommendations which are relevant to most town centres in England (Table 4.6). The recommendations follow the findings from the Adaptive Resilience Model (ARM). They are organised around two themes, which are:

Theme One – market, policy and governance; and,

Theme Two – funding, investment and management.

The recommendations relate to the three test areas of the ARM: Place (P); Deliverability (D); and, Management (M) (Fig.4.23)

The use of interviews as a method for testing the recommendations was adapted due to the impact of C-19, and the restrictions to face-to-face meetings. The recommendations were presented to a cross-section of experts through semi-structured virtual meetings (Table 5.10).

9.2.1 Theme One – market, policy and governance

Market: Recommendation One

Review and re-imagine the market in which the town centre operates (RMa1)
The reason for this recommendation is that the market has fundamentally changed (see Chapter Eight, KFD(ii)). There are now a number of formats that are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses including physical space on the edge or out-of-town locations; and virtual space, which includes physical infrastructure such as warehousing, distribution centres and pick-up-points. For the town centre to remain relevant as the 'heart' of the community (as stated in NPPF 2019) requires a rebalancing of the equilibrium between the commercial 'viability', and social 'vitality' of the place. This rebalancing can only occur with an understanding and recognition of the 'value' of the town centre as a social, civic, and commercial destination within a re-imagined new market (see Policy: Recommendation Three, below).

There was consensus that the market in which the town centre now operates has changed. A regeneration expert felt that it is '*radically different*' to the market of the 1980s (PG2). A planner reflected that *'....town centres have always evolved....*', but that the *'....pace of change was pedestrian by comparison to the technological changes of today'* (PF2). An interviewee with knowledge of the evolution of Milton Keynes, (as a planned city centre) stated that the market in which town centres operate has altered over a considerable period. They also said that the actions taken to respond to the change were *'....through commercial adaptation...',* which was commercially motivated to attract *'....people with money in their pockets....*' (PI).

In the opinion of another interviewee, town centres are more than commercial entities, and that they have: *'....historically played [an important role] in the identity of a town or city*

and their role as a social and community hub needs to be strongly recognised and effective support needs to be given to centres to enable them to transform and re-establish themselves; our communities will be much the poorer in the future if this is not the case' (PC2). A regeneration expert felt that there '*....is a huge social and community investment in town centres (not just commercial), [made] often over hundreds of years'* (PD2).

A planner stated that '*An understanding of the wider market in which they [town centres] operate will be essential to policy makers in providing for and supporting the demands of town centre users and businesses*' (PF2). This is in line with the potential identified through this research to reframe the crisis facing town centres, and re-set the response; as Mazzucato suggests: to start 'Thinking Big Again' – by actively creating and shaping new markets (Mazzucato 2019) (2.6.4).

Market: Recommendation Two

Integrate technological innovation into the built environment of the town centre (RMa2)
As part of the process to re-imagine the market (RMa1) the town centre can and should be designed to support a mutually beneficial environment for physical and virtual places. This will include a framework to support research, and innovation to enable and encourage the use of technology to support and create socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' town centres. Thereby identifying opportunities for new ways of collaborating across sectors, and rethinking how physical assets (such as the office sector) will operate in the future.

A senior planner said that, through the use of technology, there is the '….*capacity to monitor patterns of behaviour and spending which offers a rich vein of intelligence for businesses to act collaboratively*' (PF2). However, a regeneration expert suggested caution, as there could be '*unintended consequences*'. There is a need for '*balance*', and active '*management*' of technology so it is not used to '*spy*' on users of the town centre

(PG2). Civil liberties should not be eroded, although there is a role to use technological advances to build an understanding of how town centres operate, to support their commercial and social 'value' to the broader community (see Policy: Recommendation Three, below).

An interviewee with a background in regeneration said that the role of the town centre as an integral hub for technological innovation, this should be taken into account as part of the process of re-imagining the market in which the town centre operates: '*….the old town centre offer is no longer viable for a 21st century town*' (PJ). The incorporation of technological advances within the town centre was said to be important to maintain the attractiveness of the town centre (PC2). A regeneration specialist proposed that in the future there needs to be '*….more blending between public, voluntary and private sector offers and services….*', and that the offers and services *'....needs to be fully digitally accessible'* (PJ). This approach should include opportunities to '*share and collaborate*'; as '*learning towns*' they can be an '*active*' part of the '*fourth industrial revolution*' (PH). The interviewee considered that there is potential for town centres to be centres of knowledgeable specialists (like independent retailers), and to create a new generation of '*artisans*'. This would help in creating a differentiation between the town centre and the homogenised retail parks and on-line offer (PH) – which is already beginning to happen in some towns.

Policy: Recommendation One

Review the spatial planning system in England (RP1)

It is recommended that a national Spatial Planning Framework (SPF) should be developed, to reflect the new market in which town centres operate. The new SPF will include all formats that are 'viable' to deliver town centre uses (for example town centres, and out-of-town retail parks)(Fig.9.3). The SPF will create a spatial plan-led system, including a:

- National SPF;
- Regional SPF; and,
- Local SPF (see Fig.9.1).

The SPF will create a plan-led environment, for the development and operation of places for town centre uses. Through the 'front-loading' of public engagement and consultation, the spatial planning system for England will mitigate the risk of land assembly (i.e. the principle of development is established). The plan-led approach will give community and investor confidence of the shape and viability of future growth, and spatial adaptation. Therefore, the SPF will create greater certainty, and again mitigate the risk of speculative development.

Fig.9.1: proposed policy hierarchy of the strategic Spatial Planning Framework

Strategic Spatial Planning Framework		
National →	Regional →	Local

The timeframe over which the national SPF spans should allow for planning over the long-term (50-100 years), the medium-term (10-50 years) and the short-term (1-10 years) (see Fig.9.2). This is accepting, of course, that longer term planning will be less precise, but offering a planning mechanism to prepare for key anticipated pressures, such as climate change, artificial intelligence (AI), population growth, and changes in demographics.

Fig.9.2: proposed timeframe for the national SPF

SHORT TERM									MEDIUM TERM					LONG TERM
YEAR									DECADE					YEARS
YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	10	20	30	40	50	50 - 100

There was consensus that the planning system should be reviewed, with one interviewee considering the current system to be '*shot*', and that almost any alternative system *'....can't be any worse*' (PG2). Another interviewee said that it was '*madness*' that there is no strategic spatial planning above that of the LPA boundary (PI). A senior planner said that it: *'....is essential that a proper and effective strategic planning system is re-established in England and Wales. It has meant that the cross-authority cooperation and strategic awareness that was previously commonplace has been lost and key decisions that would have guided longer term development were not taken as individual local authorities were unwilling to take on the responsibility and workload of advancing these aspects*' (PC2). This was echoed by another senior planner who thought that, particularly in terms of a national and regional framework, the absence of strategic planning has a negative impact, as it is difficult to see how things '*knit*' together, and that strategic spatial planning is a *'....bit of a mess....*' at this time (PE2). Another planner felt that it is '*….essential that a proper and effective strategic planning system is re-established….*' (PC2). The removal of the Regional Spatial Strategy was seen as '*naïve'*, and the introduction of the '*Duty to Co-operate'* (introduced in the NPPF, 2012) was a '*sticking plaster*' (PE2) and ineffective (PC2).

A number of interviewees (three) cautioned that a revised planning system should not be overly '*prescriptive*' (PI). Another interviewee said that the planning system as a '*….whole needs to maintain sufficient flexibility to accommodate a changing economic landscape,*

commercial pressures and behavioural changes' (PJ). Indeed, a regeneration expert warned that '….*SPFs are welcome as long as they are broad brush and recognise the role of the market and public private partnerships. If they become a tool for 'control' then they would be a waste of time*' (PF2).

A senior planner agreed that consultation should be effective, and occur throughout the planning process. In their experience, the community do not *'....get involved until they see a draft plan….*', and can see how proposals will affect them (PE2). They also felt that too often the initial stages of the planning process (the issues and options) are too '*abstract*', and that this may limit consultation at the early stages (PE2). Therefore, there should be sufficient training and resource for effective communication and consultation at all stages of the planning process. This should include time and effort, to identify '*stakeholders*' across the community (PH).

The proposed timeframe for the national SPF was questioned, with regard to whether the Medium and Long Term timeframe was realistic, as in the '*current climate any strategy looking beyond 10/20 years is rather ambitious'* (PF2), it was proposed that the Medium term should relate to '10-20' years, with the Long term being '20+' (PD2). A planner said that to try and plan for a period up to ten years was too long, and that five years might be more realistic (PE2). Another senior planner agreed that the planning longer than 10 years is problematic: '*It is extremely hard to plan over ten years with any certainty'* (PB2). A senior member added that, in general they agreed, but that they: '….*doubt this will ever happen, in reality. We are not good at long term thinking*' (PK). However, another planner felt that by: '….*adopting a long term strategic view we perhaps need to take into account the desirability of ensuring flexibility and adaptability of buildings within centres in order to respond to new demands and expectations which have yet to evolve'* (PF2). Although it is accepted, by the researcher, that the longer the timeframe the more challenging it

becomes to plan with accuracy. A longer timeframe is essential due to the potential for significant societal, economic and environmental change.

Policy: Recommendation Two

What is defined as a 'town centre use' should be reviewed and refined (RP2)
What is defined as a 'town centre use' is broad, and does not reflect the complexity of the town centre in the new market in which it operates. Places outside the town centre have been permitted, mainly to deliver limited components of town centre uses, in particular retail and commercial leisure (such as cafés and eateries). There are few examples of mixed-use development with social amenities and housing, in the edge and out-of-town formats. This means that the edge and out-of-town format is less complex, and not as expensive to develop or manage as a town centre, but also that they are not an efficient use of land. Moreover, many edge and out-of-town locations result in a 'cartel' like model, where competition is restricted, that is to say asset managers favour the established 'high street' names, and more 'stable' multiples (for example, M&S, Primark, Boots, McDonalds, Starbucks, etc.). Therefore, access to edge and out-of-town sites is problematic for independent operators, innovators and start-ups. It is recommended that the definition of 'town centre use' should be refined in national planning policy to ensure that all development, except in exceptional circumstances, is of mixed-use (including residential). Furthermore, there is a need that what is classed as 'town centre use' is located in a town centre (see Policy: Recommendation Five and Policy: Recommendation Four)

A regeneration expert said that this recommendation was '*spot on*'; and, there needs to be a shift from '….*hard demarcation lines of particular uses rather than broader mixed uses to reflect much more balanced town centres'* (PJ).

Another interviewee agreed that there was an opportunity to reframe what town centre uses are and, in general, '*welcomed mixed-use'*. However, they felt that the definition of 'town centre use' should not be '…*too prescriptive*….', and should reflect in some way that '….*everywhere is different*.' (PG2). A number of interviewees said that it is important to have a mix of uses in the town centre – *'....including residential, [which] brings back a vibrancy to centres, including a broader economic base'* (PJ). A senior elected member acknowledged that '*Town centres are no longer primarily retail, especially with on-line shopping*' (PK). Moreover, a planner felt that mixed-use development would '*inject life and activity'* into a town centre, with the *'....delivery of town centre living opportunities and greater social interaction restoring and supporting greater vitality'* (PF2). A regeneration expert suggested that there were some circumstances where mono-use development might be appropriate, as they were not *'....convinced that all development should be mixed-use'* (PF2).

A regeneration specialist said that edge of town and out of town facilities are a great threat to traditional town centres. As towns grow in size new development is further away from the town centre, so out of and edge of facilities become popular, especially when near motorway or ring road junctions – so there needs to be a way of addressing issues of access to town centres through the planning system (PD2)(see example set out in Fig.9.3).

A chief planning officer at an LPA said that edge and out-of-town land use follows a *'business model'*, which means that they tend to be entirely commercial entities (retail and commercial leisure), and were '….*never intended to fulfil the role of the town centre and is therefore no longer fit for purpose*' (CE2). Edge, and out-of-town retail and leisure parks, follow a 'cartel' model, as they are a '….*product of investment vehicles and retail business models of national multiples'* (PE2).

Policy: Recommendation Three

Develop a method to capture the 'value' of the town centre (RP3)
The 'value' of a town centre as a place comes from its authentic character, as a complex social and commercial ecosystem. The economic 'value' of the place to operators can be captured through a number of indicators, such as commercial yield; sales per square foot; or, development profit. However, the 'value' of the social vitality of the town centre is more opaque. Therefore, it is recommended that the 'value' of the town centre in terms of both commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' is developed in terms of identify appropriate metrics and indicators. The definition of the social and commercial 'value' can then be used as part of the '*appropriateness test'*, as set out below (see Policy: Recommendation Four).

The response to this recommendation goes some way to address research question three, which asks *Can the town centre offer additional 'value' that other formats (physical and virtual), which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses, cannot?*

Work completed to date, both in research and practice, suggests that the additional 'value' of the town centre comes from the 'complex social and commercial ecosystem'. One interviewee felt that the '*value*' of the town centre comes from the uniqueness of the

'*environment*' of places, including historical elements protected by conservation areas (PH). A senior planner acknowledged that the 'value' of the town centre also comes in '*….terms of their social and cultural contribution [which] should be recognised*' (PC2).

Through the interviews the challenges to capture the 'value' of town centres as 'complex social and commercial ecosystems' was questioned, and a senior planner said that it would be '*….impossible to capture what it means to different people'* (PB2). A regeneration specialist pointed to the challenge to identify civic, and social 'value', with regard to the town centre, which is often framed through commercial metrics '*Our measurement of the success of town centres tends to be focused on economic metrics, which is fine as it goes but it does not tell the full story*' (PJ). This concern was echoed by a senior planner who felt that there is '*….a weakness in assessing the level of social vitality for which appropriate measures are required'* (PF2). Furthermore, another senior planner agreed that a better understanding of vitality as a part of assessing the 'value' of the town centre would be helpful, although they questioned how it could be assessed in '*….a measured way*' (PE2). Moreover, an interviewee with significant experience of regeneration in town centres over a number of years reflected that the problem is that Local Authorities do not '*….have the resources….to collect data anymore….*' (PH). One interviewee said that an approach that understands the value of the town centre as a 'social' as well as a 'commercial' hub: '*Should lead to better decision making….*' and mean that the town centre has a greater chance to *'....meet the needs of the area'* (PG2). However, a senior councillor said that it was very important to recognise the wider 'value' of the town centre.

Policy: Recommendation Four

*Develop an '**appropriateness test**' for existing and proposed edge and out-of-town formats* (RP4)
It is recommended that the town centre (including city centres) should be the place that provides the primary location for socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' town centre uses. There are two scenarios in which the 'appropriateness test' would be applied: (i) where other physical formats (for example edge and out-of-town) are already operating, and deliver town centre uses; and, (ii) new locations proposed through the SPF to deliver town centre uses. *Where places outside the town centre do not comply with the 'appropriateness test' they should be redeveloped or repurposed for other uses, for example, mixed-use communities including housing and employment*. It is recommended that town centre uses, consisting of a mix of uses (including residential), should be delivered in a town centre, and not in edge or out-of-town locations. It is expected that the requirement for space for retail and commercial leisure uses will continue to decline due to a number of factors, such as the growth of on-line shopping. The decline in retail and commercial floor space should be managed across all formats, within the hierarchy (Place: Recommendation Five) and network. This means that edge and out-of-town locations should be managed pro-actively, so that they can be re-purposed, or more likely, redeveloped as mixed-use communities (including housing and employment). The risk of not following this approach is that mono-use, and predominantly big-box edge and out-of-town locations would be aggressively defended by landowners/investors, to the detriment of the town centre, and lead to further decline and *relevance* of the town centre – both as a social and commercial hub.

This recommendation was not universally supported. For example, one interviewee said that this recommendation comes from a *'....town planner mentality....*' and that they felt larger stores (big-box built form) are not '*….an issue*….' (PG2). A senior elected member strongly agreed (PK) - whilst another '*agreed in principle*', but that the '*….devil is in the detail so the appropriateness test needs to be realistic, measurable and deliverable'* (PJ).

This was echoed by an interviewee with significant experience in the operation of town centres, who '*liked*' the recommendation and thought it '*of interest*', but questioned whether it was '*legally practical'* (PH). A Head of Planning and Regeneration at an LA, felt that '*….it is unlikely that the planning service will have the resource, skills or experience….'* to administer such a process (PE2). Although acknowledging that the apparent diminishing importance of retail is an '*existential problem*' for the town centre, a planner said that out-of-town is '*….here for longer*….', and that means that the type of retail in town centres would be more '*….independents and niche*' (PE2).

A senior planner strongly agreed that the '*appropriateness test*' would help people understand the '*social*' and '*cultural*' benefit from the town centre, as '*Out of centre locations are likely to achieve commercial viability but are unlikely to deliver social vitality'* (PC2). A chief planning officer to an LA was wary of the practicalities of dealing with an edge or out-of-town location that did not meet the requirements of the '*appropriateness test,*' as these places *'....are often investment vehicles owned by pension companies or other investors and so turning them over to housing is not always sound unless it is leasehold*' (PE2). The reason for the shift from traditional town centre locations to edge and out-of-town has frequently been explained by a change in '*consumer behaviour*', that the investors and operator innovate and change their operational model to deliver the '*product*' that the consumer demands. This is a problematic assumption, as it is difficult to distinguish whether the growth of edge and out of-town is '*consumer'* driven, or part of a commercial model – to drive down costs and increase profits. One participant

in this research suggested that it was not a response to changing consumer behaviour that: *'....retailers are not innovative, they just replicate and copy trends from the USA'* (PH). Furthermore, they felt that the response to the complex challenges faced by town centres cannot be left with retailers and investors, the town centre should not become a USA style '*doughnut town*' – '*….English towns need jam in the middle*….' (PH).

A senior planner said that, if as expected, the future need for retail and commercial floorspace decreases, then the priority and focus should be '….*maintaining the role of traditional town centres*.' Moreover, there should be '….*a managed decline/redevelopment of out of centre locations that do not meet these ['appropriateness test'] criteria'* (PC2).

Policy: Recommendation Five

Hierarchy of formats that operate and deliver town centre uses (RP5)

As highlighted above (Market: Recommendation One) the market in which the town centre now operates has changed, and to consider the town centre in isolation to other formats (both virtual and physical), which are commercially viable to operate and deliver town centre uses, misunderstands that challenge facing the town centre. As part of the SPF (Policy: Recommendation One) a hierarchy of place will be identified, in which the town (and city) centre would be at the top of the hierarchy – for example:

Table 9.1: hierarchy of locations

Hierarchy of locations for town centre uses
▪ **Top Tier**: town and city centres
▪ **Middle Tier**: district and local centres
▪ **Lower Tier**: edge and out-of-town

By planning for all formats in the new market a sustainable plan-led strategy can be created, and criteria developed to assess the most *appropriate* places to provide town centre uses (including physical infrastructure required for virtual operators, as well as warehousing, distribution and pick-up points). It is proposed that the town centre should be

the default, and top tier location in the hierarchy (see Table 9.1), and the criteria should be focussed on the delivery of a network of centres which are socially 'vital' (including residential-led mixed-use), and address environmental factors and sustainability.

An expert in regeneration suggested that it would be '*challenging*' to identify a hierarchy of formats as the *'....population is much more mobile*….', and was concerned that such a system could be '….*too prescriptive/controlling*' (PG2). However, a planner disagreed, and said that a policy that *'....prioritises town centres as the default location [should be] strongly supported....',* and that the town centre identified as the '….*default location of any development [proposed for town centre uses] would be a stronger protection*….' (PC2). Another participant said this approach does '….*make good sense*....', and they agreed that the town centre should be the '….*highest priority*....' (PJ); this was supported by a councillor (PK). In this way by safeguarding the town centre, all parts of society have access to for essential goods and services. Furthermore, it reduces the risk of food deserts (see 2.4.2).

Policy: Recommendation Six

Permitted Development Rights, where considered appropriate, should be agreed at a local level (as part of the Local SPF) (RP6)
Permitted development (PD) rights should reflect the requirements of an individual town centre, and should be established as part of the Local SPF (see Policy Recommendation One), as considered relevant. This means that PD rights will reflect the requirements of the local area, as well as removing the necessity for the LPA to seek to remove some PD rights through an 'Article 4' direction.

There were quite strongly opposing positions relating to whether Policy Recommendation Six was necessary:

(i) *not necessary*: a planner said that although the office to residential PD was '*London focussed',* and had '*unintended consequences',* but that nationally imposed PD rights were not a big problem, as they can be removed under an Article 4 direction (PE2); and the counter position,

(ii) *necessary*: PD Rights set at a national level are '….*bad news since they do not and cannot reflect local circumstances….centralised PDRs have no democratic accountability whatsoever, which locally agreed PDRs will still need to be agreed by elected members*', and the interviewee said the use of PD demonstrated the Government's '….*lack of confidence in LPAs*' (PJ). Another interviewee said PD '….*led to people developing poor responses and see it as a way to drive standards down….*'; in particular in terms of design standards (PH).

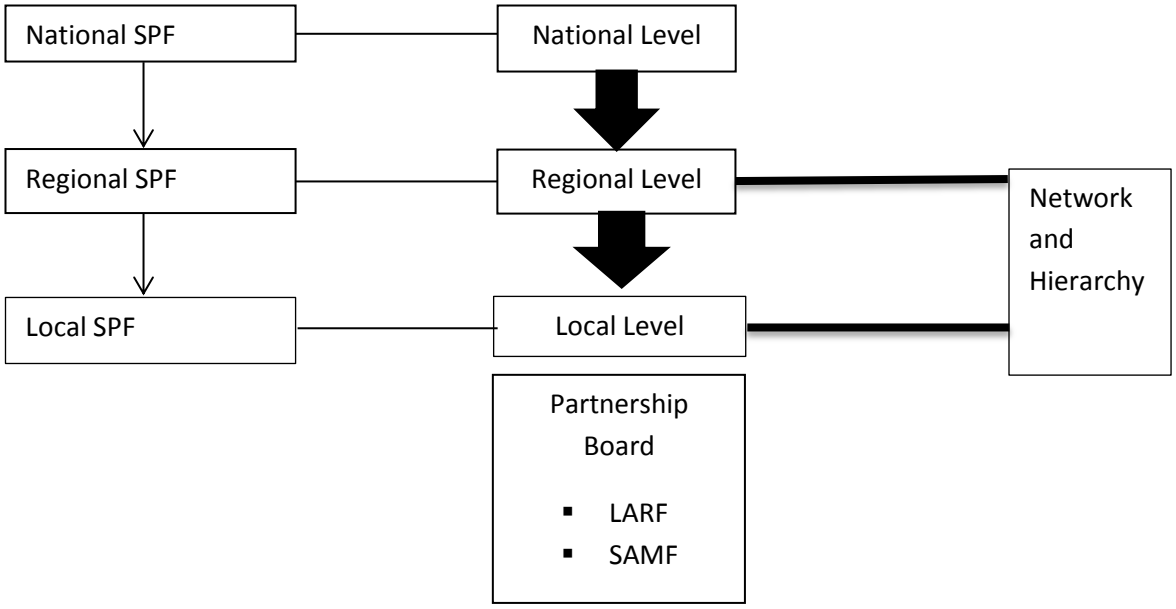
A senior planner thought that within the spatial planning framework recommended (see Policy: Recommendation One), it would be logical to develop local PD rights, so that they benefit from community consultation; and, as a senior planner suggests, local PD rights would '….*provide additional certainty to town centres*' (PC2). This position was supported by an elected member (PK). Another senior planner strongly agreed that the: '*LPA know their local areas best and need to have responsibility for them*' (PB2).

Policy: Recommendation Seven

Simplify the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process locally where proposals align with the Local SPF (RP7)
It is recommended that the process of Compulsory Purchase is reviewed and the process streamlined where the proposals accord with the Local SPF.

There was consensus that a streamlined CPO process could be beneficial for regeneration in town centres, and this was typical of the response from interviewees: '*Yes. Too long and complicated'* (PE2). Furthermore it was thought that a: '….*streamlined CPO process would allow LPAs and their partners to bring forward schemes more quickly and flexibly to respond to changing local circumstances*' (PC2).

Fig.9.3: proposed governance structure for all formats



Governance: Recommendation One

Introduce Local Adaptive Resilience Frameworks (LARFs) and create a statutory responsibility for all public sector organisations to work together to deliver the objectives of LARFs (RG1)
It is recommended that a revised governance model is introduced to reflect the new market conditions (Market: Recommendation One), and the national spatial planning framework (Policy: Recommendation One). Within this governance framework, all formats (physical and virtual) can be managed to support a plan-led approach to future change and development. This will be particularly important if, as expected, retail market continues to contract. This will mean that the town centre can be protected, whilst edge or out-of-town sites can be redeveloped or repurposed for other land uses, such as: industrial or housing (see '*appropriateness test'* Policy: Recommendation Four). The local partnership board will formalise the approach to promote the adaptive resilience of the town centre and other formats within the network (where said *appropriate*). An accountable public-sector body reporting at least annually to the local community will administer the local partnership. The membership of the partnership board will be agreed at the local level, and should be widely representative of the community, including the private and public sector, as well as local interest groups and members of the local community. Moreover, all public sector organisations with day-to-day operational and strategic responsibilities for the town centre should have a statutory duty to report, and be accountable to the partnership board.

A regeneration expert with experience of working alongside partnerships in town centres felt that this '*….approach makes sense. It's really important that all parts of the community, public, private and voluntary, are involved and invested in shaping their local community*' (PJ). A senior planner asserted that *'....there is all the more reason to focus energies on retaining the vitality and viability of traditional town centres at the heart of communities that they serve'* (PF2). A participant, with a background in regeneration and partnership working, felt that '*strong partnerships*' are '*….not easy to achieve'* and that there is *'....too often bureaucratic squabbling, lack of cooperation and vanity [which] prevent investment and regeneration'* (PG2). Another interviewee considered there was a need for '*….flexible and proactive project boards [that] have a mandate to deliver projects and proposals'* (PC2). However, a senior councillor stated: '*I am not a fan of too many 'partnerships' and 'boards', which end up as 'talking shops' with no accountability*' (PK).

The process to form and maintain partnership working is complicated by the division in funding available into capital and revenue; the majority of funding available is capital. Moreover, to manage partnerships and deliver projects calls for revenue funds which are not readily available (PG2). This hampers the ability to act '*strategically*', and plan for the medium and longer term, and creates an '*ad-hoc*' and '*hand to mouth*' approach to the delivery of regeneration projects (PG2). This means that the *'....requirement for reporting and accountability is essential'* (PC2). Effective governance calls for adequate resources and skill sets, to ensure that agreed objectives can be delivered effectively at the various levels.

Governance: Policy Recommendation Two

Create a Town Centre Local Adaptive Resilience Framework (LARF) (RG2)
The LARF creates a regeneration vehicle to deliver pro-actively the Local SPF and the SAMF. The challenges facing the town centre cannot be effectively addressed through place management interventions alone. To reinvigorate the town centre as a socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' hub will require a transparent process, and procedures which are progressed by a body which has overall responsibility and accountability for the town centre strategically and/or operationally. Nationally and regionally, this would need a structure to develop, consult on and agree a spatial plan and LARF. It will also require a local town centre LARF (in line Governance: Recommendation One). The local level 'partnership board' to deliver the LARF will be for the local partners to decide, but alternatives include a company structure, a limited liability partnership (LLP), a formalised partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding, a Development Corporation, etc.

A senior planner felt that a '*formal delivery vehicle*' would be '*beneficial*' (PC2). A regeneration expert with experience across a number of town centres in a number of countries pointed to the experience in continental Europe, and what could be learned from other places, such as Germany, where towns collaborate for the *'....common good of the town….*' and that employers and businesses '*engage*' (PH). However, a planner working within an LPA said that this was a *'....layer of bureaucracy that we can do without….*', and that currently funding is not available for the local authority to support it (PE2). The evidence and findings from the research strongly suggest that it is essential that there is adequate and accountable governance at the local level. Furthermore, it was felt that this should be a statutory requirement that is appropriately staffed and resourced.

9.2.2 Theme Two: Funding, investment and management

Funding and Investment: Recommendation One

Funding and investment for Town Centres (RF1)
Public investment and funding for the town centre should be linked to the delivery of the spatial planning framework and local needs, so that it reflects and delivers the aspirations of local stakeholders as captured through consultation, and reflected in the agreed plan over the short, medium and long term. The reason for this recommendation is to develop a sustainable, transparent, and dependable approach to funding that the public sector and the private sector can rely on to plan investment programmes – thereby mitigating risk. This approach removes the short-termism to funding, where decisions on funding are assessed on whether they are 'shovel ready', with opportunities being identified, rather than making sure that the funding is made available to the places and communities where it is most required. Finally, the criterion for funding should change to make sure that proposals deliver outcomes which are socially 'vital' as well as commercially 'viable'.

An interviewee with expertise in supporting the regeneration of town centres highlighted a need for a '*funding and investment regime',* and that at the moment it is a '*crumbs off the table approach*' (PI). They suggested that it was difficult to see where private sector investment for town centres would come from – '….*who in the private sector would invest and what would they invest in?*' (PI). The interviewee said that there needed to be a '*re-imagining'* of the town centres, and that '*some risks would need to be taken*' with '….*Local Authorities taking a greater lead*….' over what could be a '*prolonged'* period of time (PI). A regeneration expert working with a LEP felt that town centres '….*need core funding for their regeneration and that relying on open calls or other random competitive approaches is wasteful and does not always produce the optimum result'* (PJ). A Head of

Service at a LA agreed that calls for funding should be assessed on the social 'vitality' as well as commercial 'viability' impact of a place, and they questioned the '*fit*' with central government funding initiatives, which they felt were: '….*driven by short term policy issues and politics rather than long term planning*' (PE2). However, a councillor felt that: '….*long term funding commitments are not possible in the current economic climate'* (PK).

Frustration relating to the requirement for 'Shovel ready' projects was expressed by an interviewee with experience of working within the LEP environment, and said that 'Shovel ready' was '….*a bit flavour of the month at the moment*….'. They went on to say: '*In my experience organisations very rarely have a pipeline of shovel ready schemes waiting for the Government's next funding announcement, not least because the revenue funding needed to get a project to shovel ready state is speculative and therefore high risk*' (PJ). There was further concern that funding is not always well targeted, for example 'green funding' has been announced which means that the Local Authorities are chasing the money, but do not have 'shovel ready' projects, which is '….*not a good use of resources*' (PE2). Furthermore, concern was raised by a number of participants with regard to the way in which central government appears to control funding (PI), and that bidding for funding can be time consuming and frustrating, as the rules for accessing funding are not always transparent (PG2). An interviewee felt public funding to be 'critical' but, expected that it will '….*remain in short supply and be essentially opportunistic in character*' (PF2).

Management: Recommendation One

Strategic Asset Management Framework (SAMF) to support the implementation of the Spatial Plan (RM1)
In line with the national spatial strategy approach recommended, a Strategic Asset Management Framework (SAMF) is proposed to support delivery. The SAMF follows the

same governance approach and will be integrated into the regional and local governance structure (Governance: Recommendation One).

A senior planner felt that an '….*awareness of assets and their role within the delivery of the strategy is essential*….' (PC2). A senior regeneration expert expressed a view that as the market in which the town centre now operates (see Market: Recommendation One) has changed there is a need to support the adaptation of assets. They suggested Central Milton Keynes is one such case (see Fig.9.4 & Fig.9.5).

The asset owners are responding to the changing market, and that the type of building form and requirements of commercial operators has also changed, calling for flexibility through repurposing or redevelopment. (PI). However, there is a danger that the same mistakes are being made, by replacing a mono-use development with bigger box mono-use built form (Fig.9.4 & Fig.9.5).

Management: Recommendation Two

Devolve the strategic asset management of publicly owned assets to the local area (RM2)
Publicly owned assets - the management of publicly owned assets should be reconfigured to meet the local spatial aspirations (the social and commercial needs) of a town centre, as set out in the Local SPF. This will mean that the *publicly owned assets* will focus on the social 'vitality' and needs of the local communities in which they operate; including the design, function (active ground floor use, with a mix of uses promoting living in the town centre as a way to respond to the housing crisis), and form.

A regeneration expert with experience of working with partners across the public sector thought that this was a good proposal, and that '*publicly owned assets*' could be transferred and '….*held under a collective public ownership*'. In this way *'....one public body is not*

negotiating with another public body to secure the maximum value from the sale to the possible long term detriment of the public estate as a whole and local spatial aspirations' (PJ). The importance of using public assets as leverage to '*support delivery'* of regeneration projects was acknowledged by an interviewee with broad experience of regeneration projects (PF2). A Head of Service at an LA confirmed that they were already reviewing how they operate, could look at working differently (including remotely), and use the publicly owned assets to deliver regeneration (PE2).

Management: Recommendation Three

Work pro-actively with private sector asset owners to deliver the aspirations of the Local SPF - de-risk investment and development in the town centre (RM3)
Through the LARF the partnership should engage with *private sector* local landowners to (i) de-risk investment and development in the town centre, as set out in the Local SPF; and, (ii) '*appropriateness test'* process: any development delivering town centre uses outside Town centres should be tested for sustainability and ability to deliver social 'vitality' as well as commercial 'viability' through the '*appropriateness test'*. It is essential, due to the potential impact of other formats becoming less commercially viable, that the owners of the sites are fully engaged, and that there is an agreed approach for future development or repurposing, which may require public sector investment and/or intervention.

A regeneration expert with experience of working closely in partnership with private landowners and developers expressed the view that '….*without private investment regeneration will not take place on any scale*….' and, furthermore, '….*development de-risking is critical to ensure that barriers are removed at an early stage to enable developments to progress smoothly'* (PJ). This was echoed by a senior planner who, in their experience, felt that it was '*essential to engage with the private sector*' in the way recommended above (PF2). Another interviewee agreed with the objectives of both bullet

points, but said that *'....in the current very tough climate, it may be a case of securing any potential inward investment using the pull of town centre and public investment and the cluster of science and technology businesses present in the town'* (PJ). However, one interviewee expressed concern that there is insufficient resource and expertise for any meaningful engagement, and argued that partnership working of this type was time consuming and difficult (PG2).

9.3 New Theory and New Theoretical Concept

The research findings show that the 'value' of the town centre comes from it being a '*complex social and commercial ecosystem*' that is not replicated by other formats (Table 1.1). It is proposed that there needs to be a paradigm shift in the way that the problem of town centre *relevance*, as researched in this thesis, is addressed. The new theory relates to the *value* generated from the physical and psychological Complexity of Urban Ecology, as set out in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2: New Theory – Complexity of Urban Ecology

the *Town Centre – is **the** focal point within a complex ecological system of a network of hubs which meet the civic, social and commercial needs and wants of all of the community*

The *INTRICATE* town centre concept

This research indicates that the response to the threat facing the town centre has been consistent in Phase Two and Phase Three: one in which the management and built form of the town centre should emulate that of the privately managed mall and shopping centre. The town centre, arguably, moved into Phase Four from 2000, and consequently the response to the crisis facing the town centre now needs what Friedman referred to as 'real

change', and argued that '*When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around*' (Friedman 2002, p.xiv).

Table 9.3: the nine pillars of the *INTRICATE* town centre

PILLARS		COMPONENTS
1. ***I***	INVOLVE	*Effective governance* – setting a vision, strategy and delivery plans at a national, regional and local scale. Invest in engagement and consultation across all parts of the (social and commercial) community.
2. ***N***	NETWORK	*Accessible places* – promoting walking, cycling and free public transport. Using technology to reduce the need for commuting and eliminate food deserts to ensure that all of society has access to affordable essentials.
3. ***T***	TIME	*Active uses and public spaces* - mix of social and commercial uses that operate throughout the day, so that there are active streets – promoting good design and passive security.
4. ***R***	RESILIENT	*React to shock or unanticipated change* – an integrated mix of social and commercial uses designed to cope with changing competitive, health and environmental dynamics.
5. ***I***	INCLUSIVE	*Opportunities for all* – a place that welcomes diversity and delivers an incentive for urban living – with high quality, accessible and free green and blue natural environments.
6. ***C***	COMMUNITY	*A relevant place* – a space for social, commercial and learning activities. Remove artificial barriers and develop a collaborative approach by linking education, training, enterprise and innovation.
7. ***A***	ADAPTIVE	*Ability to repurpose and change* – development in the town centre should form a mix of uses (including residential), at an appropriate density, with active ground floor frontages and high quality design.
8. ***T***	TRUE	*Unique to the place* – all town centres have individual and authentic characteristics, the town centre should be an exemplar of innovation and high quality design. A place where people want to be and spend time.
9. ***E***	EVOLVING	*Anticipate change, promote experimental places* - supportive environment for testing new ways of living, designing healthy communities for all and implement equality and social support, such as a Universal Basic Income.

The following sections suggest some 'ideas' and propositions, which draw on the research findings to call for an approach which re-imagines the role of the town centre. It sees the town centre within a network that 'values' the place within a '*complex social and commercial ecosystem*'. This calls for a new concept of an *INTRICATE* town centre, designed to be *the focal point within a complex ecological system of a network of hubs which meet the civic, social and commercial needs of all of the community*.

The *INTRICATE* concept is a response to the findings of the research, in that it seeks to celebrate the complexity of the urban centre as an eco-system which puts the needs of people first. To achieve this will require a different perspective to the way places are valued, both socially and commercially; this will be of particular importance so that space for 'necessary', 'optional' and 'social' activities are accessible to all (Table 4.5) (Gehl, 2011). Furthermore, the *INTRICATE* town centre is not an ideological proposition, but a practical social, and commercial way forward to sustainable, adaptive and resilient mixed-use communities (Table 9.3).

Part Two – *Speculative discussion: potential impact of Government intervention and Covid-19 on the town centre*

9.4 Speculative Discussion

The following section comprises a speculative discussion relating to the impact that the crisis caused by the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic might have on the town centre; and, the government's approach, including (i) the place management response to the challenges facing the town centre; (ii) the current funding regime; and, (iii) the proposed review of the planning system (the Planning White Paper, MHCLG 2020). The section concludes with initial thoughts on what lessons might be taken from the C-19.

9.4.1 Government Approach

(i) The place management response

The continued place management response is based on the assumption that if the town centre was better managed it could compete with other formats, such as the privately owned shopping centres and retail parks (2.6.2). Whilst it is clear that effective management is critical to the future success and relevance of the town centre, in particular now that they are no longer '*vital*' places, the challenge to the town centre is so acute and complex that a 'place management' response alone will not be sufficient (see Market: Recommendation One; and, Policy: Recommendation Three).

(ii) The current funding regime

The ineffectiveness of the current funding regime for town centres is evident from the primary research, as set out in this thesis, and the findings of the National Infrastructure Committee (2021). As one interviewee stated: '….*communicating with the government is difficult*….', and that it is '….*not always clear what the criteria is*….' to unlock funding (PG2). This is supported in the findings of the Public Accounts Committee report, Selecting Towns for the Towns Fund (PAC, 2020). The PAC (2020) report found inconsistency, and a lack of 'transparency' in the way town centres were selected for funding through the £3.6bn Towns Fund promoted by the government, through the MHCLG (PAC 2020, p.4). The findings of the PAC (2020) are set out in the table (9.6) below, and are linked to the Recommendations detailed in the first part of this chapter.

Table 9.4: overview of findings from the Public Accounts Committee 2020

Finding Area	**Commentary from PAC**	**Link to Recommendations**
targeting funding	The Committee report found that there was inconsistency in the way that towns were selected which was vague and based in assumptions. The report states that the '….*lack of transparency*….' fuelled '….*accusations of political bias*….' (PAC, 2020).	Funding & Investment: Recommendation One ; Management: Recommendation One
local resources	MHCLG explained that a competitive process was not followed and the towns were preselected as there was concern in the Department that: '….*the towns most in need of investment would be disadvantaged….because of a lack of leadership, resources or experience of dealing with government departments*' (PAC 2020, p.6).	Funding & Investment: Recommendation One; Management: Recommendation One
local governance structures	The Committee found that there was a lack of governance structures, as LEPs etc. were found not to be appropriate, therefore a new level of governance – Town Deal Boards – are to be set-up to administer the Fund (PAC 2020, p.10).	Governance: Recommendation One; Governance: Recommendation Two
the 'value' of the town centre	The Committee questioned the 'value' of the investment as a *'....monitoring and evaluation process….to measure the impact and success of the Towns Fund*….' has not been set up (PAC 2020, p.6).	Governance: Recommendation One; Governance: Recommendation Two

(iii) Review of the planning system (White Paper 2020), with regard to town centres

The White Paper was published for consultation in August 2020. Its main focus is the delivery of new homes (White Paper 2020, p.6). The following discussion briefly considers the proposals in light of the findings and recommendations set out in this thesis.

Strategic spatial planning.

This research highlights a number of flaws in the current planning system generally and, in particular, in relation to the town centre (see Policy: Recommendation One). A review of the current planning system is supported, and called for through this research. The approach to 'shake up' the current system and return to spatial planning is supported by the findings of this research. Unfortunately, the White Paper does not address the fundamental weakness of the current planning system, which is that there is no spatial strategic planning framework beyond that of the arbitrary boundary of the LPA (with the exception of London and Manchester) (White Paper 2020, p14-16). The absence of such a spatial planning framework above that of the LPA has a significant, and specific impact on the ability to plan effectively for the future role of town centres, since no practical network or hierarchy of formats that deliver town centre uses can be developed or managed without it (see Policy: Recommendation One; and, Governance: Recommendation One).

Consultation

Engagement with the community and the role of the consultee to shape policy and development is opaque. The White Paper appears to suggest that once the Local Plan is adopted, engagement with the public and other stakeholders ceases (in particular in Growth and Renewal areas). This is of particular concern if stakeholders are not able to shape development in the future, especially in rapidly changing and dynamic places like town centres, but are held to the plans which could have been set a number of years previously (see Policy: Recommendation One; and, Governance: Recommendation One).

Role of town centres (including city centres and other formats)

The White Paper makes reference to the town centre five times; but it does not set out what it sees as its role in the future, nor does the White Paper acknowledge other formats that have become commercially 'viable' for town centre uses (Table 1.1). The White Paper seeks to create a development and policy environment, which offers a simplified, less prescriptive approach, designed to meet the needs of the market (Marshall 2020). The future role of the town centre is salient here, as well as the fact that the town centre is a complex eco-system. It is unclear how the town centre can remain commercially and socially *relevant* within a simplified planning system.

Appropriate uses - this is an area of particular concern as the White Paper does not refer to areas of mixed-use, or a mix of uses which, although it suggests that it could be suitable to identify town centres as 'distinct areas' (White Paper 2020, para 2.1). What is not clear is the definition of a 'distinct area' is, or at what scale a Growth, Renewal or Protected Area might be, for example whether it might be a whole town centre, a part of a town centre, a street or even a plot. Where uses are designated in the local plan the White Paper suggests that it will be for the market to determine what is an appropriate use, from a list of uses (White Paper, 2020). This could, on the face of it, mean that an area is designated for a broad section of 'town centre uses' (including shops, offices, civic, social and housing), but that a developer could choose to deliver a single use. For example, they might develop a Growth area exclusively for new homes; or, develop a Growth area only for retail and commercial leisure (such as a retail park), effectively creating zoned and single use areas. This would be detrimental to the notion of sustainable, well designed places which should be adaptive and resilient (Ward 2020). (see Market: Recommendation One; Policy: Recommendation One; Policy: Recommendation Two; Policy: Recommendation Three; and Policy: Recommendation Four).

Although it is accepted here that the Paper is the first stage of the consultation process, the White Paper as drafted does not offer a framework to address the challenges facing the town centre. It would result in a planning system which is further deregulated, and lacks vision or strategic direction. It appears to be very much aligned to a neo-liberal ideology, of reducing regulation, and to a laissez-faire approach where a focus on commercial development through the private sector dominates (Marshall 2020; Marshall 2022).

9.4.2 The Impact of Covid-19 on the Town Centre

C-19 is the most pressing crisis at this point in time. However, it is just one of a number of crises which challenge the way the built environment will be used, and will look in the future (Fig.9.6 and Fig.9.8). These crises cluster around a number of issues or themes, particularly health, an ageing population, socio-economic inequality, and climate. Therefore, the town centre needs the agility and ability to adapt and change, in order to remain relevant in the future. Some commentators have suggested that the COVID has merely accelerated trends, as one regeneration expert reflected: the changes to the way town centres operate have '*quickened*', been '*exacerbated*', and that town centres will not '*…go back to normal'* (Fig.9.9 & Fig.11)(PG2).

There are potential lessons that can be learnt from the C-19 crisis: the impact of the current crisis shines a light on the symptoms caused by the neo-liberal economic ideology, followed by all governments since 1979, that has deregulated the market and promoted commercial '*viability*' of places (and in particular the town centre) over the requirement for social '*vitality*' (Marshall 2022).

The crisis created by the pernicious C-19 pandemic has demonstrated that people can adapt to difficult and challenging circumstances rapidly, and, by implication, that it is more difficult to change economic sectors and the built form. The shock of the C-19 crisis, and the need to avoid physical human contact, forced a switch to technology, which has had a particular impact on town centre uses (for example, non-essential retail, the office sector and commercial leisure) (Fig.9.9 and Fig.9.10).

At the end of the first lockdown, June 2020, there was a discernible conflict between the social (including the health of people), and the commercial pressure to restart the economy (Fig.9.9 & Fig.9.10). This included the 'eat out to help out' initiative, where the economic gain (which was found to be limited) may have been at the cost of additional infections (Fig.9.7)(Gonzalez-Pampillon et al, 2021). The conflicting balance between economy and health has remained a theme through the crisis, impacting specific elements of the economy more than others - such as the office, retail and commercial leisure sectors (Bond-Smith & McCann 2022; Orr et al. 2022)(Fig. 21).

The move to technology and on-line formats makes the need for a network of sustainable and resilient physical centres more evident. The role of the town centre as a *relevant* commercial and social hub takes on more importance. There is renewed interest in the concept of hubs and networks, such as the 15 minute or 20 minute neighbourhood. Under this concept, residents are able to access essential and daily activities within 15 or 20 minutes on foot (Fig.9.11)(de Valderrama et al. 2020; Capasso Da Silva et al. 2020, p.129; Moreno et al. 2021).The 15 or 20 minute urban centre network is an attractive concept, on the face of it.

However, to bring it forward would require vision and strategic planning that is not currently available, or proposed in the White Paper (2020) (as discussed above). For the 15 minute city to become a realistic, practical opportunity would require a network of mixed-use urban cores (for example the city/town centre, district and local centres).

This in turn, calls for retrospective as well as forward planning (as set out in Policy: Recommendation Four). However, there seems little momentum to re-imagine the town centre and to reset the equilibrium of social '*vitality*' and commercial '*viability*' in the current government response (see Market: Recommendation One).

This research highlights the need to reset the debate about the future of town centres, from one which is dominated by what a number of commentators perceive to be decline due to changes in behaviour, to one which reassesses the purpose, relevance and value of the town centre within a new market environment. The response to the C-19 crisis has demonstrated that, mainly through the greater use of technology, change and adaptation can happen relatively swiftly in the way people live, shop and work. It has also highlighted spatial inequality, and the need for space to adapt to live-work (work from home or, more euphemistically, live from work). Otherwise, the theory that everyone can be an entrepreneur, or that business can locate anywhere, will be limited in its reality to those with access to space, finance and appropriate technology (Zukin 2020, p.6). This calls into question spatially where the 'address' for innovation might be, and crucially who will have the 'right' to live and work there (Zukin 2020, 198). Spatial inequality is not limited to the social '*vitality*' of place, but is a key element to developing sustainable commercial '*viability*'. Adapting and changing the built environment is more complex, and cannot be adequately achieved by each town individually at a local level, but is an essential component for places to be *relevant* (Zukin 2020, p.220). There is a need for a strategic response within a national, regional, and local spatial framework, to plan and deliver a network of sustainable, mixed use hubs with the town centre at the heart.

9.5 Conclusions

This chapter has presented recommendations that developed out of the micro and macro findings of the research. It has set out a number of recommendations that could be implemented to produce real change, and create an adaptive resilience led response to the crises facing the town centre. The recommendations were tested with experts in their field, through semi-structured interviews and surveys. Following the findings of the research, the chapter has argued that:

*the town centre is an intricate place, being **the** focal point within an ecological system of a network of hubs which meet the civic, social and commercial needs of the community.*

The recommendations form a framework which, in practice, would enable and structure consultation with all sectors of the community (including social and business); and would be the beginning of a process of re-imagining the role of the town centre in a new market, and help deliver change through an holistic set of measures at the national, regional and local level. The first step in the process would be to develop an understanding of the 'value' of town centres from a civic and social perspective as well as commercial entities.

The research focus has been on a real-life problem, which sees the town centre environment as dynamic and complex. This has been illustrated through the speculative discussion in the second part of the chapter, for example in relation to the impact and response to the crisis created by C-19; and, the government's proposed approach to planning reform. The ARM model, developed through this research, offers an analytical framework to create a better understanding of the challenges facing the built environment – in this case the town centre.

The limitations of this research and potential areas for further research in this field are considered in the final chapter.

Fig.9.4: The Point – a large mono-use building used as a cinema



Source: https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/councillors-bid-fond-farewell-point-milton-keynes-81792

Fig.9.5: Proposed redevelopment – a big box mono-use commercial development



Source: https://xplain.org.uk/2019/03/07/its-official-the-piano-will-replace-the-point-in-central-milton-keynes/

Fig.9.6: queueing two meters apart and wearing masks in public areas, new normal? Banbury



Source: author, 26/08/2020

Fig.9.7: Eat Out to Help Out, Chancellor of the Exchequer



Source: Live News Lancashire 28/08/2020

Fig.9.8: use of autonomous vehicles for delivering the goods in Milton Keynes



Source: author, 19/09/2021

Fig.9.9: ‘Go back to work or risk losing your job’, Daily Telegraph Headline


Fighting fit

The Daily Telegraph

‘Go back to work or risk losing your job’

Source: Daily Telegraph August 8, 2020

Fig.9.10: ‘Go back to the office’ , The Times Headline, August 2021



THE TIMES

Didn't she do well?
Hilary Rose: Meghan turns 40

Are you a pingdemic liar? I am

Sell footballs with warnings, says scientist in dementia study

‘Go back to the office if you want to get on’

Sunak tells the young that working from home could harm their career

Who's best in the Olympic Names? It's Team Tom

Source: The Times, August 3, 2021

Fig.9.11: The Fifteen Minute City Concept



Source: Financial Times (Saturday 18 July/Sunday 19 July, 2020)

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the final conclusions of the research, and is organised into six sections:

(i) summary of key research findings and limitations of the research;

(iii) application and limitations of the recommendations;

(iv) original contribution to new knowledge;

(v) autobiographical reflections; and,

(vi) an agenda for future research.

10.2 Summary of Research Frameworks, Research Findings and Limitations of the Research

The research problem, identified at the start of the thesis, is: how can the town centre remain a *relevant* place as a civic, social and commercial hub? The research problem is set within the context of significant and increasingly uncertain economic, social and technological change. The overall aim of the research is to critically assess the changing relationship between the commercial '*viability*' and social '*vitality*' of the contemporary English town centre. The second aim has been to develop a method to analyse the conditions (physical, commercial and political) of a town centre in such a way that prescriptive theoretical solutions to maintaining commercial '*viability*' and social '*vitality'*

can be posited. In order to effectively address the research problem three research questions were formulated; the research question (RQ) and sub-research (S-RQ) questions are answered below.

Answering the Research Questions

RQ *How has the relationship between commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality', in English town centres, changed in a period of economic transition?*

The evidence gathered by this research, and analysed through the historic framework, shows that the relationship between social '*vitality*' and commercial '*viability*' in the town centre changed fundamentally:

Phase One, 1945-1979 social '*vitality*' of a place was dominant, but as the phase continued an increasingly mobile society, changing consumer needs and commercial change there was increasing pressure for commercial '*viability*'.

Phase Two, 1979-2007, the dominance of commercial '*viability*' increased - by the end of the phase towards commercial '*viability*' being the overriding factor.

Phase Three, 2007- the present day (2020), commercial '*viability*' gained further weight in terms of importance and secured dominance over social '*vitality*'.

S-RQ *(i) Has the market in which the town centre now operates changed within the timeframe identified for this research (post 1945-2020)?*

Town centres are now part of a new, but undefined market, in which a number of formats (physical and virtual) operate to provide what were traditional town centre uses. The town centre is a shifting phenomenon, and part of a wider economic readjustment of the retail and commercial sectors of the economy which will have an impact beyond the town centre. However, the town centre is the only format that has a civic and social function as well as being a commercial entity. Care should be taken when re-imagining the role of the town

centre within the new market to male sure that it retains a dual social and commercial role, in order to avoid unsustainable 'zoning' - to ensure that all of society have access to essential goods and services.

S-RQ *(ii) Can the town centre offer additional 'value' that other formats (physical and virtual), which are commercially 'viable' to deliver town centre uses, cannot?*

The town centre is an authentic, complex social and commercial ecosystem. This is the value of the town centre, which is not replicated by other formats (physical or virtual). The findings from the research demonstrates that there is a human connection to the town centre as the civic hub of towns, and identifies evidence to support the theory that as our exposure to globalisation and the virtual world expands '…*all business is local*…' which may become more relevant and apposite as an over-reliance on the commercial '*viability'*, and a neo-liberal capitalist system becomes more apparent (Quelch & Jocz 2012). The town centre is a much more diverse and complicated place than is a privately owned and managed asset; the town centre ecosystem should be protected and encouraged, exhibiting the authentic and cultivating identity (Zukin, 2010; Butina Watson & Bentley, 2007, Reeve, 1996; Montgomery, 2013).

The following part of this section recapitulates the approach to the forensic investigation of the research problem through the design and implementation of two frameworks:

(i) the Historical Framework; and,

(ii) the Research Framework and the Conceptual Analytical Framework.

The second part sets out a brief summary of the research findings and the final part of the chapter reflects on the limitations of the research.

10.2.1 The Research Frameworks

(i) Historical Framework

The Historical Framework created a linear structure with which to interrogate the literature - enabling the changing relationship between the '*vitality*' and '*viability*' of town centres to be tracked over three phases (see Table 1.2). The framework argued that some town centres are no longer a '*vital*' place, as there are now a number of formats (physical and virtual) that are commercially '*viable*' delivering traditional town centre uses (Table 1.1).

A 'working' definition for the concept of the town centre was established in chapter two: Town Centre - a place which is recognisable as the social, civic and commercial hub which has provision for the needs and wants of all of the community (2.6.2). The 'working' definition of the town centre was used to guide the analysis of the research problem. The definition was a useful tool in that it kept the researcher focussed on place, that is to say the English town centre. However, and as discussed in chapter 2, the town centre is a '*fuzzy*' spatial concept (2.6.2). For the purpose of the case studies the geographic identity of where the town centre is located used the spatial definition adopted in the relevant Local Plan (6.4.1 & 7.4.1). The 'fuzzy' nature of the concept of the town centre was evident through informal and formal discussions with participants (6.3.1 & 7.3.1). This suggests that the concept of the town centre, as it is emotionally and physically perceived, is a shifting one which changes and evolves in time.

Reflecting on whether the definition of the concept of the town centre was sufficiently robust to guide the analysis of the research problem, it is concluded that for the purpose of the research that it was. Although, there is a caveat to that conclusion, in relation to the practical adoption of the definition in a real-life setting. The research found that the town centre is now just one format that is commercially '*viable*' to deliver traditional town centre uses (Table 1.1). This research finds that the currency of the town centre has and

continues to change, as the market in which the town centre operates evolves and adapts. As this research finds, and other commentators suggest, there is value, commercial as well as social, in physical places that are commercially '*viable*' to consolidate their attractiveness to differing groups of users by also offering social '*vitality*'. This might mean in the future that the town centre is just one format which is perceived to be a place which is recognisable as the social, civic and commercial hub which has provision for the needs and wants of all of the community (Savills, 2021; Carmona, 2019 & 2021).

The research acknowledges the importance of place management, which has been the focus of much of the academic and grey literature, in terms of town centres remaining *relevant* social, civic and commercial hubs (Marakakis et al. 2022). However, this research has probed further and has sought to move the debate into a more fundamental and strategic analysis of what town centres can provide in the future by valuing them as complex, authentic, and intricate places.

(ii) Research Framework and Conceptual Analytical Framework

The Conceptual Analytical Framework is referred to as the Adaptive Resilience Model or ARM (4.2). The ARM was developed as a new method of inquiry designed to acquire new knowledge in relation to the changing relationship between the social '*vitality*' and commercial '*viability*' of town centres through the exploratory research method.

The in-depth case study method allowed a forensic investigation of the research problem within a real-life operational environment – the English town centre. The data was analysed through theoretical lenses of the micro-specific and the macro-generic (Table 4.6). This allowed the data to be interrogated at both a local and national scale, so that a set of recommendations could be tested with experts in their field. Thereby, setting a foundation for wider empirical and longitudinal study, at various morphological levels, and across different formats (Table 1.1). The application of the model was limited to two in-

depth case studies and would benefit from further 'exposure' to test its efficacy and application as both a research framework and a tool in practice (9.5.1).

10.2.2 Summary of the Research Findings

The key research findings are summarised below under a number of themes:

1. Sense of Place. The research question was posed in a specific locality – the English town centre. A pragmatic approach was taken to identify the location through the LPA physical definition of the town centre, in their local plan, for the purpose of the case studies (2.6.2 & 3.2). Participants in the case studies identified the town centre as having a broader civic and social role than other formats, such as shopping centres or retail/leisure parks, a place where all socio-economic groups come together (Otsuka 2004, p.313; Hubbard 2017). Participants reflected on the physical and psychological elements of place, as well as the identity and history of the town centre. For example, Loughborough is an identifiable '*market town*' (6.3.3); and, Stevenage is a '*pioneering*' place, being the first post-war new town (although the history of and built form of Stevenage as a settlement can be traced much further back) (7.3.3). The research found that place theory is of particular salience when re-imagining, and re-interpreting existing town centres, planning new town centres, as well creating and/or defining networks and hierarchies of centres (3.2). This research finding confirms the importance of urban design principles, such as: active frontages, permeability, legibility etc. (Jacobs 1961; Lynch 1972; Butina Watson & Bentley 2007; Varna & Tiesdell 2010; Carmona 2013; Montgomery 2015; Carmona, 2021).

2. The 'value' of the town centre. The government's response to maintain the *relevance* of the town centre, through P2 and P3 has been remarkably consistent with a focus on commercial '*viability*' (see Chapter Two, 2.4 & 2.6)(Soules 2014; Dolega et al. 2021). The simplification of place misunderstands the '*value*' that can be generated

through the social '*vitality*', and diversity of mixed uses (including homes), identity of place, and is linked to the character and quality of design (Butina Watson and Bentley 2007; Varna 2010; Montgomery 2015; Sim 2019; Carmona 2014&2019)(9.4). This research, and the experience of the researcher in practice, finds that the additional '*value*' of the town centre comes from a complex mix of variables. Identifying the *value* of the town centre is problematic, the tentative findings from this research point to its *value* arising out of the town centre as an: '*authentic, complex social, civic and commercial ecosystem'* (9.2.1: Policy: Recommendation three). Further research is required to capture the physical, psychological and emotional metrics and indicators to better understand *value* (Savills 2021). Furthermore, for the metrics and indicators to be effective they would have to measure social and civic '*vitality*' as well as commercial '*viability*' across all formats (Table 1.1). It is posited that theoretical debate around the relative '*value*', of all formats, will underpin the ability to practically deliver and manage sustainable socially '*vital*' and commercially '*viable*' town centres (10.6, point 3).

3. Think 'Big' – a new market setting. This research has found that the market in which town centres operate now to deliver town centre uses are currently the wrong kind, that they have become '*stuck*' (Mazzucato 2018). Looking at town centres in isolation to the wider yet to be defined market (9.2.1: Recommendation One), which includes retail and leisure developments outside the town centre and virtual space, skews the way in which an effective response can be determined (Table 2.7). This means that the government's current ability to effectively analyse and develop proposals to respond to the crisis and ensure that some town centres do not disappear altogether is confused.

This finding agrees with the theoretical proposition that for town centres to remain *relevant* there must be both a social and commercial reasons to visit them (Jacobs 1961; Gehl 2011; Carmona 2021, p.23; Rao & Dovey 2021, p.1). For the problems facing town centres to be effectively addressed it is now necessary to actively create and shape a new market which

includes all formats (Table 1.1) (Mazzucato 2015; Mazzucato 2018). This would safeguard places that deliver town centre uses, so that all parts of society have access for essential goods and services, minimising the risk of food deserts and spatial inequalities. There is scope, in research and practice, to define what are considered to be 'town centre uses', where those uses should be permitted to operate, and in what format.

4. *A relevant town centre*. Within any newly defined market (point 3) the continued *relevance* of town centres calls for a rebalancing of the commercial, cultural, civic and social aspects of place (Marakakis et al. 2022). This means that there should be a rebalancing of uses, including new homes as part of the mix of uses horizontally and vertically (Table:8.2), with finer granularity, permeability and legibility – celebrating the unique features of place (Carmona 2013; Montgomery 2015; Dolega et al. 2021)(9.4).

In Chapter Three (Table:3.8) a provisional definition of *relevance* was proposed for the purpose of the research:

RELEVANCE

The physical and psychological perception of the quality of place: that has to do with its usefulness, meaning, and attractiveness to people as an identifiable hub for cultural, social, functional and economic needs and wants.

The research findings suggest that this definition is sound. However, the term '*people*' in the definition has increased in significance as events have moved on with, for example, the impact of C-19 disrupting the way we use places. The crisis facing the town centre, following the completion of the primary research, has intensified and changed thus highlighting further the dynamic nature of the subject matter (Dolega et al. 2021, p. 134) (9.6). The proposals in the planning White Paper (2020) (9.8.1(iii)) shift the focus further towards a neo-liberal political ideology (Marshall 2020, Marshall 2022), driving proposed fundamental change to the planning system. The way that stakeholders would interact with the planning process, and their ability to influence decision making at key points in the

development cycle would become reduced, and so it seems more important to define who the '*people*' are, and what role they should have. The research findings suggest that there is a plethora of '*people*', with a myriad of conscious and non-conscious '*needs and wants*' and that they can be active or passive players (see CH6,7&8). A key finding of this research is that there should be improved governance and opportunities for involvement in placemaking, and decision taking across the community (See point 7, below). In this way town centres should be seen as being inclusive places, available to all of the community. Therefore, the problem requires further investigation within the context of Lefebvre's question of who has the '*right to the city*', or in this case who has the *right* to the town centre? (Lefebvre 1967).

5. *Funding and investment*. Evidence from the research suggests that there is uncertainty in local government regarding both funding, and potential investment for town centres (National Infrastructure Commission 2021)(9.8.1(ii)). Funding and investment are linked here, as they are an essential part of the '*vital*' and '*viable*' cycle discussed in Chapter Three (3.3), but for clarity are examined as individual variables.

Funding – the case studies indicate that the austerity policies post 2010 have had a negative impact on the ability of the public sector to manage, maintain, and improve the built environment in town centres (2.6.1). The research is limited to the two in depth case studies, so the impact of austerity measures on town centres in general cannot be gauged through the work. However, the process for LAs to access additional funding from the government has been the same for all town centres (9.8.1(ii))(May et al. 2009). How funding requirements are identified and allocated is a particularly pressing area for further examination, which should include an investigation into effective governance structures (Fee et al.2021).

Investment – one interviewee said it is difficult to '*see'* where commercial investment for some town centres will come from in the short/medium term (9.2.2:(PI)), this is of

particular concern in sectors of the economy where there is a contraction in the need for traditional bricks and mortar space, such as retail and office sectors (2.6.3)(HCLG, 2019). The trend to move to virtual formats and other physical formats (see table 2.7) further challenges the quantum of retail and commercial floorspace, and types of operators who will trade from a town centre setting, which suggests the need for careful curatorship across all formats (9.5.1).

Furthermore, attracting funding and/or new development is not just a question of investment at any cost (2.6). It should be about securing sustainable investment for the future of the town centre. Evidence from the research has highlighted the move to a simplified built form in the town centre, through the development of big box mono-use structures for particular purposes (for example, the need of the end user – retail sheds and car parks) in P2 and through P3 (2.4&2.6). There is, therefore, an opportunity to further investigate the theoretical and practical 'value' of mixed use in social as well as commercial terms. Part of a debate on the value of mixed-use should examine whether too much reliance on specific commercial sectors creates risk and unnecessary complexity to respond to crisis or change, as discussed below.

6. *Adaptive resilience - agility to respond to crises and change*. Key to the survival and revival of the town centre is the finding that there is not one solution or approach capable of resolving the crises facing town centres, and that it cannot be resolved through place management alone (2.6.2)(Wrigley & Dolega 2012; Martin & Sunley 2012; Wrigley 2014). The research identified an opportunity to guide and influence practice through the theoretical findings by adapting the ARM as a research framework into a model that might be implemented in practice – the PARM (9.5) – to develop an adaptive resilience strategic response for town centres, as well as networks and hierarchies of centres.

7. *Governance, stewardship and involvement.* The current planning system and decision-making process is localised and opaque (9.2.1: Policy: Recommendation

One)(Ravenscroft 2000). Typically (and in the case of the case study locations, CH6&7), a spatial plan above that of the arbitrary boundary of the LPA does not exist, this means that policy relating to hierarchy and networks of centres cannot be practically implemented (8.3.1(ii))(Ellis & Henderson 2016). The term 'management' or 'place management' is often used in relation to the town centre, but there is, in reality, no management process in the conventional sense and, therefore, no identifiable accountable or responsible body (2.6.2). A theoretical approach of curatorship for the town centre is proposed, at various levels of governance, such as – national, regional and local (9.2.2). As set out in point 4 (above), governance form should come from an examination of *who* has the *right* to the town centre, and could be part of an experimental process (Lefebvre 1967). A framework for wide involvement in the development of a *people*, as well as a *place* based response to the adaptive resilience across commercial, social, civic and economic needs and wants should be a statutory requirement.

10.2.3 Limitations of the Research

The research topic represents a broad and shifting problem, on which the researcher sought to catch the 'reality-in-flight' (Pettigrew 1998). The primary research has provided a 'snap-shot' in time, and, due to the dynamic characteristics of the town centre, was only a truly accurate 'picture' at the time of the data collection of the case studies. However, the analysis of place was forensic, and captured a data set from which real themes emerged and could be analysed to produce tentative conclusions and recommendations. The testing of the recommendations with experts in their field found that they were salient and relevant to the participants (9.5(a)).

As alluded to above, the research included a series of interviews with experts with in-depth knowledge of the research problem as well as observations collated from numerous formal and informal meetings. Closer attention to the 'voice' of individuals might have added richness to the data collected and analysed; adding nuance to the interpretation, allowing

greater understanding of how decisions are taken or shaped from the point of view of the individual and not only their declared professional or political position. In this way opening-up further insight into how decisions might be influenced by personal and individual perceptions, as well as offering an indication of the decision maker's values. More focus on the 'voice' may have offered an opportunity to analyse the 'informal' and 'formal' meetings in regard to the relative power relationship between stakeholders, rather than assuming that those interrelationships are simply a consequence of professional and political values, and consequences. This approach may also have added a further dimension to the findings and conclusions; through a reflection of the motives of stakeholders, and their capacity to both understand and respond to the complexity of the challenges to the *relevance* of the town centre, in the context of the town centre being a unique, complex and dynamic place.

However, the research was not designed with this ethnographic perspective in mind, and whilst an attempt has been made to amplify and give due regard to 'the voice' of individual interviewees and so on, this has been treated with caution.

It should be stressed that the basis of this inquiry was from the related fields of planning and urban design. However, there are other factors and variables that could have an impact on the '*vitality*' and '*viability*' of town centres, but were out of the scope of the research, for example the role of taxation (such as business rates or the suggested 'virtual tax' relating to on-line retail).

This research adopted the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian approach to the study of public life, following empirical and a pragmatic methodology (3.2 & 5.3). The method borrowed much from the approach of Gehl (2001, 2010 and 2013) to analyse place, Zeisel (2006) through inquiry by design, and from Schon's (1983) concept of the Reflective Practitioner. This means that the majority of the data was collected using qualitative methods (as described in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Greater use of mixed methods, blending qualitative

and quantitative methods of data collection, could arguably have offered further insights. However, greater use of quantitative methods was discounted due to a number of considerations relating to the way in which data is collected by the private and public sector, these are:

(i) available quantitative data – there are a number of commercial research companies (CRC) that collect and publish data relating to town centres. However, the CRC focus on the commercial 'viability' of sectors of the economy and, crucially for this research, do not relate to the social 'vitality' of the town centre. Furthermore, the methodology employed by the CRC and data is not publicly available (Dolega et al. 2021, p.135)(5.4 & Table 5.9); and,

(ii) data in the public domain – national government (including the Office of National Statistics) data is publicly available, and it is used in this thesis to inform the discussion relating to the challenges facing the English town centres in general - at the macro generic level (Table 4.6). The data is not sufficiently granular to be used at the local level in the case studies. Local government does collect data, for example through the Authorities Monitoring Report, and the researcher used some of the data to inform the research. However, as one interviewee reflected: '….*local authorities no longer have the capacity, or required skill sets to collect and analyse appropriate data sets*' (PH).

It is that last point relating to 'appropriate data' that is apposite here. The ARM is developed through this thesis as a new method of investigation. Furthermore, a revised set of 'indicators' of the 'health' of the town centre were proposed (Fig.4.18). Therefore, a predominantly qualitative methodology using a hybrid deductive and inductive approach was considered to be the most suitable strategy to effectively address the research question.

It might be, as proposed in 10.4(i), through further application and testing of the ARM that greater use of qualitative methods will become relevant. When considering the appropriate

methods for this research it was felt that qualitative methods were most appropriate for the in-depth case study approach grounded in place-theory. It is acknowledged that as the research is expanded across multiple sites (10.4(i)), and allowing for a longitudinal approach, that new and existing quantitative measures could be used and developed further, thereby enabling comparison and benchmarking across a number of town centres. However, it was concluded that a method based more on qualitative methods would have added little to the data collected and analysed as part of this research.

The empirical element of the research programme was affected by events outside the researcher's control, for example the uncertainties around Brexit (2.6), and latterly the C-19 crisis (9.6.2). Ironically, this may make the need for the research greater - in particular the ARM and PARM approaches in theory and practice. Furthermore, a significant change to the planning system is being proposed through the White Paper: Planning for the Future (MHCLG, 2020). The dynamic nature of the research, and the operational environment in which it has been carried out called for adaptation and showed the need for agility.

Finally, one limitation of this research that was acknowledged from the outset – specifically in the discussion of research methods – has to do with the number and selection of cases. There is always a balance to be struck between breadth and depth in social science – and in this case urban studies – research. The focus of two cases allowed richness of narrative, and a full exploration of variables, at the expense of drawing generalizable conclusions around the interplay of such variables as they might apply elsewhere. However, the purpose was also to develop a method of analysis – of diagnosis and prescription – which required the in-depth approach taken here, to fully reveal what variables might be in play and in what ways. The contribution to knowledge resides both in the insights about particular case that the study has generated, and also in the new method – ARM – that is demonstrated in the research.

10.3 Application of the Recommendations

This research is focussed on a real-life problem, and from the outset, the research was designed and intended to test whether a theoretical approach and a methodology could be developed that might lead to practical applications. However, this might be challenging, as it would require a significant review and change in practice (9.5).

10.3.1 Synergising the Theoretical with the Practical (see Appendix IV)

The research findings show that the 'value' of the town centre comes from its being an '*authentic, complex social, civic and commercial ecosystem'*, which is not replicated by other formats. Consequently, there needs to be a paradigm shift in the way that the problem of the town centre as a phenomenon is addressed. Such a shift should be based on the following proposition:

1. New Theory – *Complexity of Urban Ecology*:

*the Town Centre - is **the** focal point within a complex ecological system of a network of hubs which meet the civic, social and commercial needs and wants of all of the community*.

2. New theoretical concepts of the *INTRICATE* town centre (9.4).

The concepts of the *INTRICATE* town centre were developed through this research to suggest a way of addressing the challenges identified in P2 and P3 of the historical framework – from the 1970s to 2020s. However, events in the latter part of the research programme suggest that the town centre has entered an entirely new phase:

Phase Four, 2000-20??: Brexit uncertainty, further impact of virtual space on physical space and the Covid-19 crisis.

The need for the new concepts of the *INTRICATE* to shape town centres and create a true hierarchy and network of centres is even more pressing in the context of the problems faced in this rapidly emerging period of uncertainty (9.3.1, Table 9.3).

10.3.2 Limitations of the Recommendations

The current economic, political and policy environment does not provide a clear space for a new theoretical concept to inform strategy and policy in practice; it would seem likely that this would require regulation and change in the current market structure to develop a symbiotic relationship across the formats. The White Paper (2020), for example, on the face of it seeks to reinforce the neo-liberal ideology and deregulation of the planning system, specifically through increase permitted development rights and revised use-class (Marshall 2020). This thesis finds that there is an absence of effective governance in relation to the town centre, but there is little evidence of an appetite for fundamental change or further regulation. The government focus remains on the 'management' of the town centre/High Street, in which funding is for specific and relatively short-term projects. Therefore, there are impediments to find a place, or network of places, to carry out the practical experimentation of the implementation of the *INTRICATE* town centre concept would be problematic due to the prevailing governance structures and reliance on place-management.

10.4 Original Contribution to Knowledge

In addition to the proposed agenda for future research, (10.6) this work makes a contribution to new knowledge relating to town centres in four areas:

(i) *new method of investigation* – the ARM is a bespoke model which was developed following the findings from the literature review, and influenced by the practice experience of the researcher. It provides a research framework that can be replicated through case studies of town centres, and used to diagnose issues, providing a framework for prescribing a practice-based response to adaptive resilience in town centres. In addition, the ARM offers an adaptable method with which to compare and contrast town centres through the further research. This offers further understanding of the challenges facing the town centre and advances learning through the analysis of a rich data source. Furthermore, the ARM can be used at varying morphological scales (plot, street, district, etc.) and across all physical formats (including necessary infrastructure for virtual operations). Such a method would be of particular benefit in identifying networks, and hierarchies of places that are commercially '*viable*' for town centre uses.

(ii) *historical framework* – the research has proposed a theoretical framework through which the relevant literature relating to the research question can be interrogated, and through which the changing relationship between commercial '*viability*' and social '*vitality*' is mapped in order to answer the research question effectively.

(iii) *new theory* - As set out in Chapter Two (2.4&2.6), a prevailing theory was found to have emerged in P2 which was then accepted in both P2 and P3, that for town centres to be competitive they:

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should be better managed, through private-public partnerships that focus on the experience of the customer: following a place management approach, adopting the commercial practices of the privately owned assets like the mall, retail and leisure parks (Table 2.9).

This research suggests that for town centres to remain relevant requires a new conceptualisation through the theory of the *Complexity of Urban Ecology* (9.3):

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*the town Centre - is **the** focal point within a complex ecological system of a network of hubs which meet the civic, social and commercial needs and wants of all of the community* (Table 9.2).

(iv) *new theoretical concept* – the *INTRICATE* concept: is a response to the findings of the research. It seeks to celebrate the complexity of the urban centre as an eco-system, which puts the needs of people first. To achieve this would require a different approach to the way places are valued. The *INTRICATE* concept (9.3.1) offers a new way of looking at, and responding to, the crises facing the town centre as it enters the next Phase – Phase Four. The concept bridges the theoretical findings of the research and offers a process for practical application (George & Bennett 2005; Carmona 2019).

10.5 Autobiographical Reflections

The motivation for this research came from the experience of the researcher of the problem in practice and the opportunity was seen as providing a test to the concept of the 'reflective practitioner': (i) developing new skills as a 'trainee researcher'; as well as, (ii) suggesting research insights and new knowledge that could be transferred from theory into practice (Schon 1987). Pursuing this research, in combination with working part-time, in the fields of planning and urban design, has offered an invaluable and unique insight into the challenges facing a real-life problem. This has allowed a more reflective and rigorous approach to investigate the critical situation facing town centres.

The experience of pursuing the research has also thrown up an understanding of the demands and particular conundrum of blending academic research, with a part-time career

in practice. Balancing the demands of research and practice has been problematic, unlike some other disciplines in which the value of linking research and practice is considered to be symbiotic, and beneficial (Carmona 2020). A further challenge has been the constantly shifting problem facing town centres, which seems to have quickened and intensified in recent years. Looking at the challenge through the lens of a reflective practitioner has, as a researcher and a consultant, arguably given privileged access to the challenges and how they affect the research problem in a real-world context.

10.6 An Agenda for Future Research

Six key areas for future research are proposed:

1. *Reflective Practitioner* – to investigate the potential benefits of a more nuanced relationship between practice and research, along the lines of teaching hospitals. To blend the relationship between research and practice: to synergise research, practice and theory (Appendix IV) (Schon 1983; George & Bennett 2005; Carmona 2020).

2. *Planning history promoted as a specialist field* - investigate the role of 'historical planning', evaluating the opportunity for analysis through historical frameworks as a 'core planning methodology' (as used in this research (see chapter two)), to synthesise theory with practice (Ward et al. 2011).

3. *Further testing and implementation of the ARM* - further research using the ARM to develop the concept of the *INTRICATE* town centre; investigate the benefits of a network of places; and test the 'appropriateness' and sustainability of all formats and further develop an understanding of the 'value' of place. The theoretical testing of the ARM (and the PARM) could include an investigation into the refinement of the model so that it can be replicated and implemented by other researchers and practitioners.

4. *How differing groups in society use the town centre and the relevance of the place to them* – this research finds that there is an opportunity for further investigation, within the context of Lefebvre's question who has the 'right to the city', or in this case who has the right to the town centre (Lefebvre 1967) (10.2.2, point 4). It is proposed that an area for future research will be to examine the perceived or potential relationships of differing groups, and the *relevance* of the town centre for them.

5. *Capturing the social and community 'value' of the town centre, as an inclusive place* – this research, and the experience of the researcher in practice, show that there is a need for further research into the social and community '*value*' or '*values'* of the town centre. The opportunity for further research into social and community '*value*' of space cuts across a number of the research findings as set out above (10.2.2), in particular point 2 but also relevant to points 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

6. *Research beyond the English experience* – the geographic focus of this research is the English town centre (2.1). However, the challenge to the *relevance* of the urban centre is not a phenomenon unique to England; nor are the policies, strategies, and tactics to address the challenges facing urban centres. There is, therefore, the potential for future research into the European and wider International experience; to investigate if there are successful approaches that could be learned from, or adapted for the English town centre, and vice versa.

10.7 Concluding Thoughts

The environment in which the town centre now operates is increasingly complex and unpredictable (Larco 2021:137 & Dolega et al. 2021:146). This research sought to increase our understanding of how the challenge, and in some places the crisis, is having an impact on the *relevance* (Table 3.6) of the town centre in time and space (Lynch 1972; Carmona 2013). The evolution of the town centre was analysed through an historical framework

over the period from 1945 to the early 2020s. This analysis demonstrates that there was a significant shift in the relationship between the social and civic *vitality*, and the commercial *viability* of the town centre; with commercial *viability* of a place becoming the dominant factor by Phase 2 (1979-2007) (see 2.2). The dominance of commercial *viability*, and the particular impact on the *relevance* of the town centre accelerated through Phase 3 (2007-20020) as other formats (Table 1.1) became available and commercially *viable* options for what were exclusively '*town centre*' uses at the start of Phase One (1945-1979). As alluded to above, analysis carried out using the historical framework found that the evolution of the town centre post 1945 can be organised into a number of sequential phases.

This research finds that although the challenge to the *relevance* of the town centre changed and accelerated through Phase 3, the response to the challenge remained remarkably similar to the strategic and policy response that emerged in Phase 2 (2.4.3) which sought to respond to the challenges through place management strategies and tactics (2.4.4); and introspective policy which largely ignored other formats, both physical and virtual (2.4.5 and 2.6.2). It is proposed that as this research concluded the town centre entered into a new Phase – Phase 4 (2020-202?). However, the strategic and policy response as articulated through the White Paper (9.4.1) and the NPPF (2.6.2) indicates little change to respond to the evolving challenges as the response is increasingly set within the confines of neo-liberal ideology (Marshall 2020; Marshall 2022). Therefore, the findings and conclusions from this research are timely in seeking to offer an alternative set of new proposals based on place theory. The following paragraphs set out the new contributions to knowledge in place theory and practice.

This research employed an empirical methodology: which included a hybrid deductive and inductive approach guided by a conceptual analytical framework – the Adaptive Resilience Model (ARM) (Fig.5.1). The ARM framework was used to direct the research through in-

depth case studies of two English town centres: Stevenage and Loughborough. The findings from the ARM were interrogated using both a *macro* and *micro* lens (Table 4.6); enabling the findings to be grouped into those issues which are likely to impact most (if not all) town centres, and those issues that were specific to the case study locations.

The ARM is a novel method for the theoretical investigation of a real life problem, the challenge to the continued *relevance* of the English town centre as a social and civic, as well as a commercial hub (Table 3.3). Through the methodical research process a novel and preliminary new theory of the *Complexity of Urban Ecology* is posited. Along-side this new theory a theoretical concept was introduced - the *INTRICATE* town centre. A number of further proposals relating to strategic and policy recommendations were proposed, which could be developed for use in practice (Schon 1983; Parker et al 2017; Carmona, 2019). A further contribution of the thesis is to seek an effective way in which to create a symbiotic method to merge the theory focussed conceptual analytical framework (ARM) with an analytical model that can be used in practice – the Practical Adaptive Resilience Model (PARM) (Fig 4.1). Arguably, there will be additional value through further development and testing of the Adaptive Resilience Model in theory (and, potentially, in practice), as an easily replicable approach for the analysis of dynamic places which are complex social, civic and commercial ecosystems.

The outcomes from this research are not intended, and could never be suggested to be, a definitive solution to the challenge facing the continued *relevance* of the town centre as a civic, social and commercial hub (Table 9.2). Rather, that the thesis offers further data, evidence and thoughts to the discussion of the research problem (9.3). The findings demonstrate that the town centre is a *unique* place that is of *value* to communities, which other consumption formats do not replicate – whether they might seek to replicate the social and community offer of the town centre in the future is a moot point. The fact that some town centres (or parts of them) have been consciously developed to mimic the

commercial space of the mall and retail park, with big box mono-use built form, is ironic and points to the focus on commercialisation and asset management (2.4.1) (Soules 2014; Mazzucato 2015). The research, therefore, calls for the *value* of the town centre to be re-evaluated; where the *value* of the town centre is not captured through commercial metrics and indicators alone. The worth of the town centre should be assessed on the right of all the community to access a place (Lefebvre 1967) that is recognisable as the social, civic and commercial hub which has provision for the needs and wants of all of the community. The research findings indicate that this will increase the *value* of the space symbiotically in terms of the social and community benefits, as well as the commercial return on investment.

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Appendix I: examples of semi-structured interviews and presentation of recommendations

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the response of participants to the in-depth semi-structured interviews and the recommendations. The section is organised in four parts:

Appendix I(a)	questions for the semi-structured interviews
Appendix I(b)	recommendations
	(i) micro-specific and macro-generic, Loughborough;
	(ii) micro-specific and macro-generic, Stevenage
	(iii) macro-generic only
Appendix I(c)	examples of interview transcription: (i) Participant D1 (PD1), and (ii) Participant F1 (PF1)
Appendix I(d)	Overview of responses from Participants as quoted in the thesis.

Appendix I(a) questions for the semi-structured interviews

1. In your experience are town centres important places, and what challenges do town centres face now and in the future?

Possible probe: how can town centres remain relevant (in relation to other physical and virtual places) in the near and longer term?

2. What do the terms ‘vitality’ and ‘viability’, in relation to the town centre, mean to you – if anything?

Possible probe: do you consider the terms to be helpful and/or meaningful?

[Depending on answer to 2, could skip]

3. It is suggested that for a town centre to be healthy it needs to be socially ‘vital’ and commercially ‘viable’ – do you agree with this definition?

Possible probe: would you say that social ‘vitality’ or commercial ‘viability’ is most dominant or important? Would you say that ‘vitality’ or ‘viability’ is most important?

Place

4. In your opinion is the quality of the built environment a consideration when choosing to visit or not to visit a town centre?

Possible probe: how would you rate the quality of the built environment of BLANK town (both public/private open spaces and buildings) on a scale of 1-10 (one being lowest) and how have you arrived at that conclusion?

5. Does the quality of a place influence your choice of visiting that place and how long you might spend there?

Possible probe: can you give an example of a place that you only visit because you have to and one where you visit because you want to – what are the main differences?

Deliverability

6. There is a strategy for the town centre, which is being updated, and the BID recently secured a second term. How effectively are the actions and regeneration objectives being delivered?

Possible probe: what is or could hold back growth or regeneration in the town centre? What would you prioritise and focus on?

7. Where should the funding for town centre growth or regeneration of strategic town centre development come from – the private or the public sector?

Possible probe: should there be public sector intervention where, for instance there is market failure? Would you support funding, grant or compulsory purchase orders?

8. Do you consider that ‘mixed use’ development would be positive for the ‘health’ of town centres?

Possible probe: are there any town centre uses, in your opinion, that should be the main focus? (Town Centre Uses - A1 shops; A2 financial and professional services; A3 restaurants and café; A 4 drinking establishments; A5 hot food takeaways – also, including (mainly c class) residential or other use.).

Management

9. In your opinion, is there a coordinated approach to the ‘management’ of the town centre?

Possible probe: is it clear to the customer who is responsible for each aspect of the ‘management’ of the town centre?

10. Is the management of the town centre transparent and accountable?

Possible probe: if you had a complaint about the town centre – who would you contact?

Identity

11. Can you capture the identity of the town centre and sketch it for me in words?

Possible probe: how do you know that ‘image’ and ‘marketing’, if you use it, are having a beneficial effect? If you are not using ‘image’ and ‘marketing’ is that an agreed strategy – who leads on it?

Adaptive Resilience

12. There is a concept of ‘adaptive resilience’ that has mainly been used at a national and regional economic development level. In general terms it considers how a place can react to disaster or significant economic shock. 2007/8 witnessed the rapid increase of virtual space, the credit crisis and subsequent period of austerity. How did BLANK town centre respond?

13. Do you consider that the town centre can ‘bounce back’ (i.e. regain the ground that it lost due to recession and changes in consumer behaviour – out of town and virtual space); or, that it will ‘bounce forward’ (i.e. adapt to the new circumstances and re-adjust socially and commercially).

Concluding Thoughts

14. Drawing on your personal and professional experience: do you consider that town centres can remain relevant in a challenging social, political and economic environment?

Question #	Theme	Anticipated Data
1	General Question	Participant's view on the current role of town centres.
1 PROBE	General Question	Probing question on the ability of town centres to remain relevant spatial entities.
2	General Question	Relevance of 'vital' and viable' as terms to the participant.
2 PROBE	General Question	Have the terms 'vital' and 'viable' any real meaning to the participant i.e. buzzwords.
3	General Question	Participant's view on whether it is important for town centres to be 'vital' and 'viable'.
3PROBE	General Question	Participant's view on the relationship and dominance of the terms 'vital' and 'viable'.
4	Place	Influence of quality of built environment on the participant's actions and perception of other people's actions.
4 PROBE	Place	The participant's view on the value of the quality of the built environment.
5	Place	The impact of the quality of the built environment and the influence that this has on the participant's decisions.
5 PROBE	Place	Places that the participant has to go, as opposed to a place that they chose to go.
6	Deliverability	Effectiveness of local policy and strategy.
6 PROBE	Deliverability	What frustrates regeneration and what would the participant focus on.
7	Deliverability	The participant's view on the funding source for regeneration.
7 PROBE	Deliverability	Should there be intervention for market failure, etc.
8	Deliverability	The participant's view on mixed-use development in town centres.
8 PROBE	Deliverability	What should the mix of uses be, including residential and other, or just A class.
9	Management	Participant's view on the joined-up management of place.
9 PROBE	Management	Participant's view on governance and responsibility.
10	Management	Participant's view on the accountability and transparency of management of the town centre.
10 PROBE	Management	Do customers know who to contact for service delivery.
11	Identity	Is there a tangible and descriptive identity for the place – in the opinion of the participant.
11 PROBE	Identity	Is identity being progressed through the promotion of the unique features of the place?
12	Adaptive Resilience (scenario testing)	Drawing on the data from the diagnostic framework - the participant's view on the ability of the town centre to be resilient and adapt to change.
13	Adaptive Resilience (scenario testing)	Drawing on the data from the diagnostic framework - the participant's view on the ability of town centre(s) to 'bounce forward'.
14	Concluding Thoughts (scenario testing)	Drawing on the data from the diagnostic framework - the participant's view on the potential for town centres to remain relevant in the future.

Appendix I(b): Recommendations - (i) micro-specific and macro-generic, Loughborough

Local Recommendation One

Loughborough town centre future task force (LM001:(i))
A town centre focussed partnership, bringing together key public and private sector actors as well as community focussed groups, to develop an adaptive resilient approach, so that the town centre can adapt to change and crisis. The *Loughborough town centre future task force* should be an interim measure (until M001:(ii) is implemented). It would normalise the approach and be administered by an accountable public-sector body reporting at least annually to the local community. The form of the *Loughborough town centre future task force* would be decided by the partners and may evolve over time (for example: formalised partnership with memorandum of understanding, a company, an LLP, etc.).

Local Recommendation Two

Loughborough town centre local adaptive resilience framework
The adaptive resilience framework should be a spatial plan (building on the town centre masterplan (2018) work), for the future aspirations of the town centre, which sets out a path to promote adaptive resilience. The framework would be organised over a timeframe, and be reviewed annually (as part of the annual community monitoring approach). The timeframe of the adaptive resilience framework should be such as to enable a strategic approach to develop a proactive adaptive resilience plan. Therefore, it should look at the long-term (11-30 years), the medium-term (3-10 years) and the short-term (1-2 years); accepting, of course, that longer term planning would be less precise. Thereby offering a planning mechanism to prepare for key pressures. These include, climate change; population growth; and, structural physical issues can be addressed, for example: the future

of the big box mono-use areas of the town centre; resolution of the vehicle and pedestrian conflict in the town centre, including the removal of the inner relief road; increasing the economic resilience of the town through more mixed-use development, including good quality new homes.

SHORT TERM								MEDIUM TERM								LONG TERM
YEAR ONE				YEAR TWO				YEAR								YEARS
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	YR10	YR11-YR30

Local Recommendation Three

Loughborough town centre strategic asset management plan
The town centre strategic asset management framework (LSAMP) is designed to be a delivery mechanism for the regeneration framework, enabling a practical approach to understand the aspirations of landowners, identify opportunities for inward investment, flag up risks and develop a proactive implementation approach. The Partnership could look to develop an asset delivery vehicle, as the work of the *Loughborough town centre future task force* is progressed. This approach allows a targeted approach to assets that are (i) in public ownership, through initiatives such as One Public Estate; and, (ii) in private ownership.

Local Recommendation Four

All business is local – support local business
As part of the strategic response to the future form and function of Loughborough town centre an adaptive resilience approach to town centre uses would be key, to develop a more

diverse socially ‘vital’ and commercially ‘viable’ economy The aim would be to encourage and enable a more diverse economy, that delivers a mix of commercial and social uses (including homes):

- diverse social and commercial ecology: review and rationalise inward investment; and,
- Loughborough business: all business is local, so focus on the local needs of business, suppliers and customers.

Local Recommendation Five

Experience and time of activity

It is recommended that the type of uses in the town centre are expanded, and intensified, to expand activities across a longer time span to encourage resilience. In general terms, the time of activity town centre, follows the operational hours of the two dominant economic uses - retail, and commercial leisure.

Greater emphasis should be given to the creation of a more ‘liveable’ town centre, with a mix of uses both vertically and horizontally, and bring forward the growth in the number and variety of homes available in the town centre (Table 8.2). It is important that the new homes are high quality, and well designed, so that they are desirable places for a cross section of the community, and to avoid the concentration of any one group (for example, student accommodation).

Opportunities to explore home working should be taken in the design of residential space. These should include appropriate technology to support new ways of working and that homes are designed, with sufficient space to accommodate a healthy mix of live and work activities -for example making sure that there is sufficient space for living and working. Options to expand new ways of working within the town centre, along with collaboration

to increase enterprise and innovation, should be explored with institutions such as the University of Loughborough, other higher education providers and business focussed groups. This should include an innovative approach to continuous learning and exhibiting, to celebrate the unique character of Loughborough through investment in such as art, both formal and informal.

With a more diverse mix of uses, including residential, the local economy would be less reliant on the retail and commercial leisure sectors for the commercial 'viability', and result in an improvement of resilience in Loughborough town centre.

Local Recommendation Six

Improve the quality of the built environment

The town centre of Loughborough is no longer 'vital', as there are now other physical and virtual formats that people can use for *necessary* activities. This means that it is of greater importance for the quality of the physical environment to be good. The case study analysed a number of elements that make-up the built environment of the town, that might, or ought to, influence the decision making process of potential users to visit the town centre. This area is one in which the local authorities have the most responsibility and control, that are specific to Loughborough, and could be implemented locally:

- *re-connecting the town centre*. Loughborough town centre should be a hub where other strategic and key parts of the community and economy can be accessed by walking, cycling or public transport. This is particularly important within the town centre and railway station corridor, which is of poor quality, and where priority is given to trips by car.
- *Locally distinctive Loughborough*. The built form of Loughborough is a key part of the town centre's authentic character, as an established market town. Stakeholders

could adopt a *Loughborough palette* as part of Loughborough design guide to manage and influence the design of future development.

- *Places between buildings (streets and squares)*. Key places and spaces - the design and management of the public realm in Loughborough town centre is poor. These are the areas that have a particular impact on the perception of whether the place is well managed and safe. There has been a lack of investment in the public realm in Loughborough, which has resulted in badly managed and poorly designed places and spaces. Addressing this should be a key priority area for local investment. A programme of coordinated projects to enhance and improve key places and spaces should be developed and implemented. This would be an achievable goal, although it may call for reprioritisation or additional funding.
- *Formal and not so formal art*. Space should be made available for the temporary, or more permanent pieces of local art. This could support the image and identity of Loughborough town centre as a unique place to visit.
- *Big box format areas*. The LPA should work proactively with the landowners and operators, to minimise the negative impact of the mono-use big box areas. Specific examples include The Rushes, the J. Sainsbury site, Baxter Gate and Regent's Place and the Magistrates' building, on the edge of the town centre. The LPA and partners should review the impact that poor design has on the quality of the built environment, the experience of users and the identity of the town centre. The quality and form of the built environment is of particular importance as the need to visit the town centre has reduced.
- *Vehicular traffic passing through the town centre*. Vehicular traffic using the town centre as a through route should be prevented. This is particularly so in the inner ring road and the route to and from the railway station. The redundant road network should be repurposed for environmental improvements, and to enhance the

walkability and cycle-ability of the town centre. This would include investment in the social ecosystem, to develop a more natural place and space for people to move around.

- *Improve gateways into the town centre and remove barriers to pedestrian movement*. This is important to provide a sense of arrival, being able to move around and the quality of the environment. This should include a redesign of vehicular dominated junctions to give the pedestrian priority and remove clutter from the streets.

Appendix I(b): Recommendations - (ii) micro-specific and macro-generic, Stevenage

Local Recommendation One

Stevenage town centre future task force
Build on the success of the partnerships to regenerating the town centre. Formalise the partnership further to de-risk and attract public and private investment, for example by creating a legal structure along the lines of the Urban Development Corporation, a limited company, LLP, etc. Stevenage town centre, in line with its '*pioneering*' history as the first new town, should be used as a test-bed and create a blue-print for adaptive resilience-building an innovative approach to a renaissance for town centres.

Local Recommendation Two

Stevenage town centre local adaptive resilience framework
The adaptive resilience framework should refresh the regeneration framework, building on the Stevenage Central framework, for the future aspirations of the town centre which sets out a path to create adaptive resilience. The framework would be organised over a timeframe and be reviewed annually, as part of the annual community monitoring. The timeframe of the Regeneration Framework should enable a strategic approach to a responsive adaptive resilience plan. Therefore, the timeframe should look at the long-term 11-30 years, the medium-term 3-10 years and the short-term 1-2 years; accepting, of course, that longer term planning will be less precise, but offer a planning mechanism to prepare for key pressures, such as climate change and population growth.

SHORT TERM								MEDIUM TERM								LONG TERM
YEAR ONE				YEAR TWO				YEAR								YEARS
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	YR10	YR11-YR30

Local Recommendation Three

Stevenage town centre strategic asset management framework
The town centre Stevenage local asset management framework (SLAMF) is designed to be a delivery mechanism for the regeneration framework, enabling a practical method to understand the aspirations of land owners, identify opportunities for inward investment, flag up risks and develop a proactive implementation of the framework. The Partnership could look to set-up asset delivery vehicle, as the work of the *Stevenage town centre future task force* is progressed. This framework allows a targeted approach to assets that are: (i) in public ownership, through initiatives such as One Public Estate; and, (ii) in private ownership.

Local Recommendation Four

All business is local – support local business
As part of the strategic response to the future form and function of the town centre an adaptive resilience approach to town centre uses would be key to developing a more diverse, socially 'vital', and commercially 'viable' economy in the town centre, creating a more diverse economy that delivers a mix of commercial and social uses, including homes: ▪ diverse social and commercial ecology: review and rationalise inward investment; and, ▪ Stevenage business: all business is local, so focus on the local needs of business, suppliers and customers.

Local Recommendation Five

Experience and time of activity
It is recommended that the type of uses in the town centre are expanded and intensified to diversify activities across a longer time span to encourage resilience. In general terms the time of activity in the town centre follows the operational hours of the two dominant economic uses: retail and, to a lesser extent, commercial leisure. Greater emphasis should be given to the creation of a more 'liveable' town centre with a mix of uses both vertically and horizontally and bring forward the growth in the number and variety of homes available in the town centre. It is important that the new homes are high quality and well designed so that they are desirable places for a cross section of the community to want to live in the town centre and avoid the concentration of any one group. Opportunities to explore home working should be taken in the design of residential space, this should include: appropriate technology to support new ways of working and that homes are designed with sufficient space to accommodate a healthy mix of live and work activities (for example making sure that there is sufficient space for living and working). Options to expand new ways of working within the town centre and collaboration to increase enterprise and innovation should be explored with institutions, such as higher education providers and business focussed groups. This should include an innovative approach to continuous learning and exhibiting, to celebrate the unique character of Stevenage through investment in areas such as art, both formal and informal. With a more diverse mix of uses, including residential, the local economy will be less reliant on the retail and commercial leisure sectors for the commercial 'viability' and result in an improvement of resilience of Stevenage town centre.

Local Recommendation Six

Improve the quality of the built environment

The town centre of Stevenage is no longer 'vital', as there are now other physical and virtual formats that people can use for *necessary* activities. This means that it is of greater importance for the quality of the physical environment to be good (Gehl 2011). The case study has analysed a number of elements that make-up the built environment of the town, that might or ought to influence the decision making process of users, conscious and non-conscious, to visit the town centre. This area is one in which the local authorities have the most responsibility and control that are specific to Stevenage and could be implemented locally:

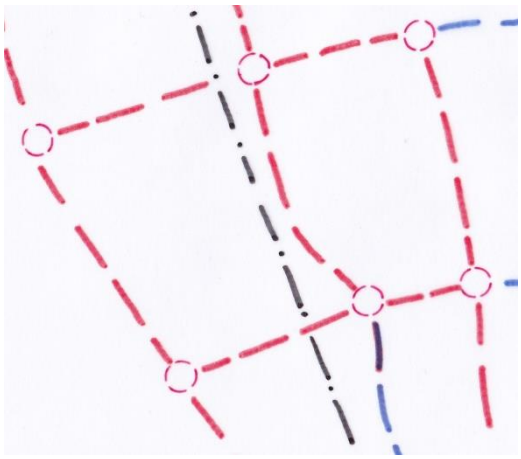
- *locally distinctive Stevenage*: the built form is a key part of the town centres authentic character as a post-war new town and the core main town centre street pattern and the buildings in the Town Square should be renovated and maintained. Stakeholders should formulate and adopt a Stevenage design guide to manage and influence the design of future development;
- *places between buildings, streets and squares* – key places and spaces: the design and management of the public realm in Stevenage town centre is of variable quality and confused in places: this area is one in which the local authorities have the most responsibility and control. It is evident that SBC has engaged in improving parts of the built environment. These are the areas, it is argued here, that have a significant impact on the perception of whether a place is well managed and safe. A programme of coordinated projects to enhance and improve key places and spaces should be created and implemented. This would be an achievable goal and the pace of the delivery of improvements in the built environment should be increased, although it may call for reprioritisation or additional funding;
- *formal art* – there are a number of examples of public art in Stevenage town centre,

many of which are integrated into the built environment and give a sense of place. In line with the design approach, a public art policy should be created and opportunities identified to continue the tradition in and around the town centre;

- *big-box format areas* - the LPA should work in partnership with land owners and operators, for example the former BHS site, to minimise the negative impact of the big-box areas: including edge and out-of-town locations e.g. the ASDA area, Roaring Meg, the Leisure Park. However, this is also a generic issue which should be reviewed at a national level as part of understanding the *value* of places;
- *vehicular traffic passing around the town centre* - vehicular traffic using the town centre as a through route should be prevented. Physical works to integrate the town centre with the rest of the town should be prioritised. The redundant road network should be repurposed for environmental improvements and to enhance the walkability and cycle-ability of Stevenage and areas of interest, including additional and enhance green and blue environmental improvements. Fig.7.64 shows the existing road network with A roads shown in red. The proposed new road network with all town centre roads redesigned as shared space, shown in green. It is further proposed that the broad Lytton Way road, which is four lanes wide, should be completely removed and replaced by a new active use which could include a linear park area (Fig.7.64).

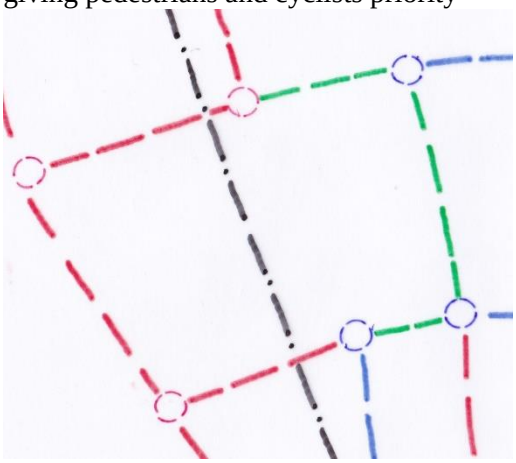
Fig.7.64 vehicular traffic passing around the town centre

Existing road infrastructure, town centre surrounded by A road network



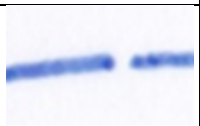
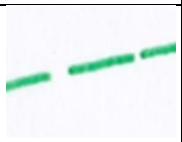
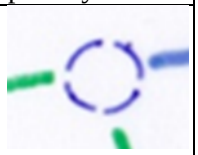
Source: author

Proposed road infrastructure, removal of Lytton Way and downgrading of A roads giving pedestrians and cyclists priority



Source: author

KEY: to fig.7.64

Road: A road	Road: B road	Movement priority: shared space	Rail Line	Node: vehicular priority	Node: pedestrian & cyclist priority
					

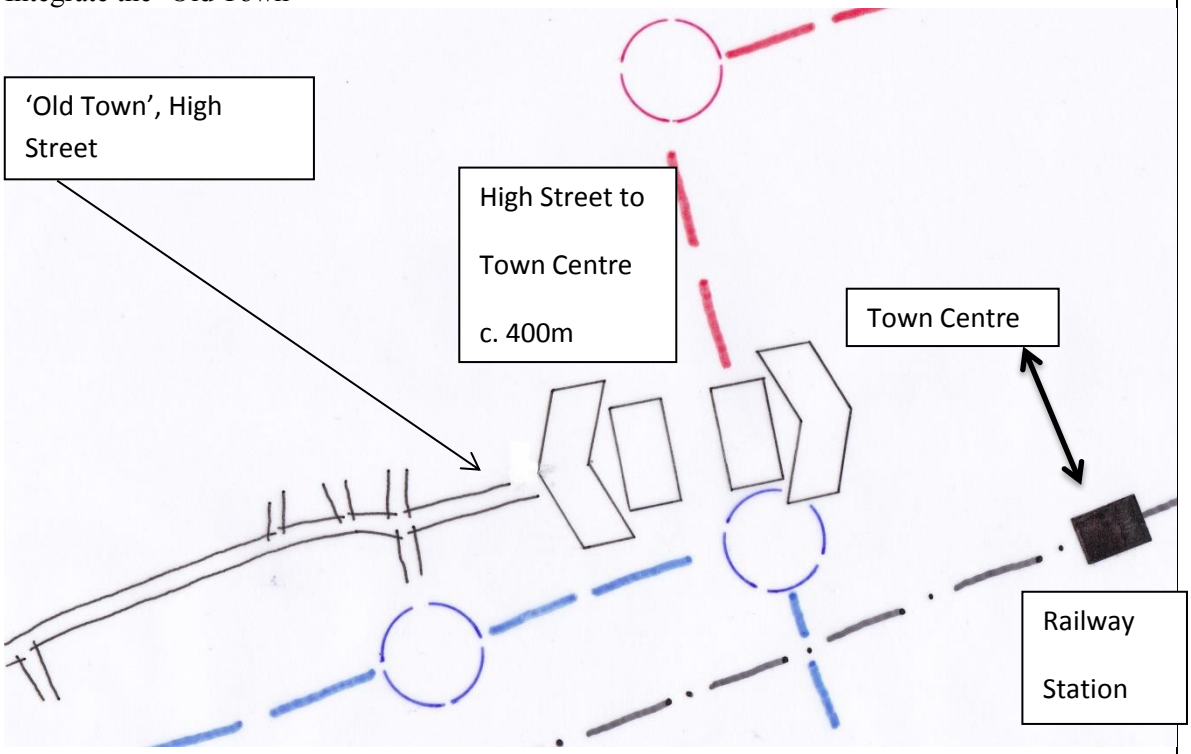
- *connecting the town centre*: the town centre should be a hub where other strategic and key parts of the community and economy can be accessed by walking, cycling or public transport. All routes in and out of the town centre should be at grade level, removing the necessity to use underpasses, ramps and bridges. This is particularly important within the town centre: (i) connectivity between the town centre and the 'Old Town' (see Fig.7.65); and, railway station corridor which is poor and dominated by the priority given to trips by car, meaning that it is accessed via a utilitarian designed bridge over four lanes of fast moving traffic and offers a poor

gateway to the town centre.

- *operational use of the Leisure Park should be reviewed*: with a focus on delivering new homes and a mix of uses around the town centre which removes the barrier of the railway. One solution might be for a smaller version of the construction platform over Hudson Yard New York. Creating new space with construction over the railway line to join the places of interest at grade and remove the clumsy and unattractive sequence of stairs, ramps and bridges (Fig.7.66).

Fig.7.65 Connecting the town centre – with the 'Old Town'

Integrate the 'Old Town'



Source: author

KEY: to fig.:7.65

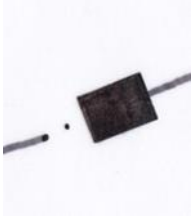
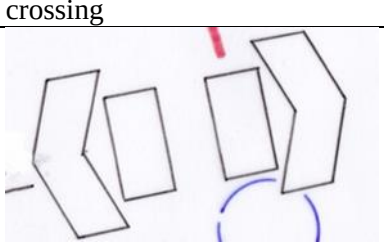
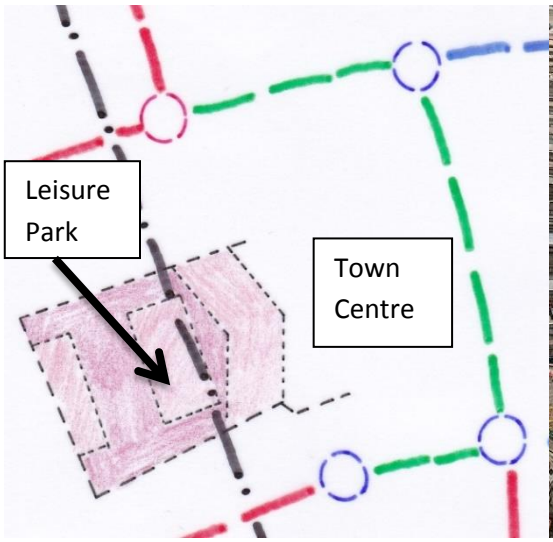
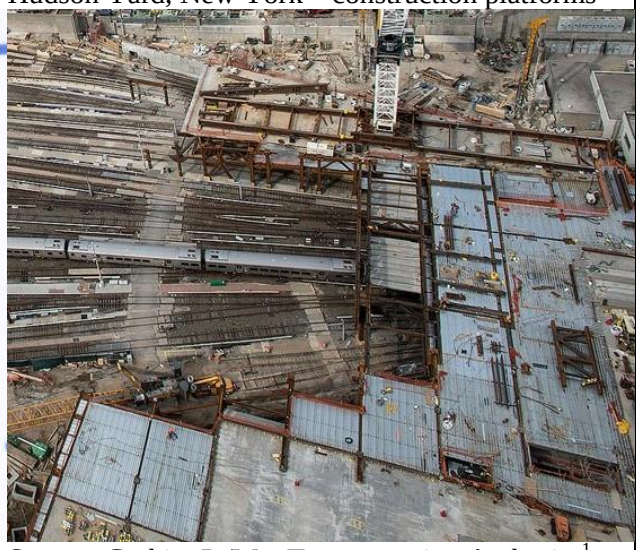
Railway & Station	Shared space & at grade crossing	Improved route & at grade crossing	Main road structure
			

Fig.7.66 Operational use of the Leisure Park should be reviewed



Source: Author

Hudson Yard, New York – construction platforms



Source: Cashin, P./Met Transportation Authority[1]

KEY: to fig.7.66

Road: A road	Road: B road	Movement priority: shared space	Rail Line	Node: vehicular priority	Node: pedestrian & cyclist priority

- *bus station*: the current bus station area operates as a bus depot; with maintenance and the laying over of busses. The plan to reclaim and improve the built environment from the bus depot is a common sense plan. However, by creating a new bus station elsewhere in the town centre appears to merely move some of the problems on, for example: (i) safety – the design means that buses would have to reverse out of the bays, this design was found to be unsafe by the HSE at the Banbury bus station and required extra safety measures and the employment of staff to supervise the buses when reversing - this has been an ongoing cost to the local authority, Cherwell District Council; (ii) integration to the rest of the town

[1] https://placesjournal.org/article/instrumental-city-new-york-hudson-yards/

centre – would be better serviced by on street bus stops and would be a more effective land use.[23]

[2] https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/6620357.safety-changes-wake-bus-tragedy/ Accessed 30/09/2020
[3] https://www.thecomet.net/motoring/stevenage-bus-station-development-gets-green-light-1-6715523 Accessed 30/09/2020

Appendix I(b): Recommendations - (iii) macro-generic only

Theme One – market, policy and governance

Market: Recommendation One

Review and re-imagine the market in which the town centre operates (RMa1)
The reason for this recommendation is that the market has fundamentally changed (see Chapter Eight, KFD(ii)). There are now a number of formats that are commercially 'viable' for town centre uses including physical space on the edge or out-of-town locations; and virtual space, which includes physical infrastructure such as warehousing, distribution centres and pick-up-points. For the town centre to remain relevant as the 'heart' of the community[4] requires a rebalancing of the equilibrium between the commercial 'viability', and social 'vitality' of the place. This rebalancing can only occur with an understanding and recognition of the 'value' of the town centre as a social, civic, and commercial destination within a re-imagined new market (see Policy: Recommendation Three, below).

Market: Recommendation Two

Integrate technological innovation into the built environment of the town centre (RMa2)
As part of the process to re-imagine the market (RMa1) the town centre can be should be designed to support a mutually beneficial environment for physical and virtual places. This will include a framework to support research, and innovation to enable and encourage the use of technology to support and create socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' town centres. Thereby identifying opportunities for new ways of collaborating across sectors, and rethinking how physical assets (such as the office sector) will operate in the future.

[4] As stated in NPPF (2019)

Policy: Recommendation One

Review the spatial planning system in England (RP1)

It is recommended that a national Spatial Planning Framework (SPF) should be developed, to reflect the new market in which town centres operate. The new SPF will include all formats that are 'viable' to deliver town centre uses (for example town centres, and out-of-town retail parks). The SPF will create a spatial plan-led system, including a:

- National SPF;
- Regional SPF; and,
- Local SPF.

The SPF will create a plan-led environment, for the development and operation of places for town centre uses. Through the 'front-loading' of public engagement and consultation, the spatial planning system for England will mitigate the risk of land assembly (i.e. the principle of development is established). The plan-led approach will give community and investor confidence of the shape and viability of future growth, and spatial adaptation. Therefore, the SPF will create greater certainty, and again mitigate the risk of speculative development.

Fig.9.1: proposed policy hierarchy of the strategic Spatial Planning Framework

Strategic Spatial Planning Framework		
National →	Regional →	Local

The timeframe over which the national SPF spans should allow for planning over the long-term (50-100 years), the medium-term (10-50 years) and the short-term (1-10 years). This is accepting, of course, that longer term planning will be less precise, but offering a planning mechanism to prepare for key anticipated pressures, such as climate change, artificial intelligence (AI) and population growth.

Fig.9.2: proposed timeframe for the national SPF

SHORT TERM									MEDIUM TERM					LONG TERM
YEAR									DECADE					YEARS
YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	10	20	30	40	50	50 - 100

Policy: Recommendation Two

What is defined as a 'town centre use' should be reviewed and refined (RP2)

What is defined as a 'town centre use' is broad, and does not reflect the complexity of the town centre in the new market in which it operates. Places outside the town centre have been permitted, mainly to deliver limited components of town centre uses, in particular retail and commercial leisure (such as cafés and eateries). There are few examples of mixed-use development with social amenities and housing, in the edge and out-of-town formats. This means that the edge and out-of-town format is less complex, and not as expensive to develop or manage as a town centre, but also that they are not an efficient use of land. Moreover, many edge and out-of-town locations result in a 'cartel' like model, where competition is restricted, that is to say asset managers favour the established 'high street' names, and more 'stable' multiples (for example, M&S, Primark, Boots, McDonalds, Starbucks, etc.). Therefore, access to edge and out-of-town sites is problematic for independent operators, innovators and start-ups.

It is recommended that the definition of 'town centre use' should be refined in national planning policy to ensure that all development, except in exceptional circumstances, is of mixed-use (including residential). Furthermore, there is a need that what is classed as 'town centre use' is located in a town centre (see Policy: Recommendation Five and Policy: Recommendation Four)

Policy: Recommendation Three

Develop a method to capture the 'value' of the town centre (RP3)
The 'value' of a town centre as a place comes from its authentic character, as a complex social and commercial ecosystem. The economic 'value' of the place to operators can be captured through a number of indicators, such as commercial yield; sales per square foot; or, development profit. However, the 'value' of the social vitality of the town centre is more opaque. Therefore, it is recommended that the 'value' of the town centre in terms of both commercial 'viability' and social 'vitality' is developed in terms of identify appropriate metrics and indicators. The definition of the social and commercial 'value' can then be used as part of the '*appropriateness test'*, as set out below (see Policy: Recommendation Four).

Policy: Recommendation Four

*Develop an '**appropriateness test**' for existing and proposed edge and out-of-town formats* (RP4)
It is recommended that the town centre (including city centres) should be the place that provides the primary location for socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' town centre uses. There are two scenarios in which the 'appropriateness test' would be applied: (i) where other physical formats (for example edge and out-of-town) are already operating, and deliver town centre uses; and, (ii) new locations proposed through the SPF to deliver town centre uses. *Where places outside the town centre do not comply with the 'appropriateness test' they should be redeveloped or repurposed for other uses, for example, mixed-use communities including housing and employment*. It is recommended that town centre uses, consisting of a mix of uses (including residential), should be delivered in a town centre, and not in edge or out-of-town locations. It is expected that the requirement for space for retail and commercial leisure uses will continue to decline due to a number of factors, such as the growth of on-line shopping. The decline in retail and commercial floor space should be managed across all formats, within the hierarchy (Place: Recommendation Five) and network. This means that edge and out-of-town locations should be managed pro-actively, so that they can be re-purposed, or more likely, redeveloped as mixed-use communities (including housing and employment). The risk of not following this approach is that mono-use, and predominantly big-box edge and out-of-town locations would be aggressively defended by landowners/investors, to the detriment of the town centre, and lead to further decline and *relevance* of the town centre – both as a social and commercial hub.

Policy: Recommendation Five

Hierarchy of formats that operate and deliver town centre uses (RP5)

As highlighted above (Market: Recommendation One) the market in which the town centre now operates has changed, and to consider the town centre in isolation to other formats (both virtual and physical), which are commercially viable to operate and deliver town centre uses, misunderstands that challenge facing the town centre. As part of the SPF (Policy: Recommendation One) a hierarchy of place will be identified, in which the town (and city) centre would be at the top of the hierarchy – for example:

Table 9.1: hierarchy of locations

Hierarchy of locations for town centre uses

- **Top Tier**: town and city centres
- **Middle Tier**: district and local centres
- **Lower Tier**: edge and out-of-town

By planning for all formats in the new market a sustainable plan-led strategy can be created, and criteria developed to assess the most *appropriate* places to provide town centre uses (including physical infrastructure required for virtual operators, as well as warehousing, distribution and pick-up points). It is proposed that the town centre should be the default, and top tier location in the hierarchy (see Table 9.1), and the criteria should be focussed on the delivery of a network of centres which are socially 'vital' (including residential-led mixed-use), and address environmental factors and sustainability.

Policy: Recommendation Six

Permitted Development Rights, where considered appropriate, should be agreed at a local level (as part of the Local SPF) (RP6)

Permitted development (PD) rights[5] should reflect the requirements of an individual town centre, and should be established as part of the Local SPF (see Policy Recommendation One), as considered relevant. This means that PD rights will reflect the requirements of the local area, as well as removing the necessity for the LPA to seek to remove some PD rights through an 'Article 4' direction.

Policy: Recommendation Seven

Simplify the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process locally where proposals align with the Local SPF (RP7)
It is recommended that the process of Compulsory Purchase is reviewed and the process streamlined where the proposals accord with the Local SPF.

Governance: Recommendation One

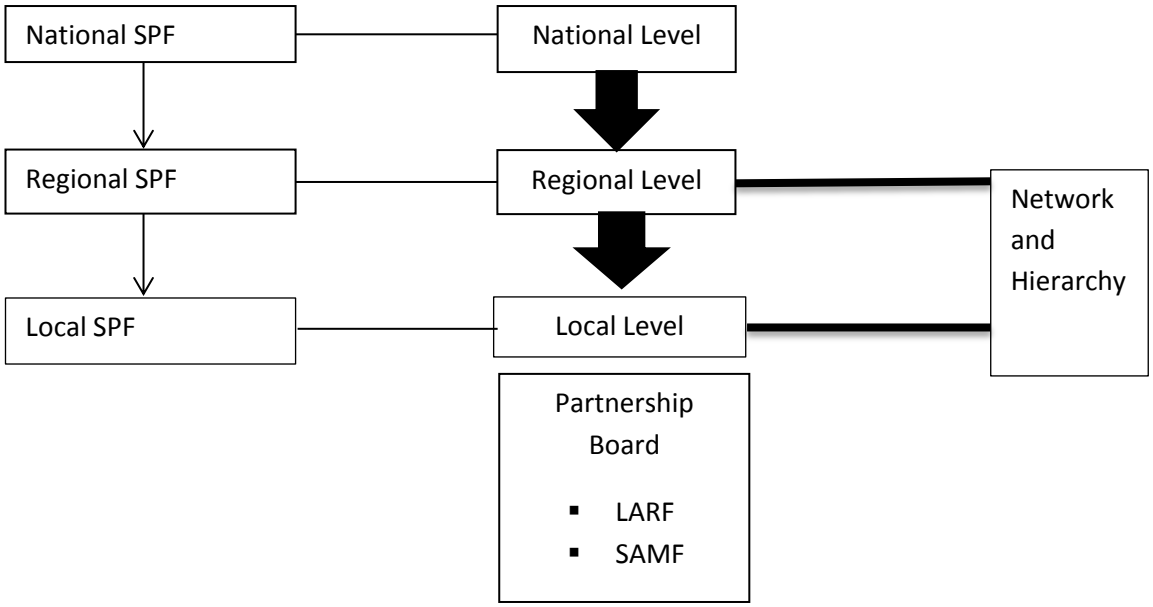
Introduce Local Adaptive Resilience Frameworks (LARFs) and create a statutory responsibility for all public sector organisations to work together to deliver the objectives of LARFs (RG1)
It is recommended that a revised governance model is introduced to reflect the new market conditions (Market: Recommendation One), and the national spatial planning framework (Policy: Recommendation One). Within this governance framework, all formats (physical and virtual) can be managed to support a plan-led approach to future change and development. This will be particularly important if, as expected, retail market continues to contract. This will mean that the town centre can be protected, whilst edge or out-of-town sites can be redeveloped or repurposed for other land uses, such as: industrial or housing (see '*appropriateness test'* Policy: Recommendation Four).

[5] Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Eng) Order 2015

The local partnership board will formalise the approach to promote the adaptive resilience of the town centre and other formats within the network (where said *appropriate*). An accountable public-sector body reporting at least annually to the local community will administer the local partnership.

The membership of the partnership board will be agreed at the local level, and should be widely representative of the community, including the private and public sector, as well as local interest groups and members of the local community. Moreover, all public sector organisations with day-to-day operational and strategic responsibilities for the town centre should have a statutory duty to report, and be accountable to the partnership board.

Fig.9.3: proposed governance structure for all formats



Governance: Policy Recommendation Two

Create a Town Centre Local Adaptive Resilience Framework (LARF) (RG2)
The LARF creates a regeneration vehicle to deliver pro-actively the Local SPF and the SAMF. The challenges facing the town centre cannot be effectively addressed through place management interventions alone. To reinvigorate the town centre as a socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' hub will require a transparent process, and procedures which are progressed by a body which has overall responsibility and accountability for the town centre strategically and/or operationally. Nationally and regionally, this would need a structure to develop, consult on and agree a spatial plan and LARF. It will also require a local town centre LARF (in line Governance: Recommendation One). The local level 'partnership board' to deliver the LARF will be for the local partners to decide, but alternatives include a company structure, a limited liability partnership (LLP), a formalised partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding, a Development Corporation, etc.

Theme Two: Funding, investment and management

Funding and Investment: Recommendation One

Funding and investment for Town Centres (RF1)
Public investment and funding for the town centre should be linked to the delivery of the spatial planning framework and local needs, so that it reflects and delivers the aspirations of local stakeholders as captured through consultation, and reflected in the agreed plan over the short, medium and long term. The reason for this recommendation is to develop a sustainable, transparent, and dependable approach to funding that the public sector and the private sector can rely on to plan investment programmes – thereby mitigating risk. This approach removes the short-termism to funding, where decisions on funding are assessed on whether they are 'shovel ready', with opportunities being identified, rather than making sure that the funding is made available to the places and communities where it is most required. Finally, the criterion for funding should change to make sure that proposals deliver outcomes which are socially 'vital' as well as commercially 'viable'.

Management: Recommendation One

Strategic Asset Management Framework (SAMF) to support the implementation of the Spatial Plan (RM1)
In line with the national spatial strategy approach recommended, a Strategic Asset Management Framework (SAMF) is proposed to support delivery. The SAMF follows the same governance approach and will be integrated into the regional and local governance structure (Governance: Recommendation One).

Management: Recommendation Two

Devolve the strategic asset management of publicly owned assets to the local area (RM2)
Publicly owned assets - the management of publicly owned assets should be reconfigured to meet the local spatial aspirations (the social and commercial needs) of a town centre, as set out in the Local SPF. This will mean that the *publicly owned assets* will focus on the social 'vitality' and needs of the local communities in which they operate; including the design, function (active ground floor use, with a mix of uses promoting living in the town centre as a way to respond to the housing crisis), and form.

Management: Recommendation Three

Work pro-actively with private sector asset owners to deliver the aspirations of the Local SPF - de-risk investment and development in the town centre (RM3)
Through the LARF the partnership should engage with *private sector* local landowners to (i) de-risk investment and development in the town centre, as set out in the Local SPF; and, (ii) '*appropriateness test'* process: any development delivering town centre uses outside Town centres should be tested for sustainability and ability to deliver social 'vitality' as well as commercial 'viability' through the '*appropriateness test'*. It is essential, due to the potential impact of other formats becoming less commercially viable, that the owners of the sites are fully engaged, and that there is an agreed approach for future development or repurposing, which may require public sector investment and/or intervention.

Appendix I(c): Examples of interview transcription

(i) Participant D1 (PD1)

Q1.

Yes I believe they are important places for all sorts of reasons. Not only in the sort of focused here if you like so….I think before that we went to the Remembrance Day parade you know which moves through the town centre so there are all sorts of you know. Lucky to have a great space. I think people can….and it is the place physically where people come together…. not only for a residential area but everybody has an experience of the town centre or uses it or…

Q2.

It's interesting isn't it you know as I said before we started recording it that traditionally the two go together don't they you know for most sort of town planners and practitioners they're they often sit and think about what it means but trying to do that since obviously I've seen obviously to me is more about the experience that people have of the town centre - is it active are there people around are there things to go and see. In terms of viability I guess speaks more to the right sort of scale of shops it's got you know….catchment area, I guess the reason for those two words or linking them together is that it's not enough just to be viable you know you'd hope that the two feed off each other in sense of it, probably one without the other but I think it does remind you that there's a social aspect as well as a …

Q3.

I suppose, in a bit more recent times than that the concern has been about the viability switch to internet shopping, the sort of…. the closure of a number of big stores and chains and all the rest of it about whether town centres can be….whether some of them might not continue to operate if you like, so I think there's been a push to people in the retail business or commercial business to say that footfall is the key to operating, you know, and that links to me about trying to retain and give people a reason for coming to the town centres in that that will sustain a lot of the bid activity for example. I think one of the worrying things I see at the moment, I still get the sort of….and to see the continuum. The other thing that was just a thought that just occurred to me as well is that the high street is changing obviously and people are increasing internet if you like and hence….and one thing I've noticed just being around the town you go into Costa or one of the other coffee shops, the independent coffee shops, and they are full of people. And it's just interesting, I think that people are still coming into the town for a coffee or whatever. But they're not; they're not looking around or wandering around the town. You know you walk a certain route and I think there's less of that now, but it does fascinate me how many people are still coming into the town centres. But aren't moving around it them as much they have a coffee in their favourite shop and may spend a couple of hours there you know. Less window shopping and browsing I think.

I think they have….obviously the footfall counting and stuff is getting much more sophisticated and before it used to be click and count and now there are devices, and I think they have installed something and measured the dwell time that people move around the town centres, and so but I think in terms of people moving through the town centres that's probably where the change has been.

Q4.

I think it is important, as a town planner, you like to think that it is you know and we've

always tried to improve the public and so on although increasingly it was our improvements because people couldn't see that and jobs and all rest of it but I think there are different types of shopping and visits aren't there? There's a regular town centre If you like where you have to use and there are visits for leisure and social reasons to other places and I think people are… But, I think the quality of the built environment is still uncomplimentary about the town. But other people come in and they say what a wonderful collection of art deco buildings that you've got here, and isn't the area around church and place like that….but I think people do appreciate it and certainly since the town centres been fully pedestrianized people appreciate that as well. So, I do think there is a link between the attractiveness of a place and people's….and people's willingness. People are certainly very quick to comment if they think anything?

Q5.

It probably does if….in Loughbough I think the markets and especially when there's a bric-a-brac market. I think the quality of the environment does influence….I would say yes.

Q6.

I think it's been quite frustrating, to be fair to the Borough council they've probably had quite a clear….it's like Loughborough I think….retail development….probably for 20 odd years you know. Some of them, you know, have come to fruition but its interest from or just the fact….that whatever. We often used to bemoan the fact that we knew which was our sort of favourite potential retail site, you know….But the one that came forward first, but, you know the Rushes development across the road was the one that come to fruition because some public land….assemble a site. It probably wasn't the top priority retail site, but it was identified as an opportunity site, and that's the one we sort of went with, if you like. But there have been other sites that have been identified that haven't come forward, in particular, it's been quite hard to attract. You know sometimes you get a bit overlooked because...and equally public sector…because the regeneration priorities. There's been, you know, having said that over and above there have been one or two key bits of public sector investment, you know: the original pedestrianisation of the market place which was in 1995; and, subsequently the inner relief road… which enabled the completion of the pedestalization programme if you like. So those two bits of essential infra-structure, and again, it was the best order, if you, like because the masterplan for Loughborough was in the physical sense always envisaged linking the two parts of the town centre together. But it didn't happen in that order, because the first phase of pedestrianisation was done, and then the Rushes development happened, then the former hospital site went for student housing. Actually the inner relief road came after all of that, if you like…but it's quite interesting. I think that at the moment the amount of investment that's happening in the town, there's quite a lot going on in the town at the moment. There's a big student housing proposal that's recently been approved that will start shortly, right on the edge of the town centre. You think well, this must all go well for the for the town centre, if you like, if there are going to be that number of people living closer to the town centre. A lot of these things are coming together in the prospect, so I think the strategy has been wrecked if you like. It's going to have to be adapted. I think in retail activity particularly. The physical strategy is I think...broadly.

Can I say something about the contribution of the bid? Because I was involved in the bid and I think that it has been a success. But I think there's always a concern with bids about what they do is not strategic it's operational, you know, so and it does try to I guess

address issues of recycling, you know, helping to reduce business costs and campaigns business rates and….side trying to do events. We did try to get involved in strategic things like the card, including meetings and it was a campaigning thing as well and….were selected as a Portas pilot town in our first term, that was trying to think more strategically but it's…quite difficult I think for a relatively small bid, you've paid for your staff and all the rest of it, your Christmas decorations, your recycling scheme, your business support and effect strategic change you know. I think that's where you need bids and local authorities to work together, and hopefully that will produce some results but an awful lot does depend on attracting….

I thought it was enormously effective in bringing us together in a common cause if you like and when we were selected as a Portas pilot town that was…we tried to get involved in the sort of…we persuaded it was probably in the second reference for Portas Partner towns…in Loughborough so we had…Mary Portas came. It was good in a sense that it put Loughborough on the map. Do you know what I mean? And we felt we did have a bit of a USP, in terms of our university and presence of the… One of what we did with Portas' money was about one of the things that was most successful, was that most successful? I guess we text savvy university students who were interested in getting involved in the community to partner independent small businesses, who for example, didn't have a website or even an e-mail address or anything about how they could use social media and websites, you like with a youngster that knew their way around it. That's been quite successful, so you know there was a sort of strategic element in that recognizing that there's a different presence of a university and how we tapped into. We went there to talk to their students and their students came into town. We were taking advantage of that. How you could persuade students rather than just, you know, many of them live in the town centre. What is it that would attract them to spend more time in the town centre, rather than trooping up to the campus for nightclubs you know?…any of these schemes....see...it's hard to maintain. That was good. It did give £100,000 of funding….obviously that runs out. The attention goes …keep the momentum going really you know.

7.

The government is putting quite a lot of a deal on. I think local authorities have got a big role. I've always felt, you know, when I worked for….I mean they did a bit and were supportive of the bid and were doing as much as they could. There were a lot of local authorities doing quite innovative things in their town centres especially making use of the need to bring in a way that's what bids are doing, is bringing in private finance but, it's rarely enough to do big regeneration projects it's only really big enough to….that was one of the things we tried to do with the bid, our money….we were lucky there was money around. We got Portas' money and the County Council had a big programme of supporting sustainable.... yes, I guess I would say….sector led but you're trying to do as much as possible to, there are some places which just attract private sector investment because they are….but even then you would probably get a good expenditure.

Possible probe: should there be public sector intervention where, for instance there is market failure? Would you support funding, grant or compulsory purchase orders?

Personally I would say that it needs to be proactive, if I was commenting that some local authorities actively use their public, direct approach to identifying the opportunities and setting out the strategies. I think it should from my own experience it was often enough to threaten to use it and to work in planning regeneration compulsory powers came up quite

often. I mean once did we ever, as I recall, tend a town centre development in Sisetown. When we did the regeneration of Loughborough railway station with network rail and all the rest… the Borough Council actually served a compulsory purchase notice almost with implicit encouragement to….as so often happens, we served a compulsory purchase order the day before the enquiry. So, I think councils have got to be willing to use that and a….to developers look, you know, if we are willing to implement it we are prepared to use our compulsory purchase plan. I think they need to and there's the possibility of them using their property. The redevelopment of the rushes development for example….in that….and to contribute it to the development. Significant discount to facilitate the development, you know, as an example of, you know, an unconditional? I think there's a lot authorities can do. Local Authorities still own a lot of land, but there's a lot you can do other ways of doing it you know….

Q8.

Yes I think it would. I mean we have a few examples of that happening, industrial buildings that have been converted. Down on the canal, called Canal house, which are working space, a 60s block and another one again they tend to be on the edge of town in former industrial buildings. Which occupies a downside and occupies a ground floor and the floor above that is suitable for small business and the top floor is… a real eclectic mix of use of old buildings. I think that's going to be the way forward, another example down by the station…a pharmaceutical building that has a mix of uses, but then there's issue about the use classes order and….mix it up in a way to get activity and different uses. In a way you could say that address viability and what uses those buildings can be for more people living and moving about, so on. One of the frustrations is you don't exercise as much control….we think we do, or might like to, but it's difficult to predict what the private sector….any town planner looking at their unviable….instead what you tend to get is individual conversions or get mixed up which is isn't necessarily a bad thing if you like, but you needed to have vital….it's a dilemma really. I think it's the amount of retail has got what's left ideally I….you would want to conserve areas the less viable ones there, I think you are being reactive and less….it's rare….and we facilitate conversions. I don't know whether working within a property sense so that you could acquire buildings and reallocate them.…it was looking to see if there was a model where you could get more involved actually.

It's probably easier for cities to be able to maintain. It is a struggle for town centre reasons and I could see it could become.…sometimes I think that whole actually over the years we have lost control of all of that and tried to control that by saying okay well food shopping is different and people they need to do and you find almost unquestioning supermarkets, clothes...books….cards…that could be sold in town centres. Garden centres as well…I think they push into…original acceptance was garden centres have big stuff but now you go in and you've got franchises, toys, books and crafts. They occupy the unit on…Initially started as bulky goods, D.I.Y and there's supposed to be a limit on the amount of small town centre goods…floor space and you know B and M and all these sorts of places are actually originally set up as bulky goods justified to the outside of town centres. Sometimes I think we've completely lost it. Before the Rushes development… one of the main justifications for that was a site that was big enough because Tesco aren't going to keep on opening. They want a unit of a certain size and shape and that was one that was a bit edge of, part of and close enough to the town centre to benefit. That was

where the strategy came in. We could link to the traditional heart of the market place. There definitely was a strategy there and it's not done too badly, but you know, I still think the town centre first and when there's not enough retail to go round. But when you see planning decisions and things that are operating the plan now is taking more development for Loughborough and Shepton that are miles away from town centre now and getting people in those suburban locations, motorway junctions…you've got Fosse park. My fear is that those new residents - their choice will be to get into Loughborough, they might not even be aware of it. I think you've got to look at your strategy for new development supporting only case for Loughborough…development strategy. How do you get new residents in these new areas? It's difficult because traditional suburban developments.

Q9.

It has helped with that…the BID can't manage the town centre and the borough can't manage the town centre in the complete sense if you like.

Charnwood did have designated town centre manager at one point. There still is that challenge for that department, that's challenged for Local Authorities. It's perfectly capable of doing it, if needs must the Local Authority need to sign up to improvement of town centre. In their mind always ought to be the viability and vitality of town centres. How does what we do contribute to and support that? There's a tendency now locally Charnwood is doing its bit but in terms of the connection with business communities. I think that's what the BID - a way and more accepted and trusted by businesses, I think, than Borough Council. That's a bit unfair that's changing where all the money goes I think it does need, again, co-operation with the business community using its BID. Regular meetings between the BID and them it's still got to be a coordinated thing everybody recognising their role and supporting the town council

Understand what that means, with a very deliberate exclusion of, you know, certain people which town centres still have to deal with all of that. People do understand the concept of a well managed town centre; that's clean and operates well that bins are emptied… there's a programme I think that people expect, that there's a word for it. I can't think of an alternative it's something people recognise as a need to be doing and they expect someone to be doing it.

Q10.

It's not absolutely transparent. I don't think I think there's a lot of confusion about it, who does what, who's responsible, you could say that BIDs have confused that a bit. There were some BIDs gone down that route. An improvement of what's possible and what not may be possible. For example, you look a general example given planning permission for a fish and chip shop round the corner in market street. That's been there for 30 years paid business rates, should have been refused. You try to explain that's not possible under our planning system. I think bits have helped with that in terms of transparency, but one of the frustrations is that we have the city, the brochures, the leaflets…. Why didn't you tell us? So it is difficult to get the message across and you've got to keep plugging away?

Identity

Q11.

Loughborough town centre - I always feel Loughborough it's a sort of…? With the exception of groups of buildings and bits. Its friendly it's accessible. You literally can do anything. It's a very down to earth sort of place, I think. You realise that when people come to Loughborough that have travelled from here there and everywhere and you hear…

I think town councils need reminding of it, the attractive features of it. You go away somewhere else and think: bloody hell here are lots of vacant units, we are not doing so badly after all - so yeah it's a good town centre, no nonsense, friendly and welcoming. I think as well it's a very diverse town. I think people grudgingly value it. Might complain about it. It's like a family thing isn't it? You can be critical but don't let anyone else criticise it. It is in terms of public transport it is very accessible. It's got plenty of parking. Diversity does make a difference. One regret I have, one disappointment for me is that even though the campus is very close…the same way that other places do the presence of university I town. It did have a few outlying buildings there still, although businesses did recognise….we do more I think

I suppose because I was involved in it raised the profile of Loughborough, no doubt about that. Marketed the town in a way the Borough refused to do. We right from the start we though…we used creative industry… everyone loves everything don't they…those elements…people immediately recognised…but also the fact it was love Loughborough, not I love Loughborough, we love Loughborough it was sort of we felt it was an invitation as a way to get people in and I think that had an impact I really do. Loughborough loyalty card, the new bidder has developed into a booklet. Love Loughborough t-shirt launched. People really responded to it and we didn't want to be the Loughborough bid company we were love Loughborough that was the name of the organisation everything we did was for that. That was part of our portfolio. When we were establishing our first vote we didn't have the marketing strategy, love Loughborough that came later. So we use Portas fund to develop that. I think it worked and I think you need love Loughborough and I think it did make a difference constantly use and reuse that brand. I think it was good coming from a business organisation and foundation rather than borough council. Love Loughborough logo on recycling bags seen as an opportunity and I think when we worked with the county we subsidised buses to travel into Loughborough decorated through with love Loughborough heart on it sending the message around. I think it did work and then we…like the Christmas lights switch on we were able to show through footfall counting that year on year attendance at these events increased… and the experience when your there is down to the marketing.

Adaptive Resilience

Q12.

I'm not sure there was? Strategic how do we respond to this? It was part of the BID's concern through the increase in vacant units in some places and so there seemed… you like to think what the BID and Borough Council did… I think probably successive things… I was always surprised to look around the town now, the thing that's noticeable to me in terms of vacant units it's the Littlewood's, Planet World, and Burton's and so on… How those units might be reused. Admire their resilience either as individual traders, many cases, some people just hung in there but also… Market Street was more of a problem you see that's a shame they've gone…they come back again. The resilience there I think it's suddenly you find you've got sushi bars. People giving things a go and delis and cafés I think that…in the ways small business responds more than…they are increasingly trying to do things like CVA. You hope that landlords will be more flexible rather than lose a tenant they'll offer different terms the big chains and property owners property consortiums, there is economic theory if their tenants are struggling forces a lot of big chains to do this arrangements where effectively without paying. I think interestingly in Loughborough small business sector has responded. It helps that Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, Loughborough can't compete its recognised roles good catchment area other competition very close urban centres shot to pieces awarded lots of money like traditional market towns with along tradition of being the focus of town centre activity not just business yes. That resilience comes from?

Q13.

I like that description - is it going to bounce back? Or. will it be what it was bounce forward? Is a more interesting and more optimistic way of looking at it. I don't think it is good to bounce back in…there's a lot of people in town who remember local stores not national…whether it was food or clothes, times have gone. I think and more about people circumstances, events eating and drinking, coffee shops. I think it is bouncing forward, it is a good way of looking at it.

Concluding Thoughts

Q14.

I think they can I think they will there's been an act of town management in things. The borough council are there going out to lunch - popping to shops. They are supportive.

Appendix I(c): Examples of interview transcription

(ii) Participant F1 (PF1)

Q1.

They are very important places. The town centre is in most places relatively unique. When increasingly design around and outside the centres is pretty uniform the town centre continues to define the location. So a returning native would recognise the centre of Loughborough when they'd fail to recognise if dropped somewhere else. Even though town centres change over time the spaces stay the same. The cultural associations. Yes they are an important place both socially and culturally and in defining a sense of place and belonging the challenges they face. They face significant challenges at the moment and the key challenge to that is 50% of retail is happening online combined with difficulties of austerity for rents and business rates of course. So that there are… the high street retailer faces a whole range of challenges which were not so acute in the past. And it can only get more challenging I think as time goes on. We are where we are in terms of online sales it's probably young people who are the early adopters and they conduct themselves. They're constantly wired in, when they're walking etc.… so as new generations come through then I would expect them to be even more heavily using online sales. Which must undermine the retail function of the town. That will be a challenge ongoing one of the challenges in the future, the need and viability of retail space particularly.

Possible probe

I think the function has to change and it is changing. Certainly Loughbourgh and most other town centres I've visited. They are offering a broader range of services businesses and cafes. The sorts of goods and services you can only get by visiting the town centre. So the town centres are responding and adapting adding to a new set of demands and challenges of customers.

Q2.

I think viability is easier defined… the commercial ability to make a profit, remain in business. Individual retailers and businesses will very soon know whether they can make a… illustrate the viability of that business and multiplied across the town centre across a whole. Vitality is probably harder to define and measure. Essentially it is about the amount of life, activity that the town centre can attract. We would tend to measure it in footfall. I think it's more than that, it's the degree to which people are attracted to their centre, to use it, to be there, to choose it as a destination of choice, or a range of social.

[Depending on answer to 2, could skip]

3. It is suggested that for a town centre to be healthy it needs to be socially 'vital' and commercially 'viable' – do you agree with this definition?

I agree with that.

Place

Q4.

Yes for many people it probably isn't actually. It isn't the primary factor that persuades them to come to a town. Personally I am looking for a quality but I think for many other people it is more a question of convenience, accessibility, value for money. Harder issues in that overall balance when their choosing which town centre to visit. I guess the quality of the built environment isn't important unless there combining that trip with a leisure experience. If their choosing to visit town centre because it's got a range of historical

buildings etc…etc… general day-to-day purchase to goods and services. I rather suspect… Primarily driven by accessibility. How easy is it to find parking, to get from parking to centre. How easy is it to get in by bus? Walk to central area. That's all around convenience of build environment. It's not the driving factor. The judgement is how easy is it to get in, get what you want and get out again.

Q5.

I think in terms of my choice…does the quality influence…probably yes in broad terms but if the quality of that place enables things to happen. For example that could be the sort of thing that could have stronger influence and encourage people to visit a place but it's about if the quality of a place is creating forums where events or activities that's more likely I think to encourage people. The functionality of that space? Place? Decide what role it has for attracting people into town centres.

Possible probe

I'm sure people with limited mobility will use Loughborough because they have to increasingly obviously…we would like to persuade people who have that choice and mobility to still use it for people who have mobility. City centres will still no doubt continue to attract them and I would have thought Nottingham, Leicester and Fosse Park in part are attractors. So people with the ability to travel, the broader range of goods and products on offer.

Deliverability

Q6

I terms of our master plan, sadly it's not very well at this stage. Its early days in the life of a master plan. If I reflect on master plans in this authority area, they haven't really progressed. I fear with this one will be fully constrained…it's very ambitious. The output that's commended to bond require a degree of intervention on the part of these partners but in terms of the actual costs of that intervention, culture of intervention rate and use of things like compulsory purchase…or, even to get involved in the share to make things happen and something…availability of finance.

Possible probe

Really the success depends upon the degree of intervention in order for it to be effective and to deliver its objectives it isn't helped either by the respective roles of the highway authority. How the authority and charitable find themselves over committed in other areas where they're not able to provide the degree they did particularly for improvements in public role.

No, I think the BIDs role is primarily around day-to-day management. Clearly they use events and activities…some of that…those activities have a cultural…historical connection…therefore it ties in with the councils role where there's a degree of overlap between those- then the council is in staging, managing, delivering an event. It's a tribute to that experiential offer of the town where the BID encourages and likes to see greater investment in regeneration of the town. That isn't really within its remit. Encourage from the touch-line, but you can't really get involved in those sorts of things. There's an effective relationship with the BID, but that's much more on a day-to-day management

Q7.

Our approach of late has been laissez-faire…nothing has happened. Or, very little has happened. A short answer is it has to be both…that is difficult in the situation but without that public sector intervention then it is unlikely that the private sector should respond. It

has to be a round of a means of bringing them forward. Then a greater proportion of private sector investment. I think the reality is resources are so stretched it is unlikely that we would get involved in anything other than where market failure is. There's an argument for saying that we could take a stronger leadership role by being more strategic… in our case it is unlikely that the leadership role…

Q8

It's positive, it's essential. Town centres have to change people often look at the town centre and actually think they've been like that forever but they have not… there really dynamic places and we're in a stage now when town centres are shrinking in terms of what they offer. They are developing for more as centres for more entertainment. That content comes back to the fact of vitality issues. The uses… can't survive without greater vitality. People actually have to visit the town centre in order to... while living in town centres then they are more likely to use the facilities and services. That mixed use if we can encourage… a stronger element of housing as well as other leisure and uses beyond the centre then It can produce its own dynamism we can see it happening in city centres. It's quite a challenge for town centres and some of the big city centres include the critical masses achieved. The same model needs to happen in town centres if there to sustain.

I think we could sustain higher density living its controversial… there have been proposals which have challenged the councils [SBC]. *The scale of developing the height of buildings within the town centre my personal view is that we're developing to high a density in ways that could produce a Dallas type skyline. Create more interest… certainly that view that we need… on the Nottingham corridor we can see it happening. Within the town centre there still seems to be some reluctance.*

I've a feeling that it almost happens incrementally. We might arrive at one stage in Loughbourgh where a 15? Isn't acceptable but before we get there we've got to have something that's allowed at 13? It has to build up gradually rather than take the bold decision and go for something.

That would be in the future yes but I think that at the moment we have had developers interested in going to higher levels but the collator has sought to reduce that height that's the balance between what the committee feel is appropriate and what the system can justify

Possible probe

Management

Q9.

It isn't really, certainly I don't think the public appreciate the different responsibilities and different agencies with respect to the town centres. We don't really have a defined town centre, organized centre. Loughborough doesn't have its own [Parish/Town] *council. It might have provided a vehicle for responsibility we have a Loughborough town committee now but it isn't executive.*

Q10.

In terms of that you need accountability and I guess hands on management on the centre. A vision as to what the town centre is going to be. It's not contributable. The town centre is only one part of all the other responsibilities. Whilst it's clearly important to Loughborough it's not particularly important to the body- some of which has closest affinity to Leicester.

Yes there has been that tension as long as I've been here. Elsewhere across Charnwood individual communities have…are represented by town councils. Loughborough is unique

in that respect, not having its own accountable agency to whom some powers might have been devolved. That's been a long term tension, part of that reason is political but when there was a Loughborough administration there was a Labour administration in charge and they didn't…that opportunity to set it up. I think it does make it difficult for Loughborough to have a voice of its own.

Identity

Q11.

If you identify LB with the market place with the importance of that place, the market, the fair, those are demonstrations of what that space can be used for. The comment I first made a native returning to the marketplace at LB would immediately know they were home again…this is back in LB, it's familiar. So in terms of the identity you come to that as a market town but the market does add colour, vitality and a sense of identity. It sets it apart. We don't have a unique vision for LB. We don't have a vision that is beyond the masterplan which is just about…a place where people will chose to come and want to.

Possible probe

Adaptive Resilience

Q12.

It must have affected it. It was LB has ridden the storm better than others. You might argue with me quite strongly but when visiting other town centres far, much worse impacts on high streets. My view is LB overall has met the challenge reasonably well in terms of why that is…a lot of the other centres- department stores, bigger names that have been cut down. LB never had representation that failed or the bigger names as LB didn't make the first division town centres, it didn't attract the range of stores where those cuts have made most impact LB ducked beneath the wire so to speak. Beneath that lb has got a very buoyant independence sector, quite a strong diverse independent sector so its resilience is attributable in part to the fact the level of big name closures that many other towns have had to measure.

Q13.

They can't bounce back. online sales with younger generations is going to go from strength to strength. They won't bounce back but they will bounce forward. They will find a new role for themselves and that may be a painful transition for some but they are the very same people who are responsible in the first place, who are buying and causing decile of the town centres. Will bounce forward. Will never be the same again they are… they will be resilient in the way they will find a new role for themselves, much more in the range of the food, drink, entertainment activity. Serve each part of individual retail that will never go away completely. Nor are we going to experience or see the level of planning as to how that change is managed.

It will be a chance when we get those sorts of applications I guess. My judgement is that town centres will fulfil a different role and we've already let the genie out the bottle in terms of major retail going out of town, by where's and go on their way. We can't put the genie back in the bottle and although planning policy is still about town centres partly because a lot of these boxes…relatively general site is not often big enough for… the way the policy works they will probably find it relatively easy to demonstrate the sequential test. They can't find a suitable site in or around the town and then the question comes In what harm will they do to the town centre but if the town centre is fulfilling a different role in planning terms…big boxes car parks outside.

It needs planning. In terms of managing process it needs intervention in the sense to bounce forward it needs intervention to enable that process to take place

It's inevitable really because even with shrinkage in LB if we could manage shrinkage in some way, if we could free up large blocks, that is still going to be challenging in terms of encouraging retail investment. There may be those part sites that are meant to be difficult to assemble, difficult to access. In many ways I think the process will look after its self. There will not be the opportunities around LB ? has to change. The process has to change. The hierarchy works on the basis of retail being the key driver of what makes the centre the centre. But retail is probably going to become the peripheral use.

Concluding Thoughts

Q14.

Town centres won't die, but will change. You need to have a place of unique recognition. They could become more active…in the past out of retail hours they just become deserted if they are able to embrace this new role… centre for physical entertainment they will become far more vibrant for 24 hours a day. I'd say that I can still see a vibrant…

Appendix I(d): Overview of responses from Participants as quoted in the thesis

Participant A (PA)

Stevenage town centre is perceived to be a 'pioneering' place, as it is a pedestrianised precinct and was the first post-war new town

General 'civic pride' in the fact Stevenage was the first post-war new town, and that it is a '….pioneering town….' and '….symbolic of 1940s and 1950s architecture'

There was a feeling of '….love for the town square….', and that the buildings surrounding the Square are recognisably 'Stevenage'

The Council '….does not support PD' as this can lead to poorly configured residential buildings and removes a sector of the economy – the office sector

PD undermines and reduces confidence of the community in planning, and the concept of a plan led system

Increasing residential-led regeneration, as part of a strategy to deliver mixed use, would increase 'variety' and enhance the feeling of 'place.

The investment opportunities - should be an incentive for the Government, through Homes England, to become more involved in the regeneration of the town centre.

Pointed to work on a spatial strategy relating to the 'London to Stanstead corridor'. However, it is not clear how such a strategy could be implemented, due to the absence of any spatial plan above that of the LPA, or what weight it would have in planning law (PA).

The promoters[6] of the Debenhams store made clear to the Council, the Debenhams store would not be located within the town centre, so it 'must' be located at Roaring Meg retail park where it '….trades well….' as an anchor store (PA).

There is an aspiration running through the regeneration framework that there will be sustainable, and socially 'vital' elements, which include a 'public sector hub', a library, cafés, and restaurants to '….create more interest'. The elected member felt that the '….quality of place….', in the proposed regeneration scheme, was very important as was the ability for the new facilities to '….attract people from surrounding areas'

When town centre first started 'trading' it had the 'wow factor', and was different to the surrounding areas and other town centres

Reflected that '….it [regeneration] would have been easier if [the assets in the town centre] remained public….' after the closure of the Stevenage Development Corporation

This was a lost opportunity for the community to share in the increased land value, and to have greater control over the development of the town centre post 1980, pointing to the local example of Letchworth

The intention of the Stevenage Central plan was to act '….partly as a prospectus for investment and delivery in the town centre that will allow parties to unite and capitalise upon the potential for Stevenage' (Stevenage Central 2015, p.7). Stevenage Central (2015) set out a proactive strategy for the regeneration of the town centre (including the Leisure Park), over a twenty five year period. An elected member of SBC said that the framework was '….doing what we want it to do'

They thought that the 'austerity' measures had delayed progress, and that there is underlying risk of the economic 'cycle', and unexpected 'changes', and that they need to '….economic proof….' the regeneration proposals

There was also frustration that there was a 'constant requirement' for the local authority to bid for funding, and a Member of SBC was of the opinion that the impact of this was that the regeneration team is working 'flat-out' and that it 'takes up a lot of time'

There is a '….public misunderstanding….', which leads to a '….perception and expectation….' that the local authority can directly 'manage' the town centre, and has

[6] Aberdeen Asset Management

greater control than it does.
The term management was defined loosely, and not used in a conventional sense where there is 'control'
The town centre 'must' also be socially 'vital', which means, in the case of the town centre, it will continue to be a more challenging and financially risky location in which to invest
PB1 & PB2
Need for the public sector to prioritise spending due to 'new' austerity measures that had a negative impact on the ability to create and maintain a high quality environment in the public realm
Pointed to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining people with the skills and experience to manage the built environment effectively
'Viability' related to the commercial character of the town centre
Commented on the importance of the clock tower and the fountain within the setting of the town square, which brought character to the place
'….building form has an industrial feel'
The town centre offered 'use-ability' and worked as a '….space for operators'
The '….urban form is tired….'
Highlighted that the closure of the town centre MacDonald and Burger King fast food restaurants in the town centre is evidence of the struggle to maintain an evening and night-time economy
PD undermines and reduces confidence of the community in planning, and the concept of a plan led system
By intensifying the mix of uses in the town centre, including residential, would improve the 'resilience' of the town centre
There is a 'belief' from the public that the Council has more '….influence than it really does'
The timing of any redevelopment would be a corporate private decision for the company, based on commercial factors and not the needs of the community
Turnover of staff, and subsequent challenges in recruiting people with the right skills had had a negative impact on 'confidence' in the ability of the LA to deliver
The role of the TCM is '….events….' and '….branding….' focussed - 'Love Stevenage' brand
The 'management' of the town centre in a broader sense – private and public space – is not '….properly coordinated….', as there is not the ability to manage the town centre as an '….asset….', due to the various interests
Agreed that a more formal structure would be appropriate
Neutral as to the benefits of a local adaptive resilience framework, and said that 'It is extremely hard to plan for over ten years with any certainty'
It has taken a number of years to bring forward a planning application for SG1, and work on site is yet to commence. In their opinion of an interviewee, the physical regeneration had been '….delayed by political [central government] interference'
Although, '….once one or two developments come forward….' that will in effect '….establish a market'
'It is important to get those initial ones….' started
Agreed that publicly owned assets should meet local spatial aspiration, and that there should be a close working relationship with the private sector
The way the town centre operates needs to be rebalanced, to ensure that '….social interactions of our local places….' are encouraged
There needs to be a mix of uses; that allowing residential under 'town centre uses' should not incentivise a dominance of ground floor residential
Most of the recommendations are being implemented, with the exception of the proposed road and pedestrian network alterations which would be controversial, complex and costly
Agreed that there is not a huge amount more that LA could do locally, due to budget and

policy constraints, which they considered was a '....good reflection....' of the current position

PC1&PC2

The '....government [have been] willing to support retail growth in such centres' (i.e. formats at the edge of town centres and in out-of-town locations), creating commercially 'viable' space without the requirement or need for civic or socially 'vital' town centre uses.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) introduced a 'Duty to Cooperate' to LPAs, but this does not create a framework for spatial planning in any meaningful way, and was not a '....replacement for proper strategic planning' and '....cross-authority cooperation....that was previously commonplace has been lost....'

Viability' related to the commercial character of the town centre (PB1, PC1, PD1)

A number of interviewees questioned whether the phrases really had any meaning (PC1, PD1).

At times the use of commercial 'viability' in relation to the town centre is a '....dirty word....'.

Had more than one experience at appeal where the planning Inspector took a very narrow interpretation of the impact that development can have on the 'vitality' and 'viability' of the town centre, and that this 'undermines' the plan-led approach; further, that they were not confident that they had considered the letter and spirit of the policy.

The incorporation of technological advances within the town centre was said to be important to maintain the attractiveness of the town centre

It is '....essential that a proper and effective strategic planning system is re-established....'

The removal of the Regional Spatial Strategy was seen as 'naïve', and that the introduction of the 'Duty to Co-operate' (introduced in the NPPF, 20120 - ineffective.

Acknowledged that the 'value' of the town centre also comes in '....terms of their social and cultural contribution [which] should be recognised'.

Strongly agreed that the 'appropriateness test' would help people understand the 'social' and 'cultural' benefit from the town centre, as: 'Out of centre locations are likely to achieve commercial viability but are unlikely to deliver social vitality' (PC2).

If as expected, the future need for retail and commercial floorspace decreases, then the priority and focus should be '....maintaining the role of traditional town centres.' Moreover, there should be '....a managed decline/redevelopment of out of centre locations that do not meet these ['appropriateness test'] criteria'

Disagreed, and said that a policy that '....prioritises town centres as the default location [should be] strongly supported....', and that the town centre identified as the '....default location of any development [proposed for town centre uses] would be a stronger protection....'.

That within the spatial planning framework recommended (see Policy: Recommendation One), it would be logical to develop local PD rights, so that they benefit from community consultation; and, as a senior planner suggests, local PD rights would '....provide additional certainty to town centres' (PC2).

Thought that a: '....streamlined CPO process would allow LPAs and their partners to bring forward schemes more quickly and flexibly to respond to changing local circumstances'

The need a governance structures to focus and need for the ability to deliver was reflected by another interviewee, that there is a requirement for '....flexible and proactive project boards [that] have a mandate to deliver projects and proposals'

This means that the '....requirement for reporting and accountability is essential'

A 'formal delivery vehicle' would be 'beneficial'

'....historically played [an important role] in the identity of a town or city and their role as a social and community hub needs to be strongly recognised and effective support needs to be given to centres to enable them to transform and re-establish themselves; our

communities will be much the poorer in the future if this is not the case'
The incorporation of technological advances within the town centre was said to be important to maintain the attractiveness of the town centre
'....is essential that a proper and effective strategic planning system is re-established in England and Wales. It has meant that the cross-authority cooperation and strategic awareness that was previously commonplace has been lost and key decisions that would have guided longer term development were not taken as individual local authorities were unwilling to take on the responsibility and workload of advancing these aspects'
It is '....essential that a proper and effective strategic planning system is re-established....'
Acknowledged that the 'value' of the town centre also comes in '....terms of their social and cultural contribution [which] should be recognised'.
Disagreed, and said that a policy that '....prioritises town centres as the default location [should be] strongly supported....', and that the town centre identified as the '....default location of any development [proposed for town centre uses] would be a stronger protection....'
A senior planner thought that within the spatial planning framework recommended (see Policy: Recommendation One), it would be logical to develop local PD rights, so that they benefit from community consultation; and, as a senior planner suggests, local PD rights would '....provide additional certainty to town centres'.
It was thought that a: '....streamlined CPO process would allow LPAs and their partners to bring forward schemes more quickly and flexibly to respond to changing local circumstances'
The need a governance structures to focus and need for the ability to deliver was reflected by another interviewee, that there is a requirement for '....flexible and proactive project boards [that] have a mandate to deliver projects and proposals'
This means that the '....requirement for reporting and accountability is essential'
PD2
There '....is a huge social and community investment in town centres (not just commercial), [made] often over hundreds of years'
The Medium term should relate to '10-20' years, with the Long term being '20+'
As towns grow in size new development is further away from the town centre, so out of and edge of facilities become popular, especially when near motorway or ring road junctions – so there needs to be a way of addressing issues of access to town centres through the planning system
PE
In terms of a national and regional framework, the absence of strategic planning it has a negative impact, as it is difficult to see how things 'knit' together, and that strategic spatial planning is a '....bit of a mess....' at this time
The removal of the Regional Spatial Strategy was seen as 'naïve', and that the introduction of the 'Duty to Co-operate' (introduced in the NPPF, 2012) was a 'sticking plaster'
Consultation should be effective, and occur throughout the planning process.
In their experience, the community do not '....get involved until they see a draft plan....', and can see how proposals will impact them/
Too often the initial stages of the planning process (the issues and options) are too 'abstract', and that this may limit consultation at the early stages.
To try and plan for a period up to ten years was too long, and that five years might be more realistic.
Edge, and out-of-town retail and leisure parks are a '....product of investment vehicles and retail business models of national multiples'.
Agreed that a better understanding of vitality as a part of assessing the 'value' of the town centre would be helpful, although they questioned how it could be assessed in '....a measured way'
'....it is unlikely that the planning service will have the resource, skills or experience....' to

administer such a process
Apparent diminishing importance of retail is an 'existential problem' for the town centre, a planner said that out-of-town is '….here for longer….', and that means that the type of retail in town centres would be more '….independents and niche' Wary of the the practicalities of dealing with an edge or out-of-town location that did not meet the requirements of the 'appropriateness test,' as these places '….are often investment vehicles owned by pension companies or other investors and so turning them over to housing is not always sound unless it is leasehold'
Not necessary: although the office to residential PD was 'London focussed', and had 'unintended consequences', but that nationally imposed PD rights were not a big problem, as they can be removed under an Article 4 direction.
CPO: 'Yes. Too long and complicated'
Another strategic plan is '….layer of bureaucracy that we can do without….', and that currently funding is not available for the local authority to support it
Calls for funding should be assessed on the social 'vitality' as well as commercial 'viability' impact of a place, and they questioned the 'fit' with central government funding approaches, which they felt were: '….driven by short term policy issues and politics rather than long term planning'
There was further concern that funding is not always well targeted, for example 'green funding' has been announced which means that the Local Authorities are chasing the money, but do not have 'shovel ready' projects, which is '….not a good use of resources'.
Confirmed that they were already reviewing how they operate, could look at working differently (including remotely), and use the publicly owned assets to deliver regeneration
PF2
Warned that '….SPFs are welcome as long as they are broad brush and recognise the role of the market and public private partnerships. If they become a tool for 'control' then they would be a waste of time'
He proposed timeframe for the national SPF was questioned, with regard to as to whether the Medium and Long Term time-frame was realistic, as in the 'current climate any strategy looking beyond 10/20 years is rather ambitious'
That by: '….adopting a long term strategic view we perhaps need to take into account the desirability of ensuring flexibility and adaptability of buildings within centres in order to respond to new demands and expectations which have yet to evolve'
Mixed-use development would 'inject life and activity' into a town centre, with the '….delivery of town centre living opportunities and greater social interaction restoring and supporting greater vitality'
There were some circumstances where mono-use development might be appropriate, as they were not '….convinced that all development should be mixed-use'
There is : '….a weakness in assessing the level of social vitality for which appropriate measures are required'
That: '….there is all the more reason to focus energies on retaining the vitality and viability of traditional town centres at the heart of communities that they serve' (
Public funding to be 'critical' but, expected that it will '….remain in short supply and be essentially opportunistic in character'
The importance of using public assets as leverage to 'support delivery' of regeneration projects was acknowledged by an interviewee with broad experience of regeneration projects
They reflected that '….town centres have always evolved….', but that the '….pace of change was pedestrian by comparison to the technological changes of today'
PG2
There is a need for 'balance', and active 'management' of technology so it is not used to 'spy' on users of the town centre
The current system to be 'shot', and that almost any alternative system '….can't be any

worse'

An approach that understands the value of the town centre as a 'social' as well as a 'commercial' hub: 'Should lead to better decision making….' and mean that the town centre has a greater chance to '….meet the needs of the area'

This recommendation was not universally supported. , for example, one interviewee said that this recommendation comes from a '….town planner mentality….' and that they felt larger stores (big-box built form) not to be '….an issue….'

Suggested that it would be 'challenging' to identify a hierarchy of formats as the '….population is much more mobile….', and was concerned that such a system could be '….too prescriptive/controlling'

'Strong partnerships' are '….not easy to achieve' and that there is '….too often bureaucratic squabbling, lack of cooperation and vanity [which] prevent investment and regeneration'

The process to form and maintain partnership working is complicated by the division in funding available into capital and revenue;: the majority of funding available is capital.

To manage partnerships and deliver projects calls for revenue funds which are not readily available

This 'hampers' the ability to act 'strategically', and plan for the medium and longer term, and creates an 'ad-hoc' and 'hand to mouth' approach to the delivery of regeneration projects

and that bidding for funding can be time consuming and frustrating, as the rules for accessing funding are not always transparent

However, one interviewee expressed concern that there is insufficient resource and expertise for any meaningful engagement, and set out that partnership working of this type was time consuming and difficult

PH

Should be opportunities to 'share and collaborate'; as 'learning towns' they can be an 'active' part of the 'fourth industrial revolution'.

New ways of working (and be seen to be working, in 'repair shops', for example) and collaborating to join people from different backgrounds . There is potential to create town centres of knowledgeable specialists (like independent retailers), and to create a new generation of 'artisans'.

Creating a differentiation between the town centre and the homogenised retail parks and on-line offer) – which is already beginning to happen be delivered in some towns

The 'value' of the town centre comes from the uniqueness of the 'environment' of places, including historical elements protected by conservation, and conservation areas.

Significant experience of regeneration in town centres over a number of years said that Local Authorities do not '….have the resources….to collect data anymore….'

On the 'Appropriateness Test' - 'liked' the recommendation and thought it 'of interest', but questioned whether it was 'legally practical'

Change in retail was not a response to changing consumer behaviour, that: '….retailers are not innovative, they just replicate and copy trends from the USA'

They felt that the response to the complex challenges faced by town centres cannot be left with retailers and investors, the town centre should not become a USA style 'doughnut town' – '….English towns need jam in the middle….'.

PD '….led to people developing poor responses and see it as a way to drive standards down….', in particular in terms of design standards

With experience across a number of countries, they pointed to the experience in continental Europe, and what could be learned from other places, such as Germany, where towns collaborate for the '….common good of the town….' and that employers and businesses 'engage'.

PI

With knowledge of the evolution of Milton Keynes, (as a planned city centre) stated that the

market in which town centres operate has altered over a considerable period of time.
The actions taken to respond to the change were '....through commercial adaptation…', which were commercially motivated to attract '....people with money in their pockets....'
It was 'madness' that there is no strategic spatial planning above that of the LPA boundary
Cautioned that a revised planning system should not be overly 'prescriptive'
Highlighted a need for a 'funding and investment regime', and that at the moment it is a 'crumbs off the table approach'
Difficult to see where private sector investment for town centres would come from – '....who in the private sector would invest and what would they invest in?'. The interviewee said that there needed to be a 're-imagining' of the town centres, and that 'some risks would need to be taken' with '....Local Authorities taking a greater lead....' over what could be a 'prolonged' period of time.
Concern was raised by a number of participants with regard to the way in which central government appears to control funding.
Central Milton Keynes is an example where asset owners are responding to the changing market, and that the type of building form and requirements of commercial operators have also changed, calling which calls for flexibility through repurposing or redevelopment
PJ
The role of the town centre as an integral hub for technological innovation, should be taken into account as part of the process of re-imagining the market in which the town centre operates: '....the old town centre offer is no longer viable for a 21st century town'
Proposed that in the future there needs to be '....more blending between public, voluntary and private sector offers and services....', and that the offers and services '....needs to be fully digitally accessible'
Cautioned that a revised planning system should not be overly 'prescriptive'.
Recommendation to review what are town centre uses was 'spot on'; and, there needs to be a shift from '....hard demarcation lines of particular uses rather than broader mixed uses to reflect much more balanced town centres'
A mix of uses in the town centre – '....including residential, [which] brings back a vibrancy to centres, including a broader economic base'
With experience of working alongside partnerships in town centres felt that this '....approach makes sense. It's really important that all parts of the community, public, private and voluntary, are involved and invested in shaping their local community'
With experience of working with a LEP they felt that town centres '....need core funding for their regeneration and that relying on open calls or other random competitive approaches is wasteful and does not always produce the optimum result'
'In my experience organisations very rarely have a pipeline of shovel ready schemes waiting for the Government's next funding announcement, not least because the revenue funding needed to get a project to shovel ready state is speculative and therefore high risk'
'....publicly owned assets' could be transferred and '....held under a collective public ownership'. In this way '....one public body is not negotiating with another public body to secure the maximum value from the sale to the possible long term detriment of the public estate as a whole and local spatial aspirations'
'....in the current very tough climate, it may be a case of securing any potential inward investment using the pull of town centre and public investment and the cluster of science and technology businesses present in the town'
PK
On the timeframe for the macro strategic approach - in general they agreed, but that they:
'....doubt this will ever happen, in reality. We are not good at long term thinking'
'Town centres are no longer primarily retail, especially with on-line shopping'
'I am not a fan of too many 'partnerships' and 'boards', which end up as 'talking shops' with no accountability'

'....long term funding commitments are not possible in the current economic climate'
'I can't fault your theory, but....'

Appendix II: examples of Sketch Maps

Introduction

The sketch map method was a key part of the Field Observations stage of the case study research (5.3.3, Table 5.2(a)). The following section sets out two examples of sketch maps that were used to investigate and analyse the qualities of place in Loughborough and Stevenage. They are intended to be illustrative of the technique followed and are not included here to support the findings of the research.

Appendix II(a): Sketch Map Process – Analysis of connectivity and movement in Loughborough

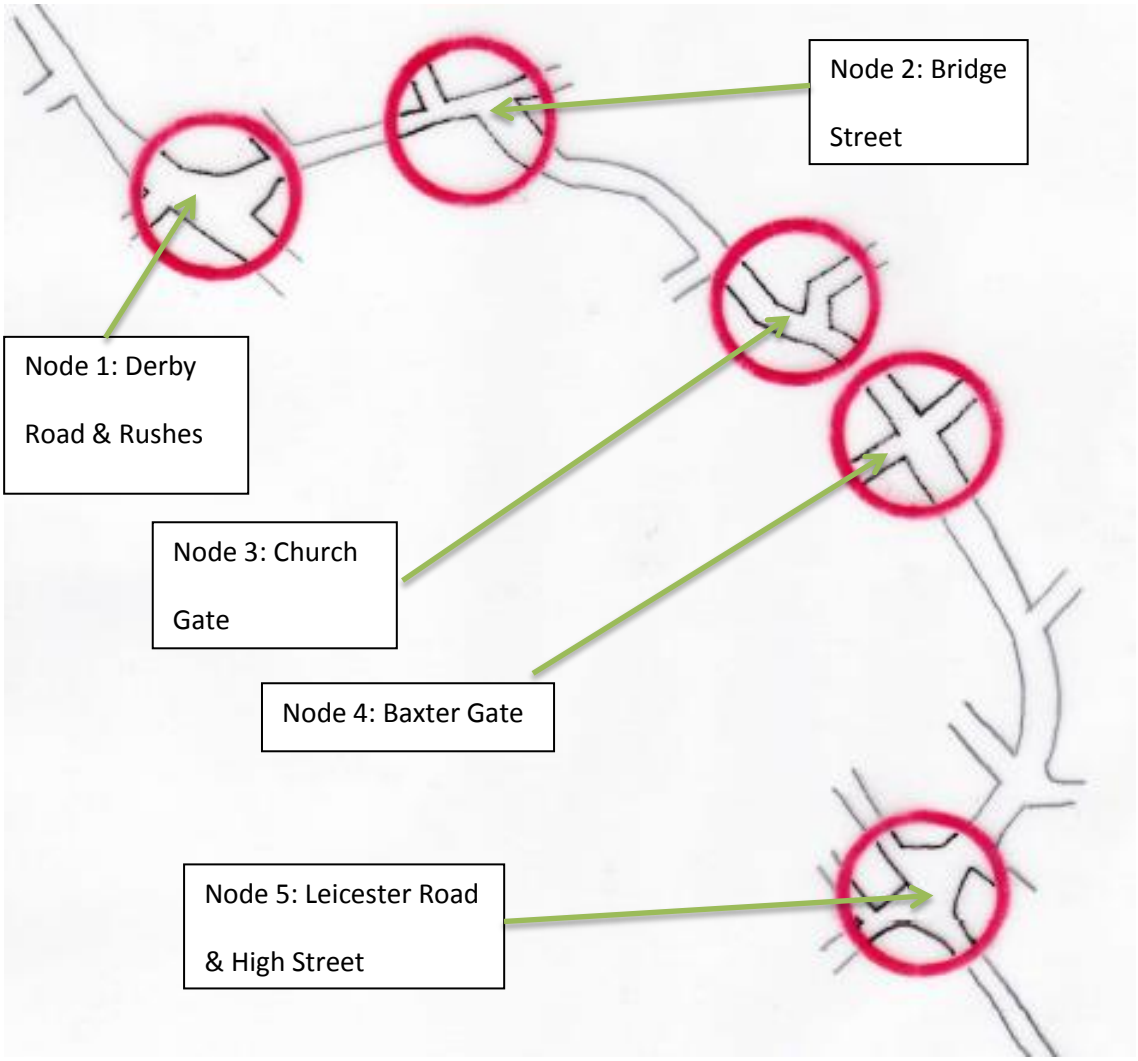
This section includes some sketch maps and images used as part of the diagnostic stage of the ARM.

1: example of dominance and width of the inner relief road



Source: author

AII.2: Inner Relief Road and Nodes



Source: author (not to scale)

The following sketch maps and images were used to analyse the way in which the inner relief road impacts on the operation of the town centre. Each of the main crossing points, or nodes, were observed at different times of the day.

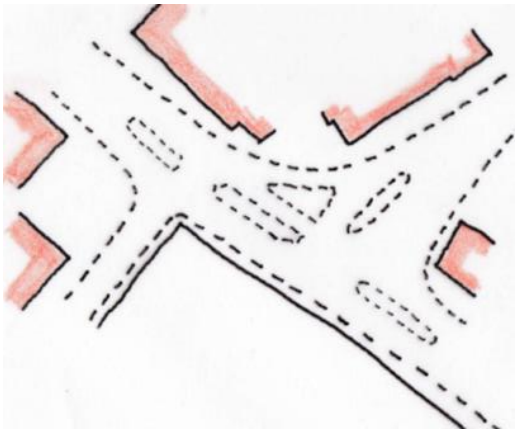
AII.3: Panoramic view of Node 2 & inactive façade



Source: author

Node1: A6 Inner Ring Road

AII:4: Node 1. Derby Road and Rushes



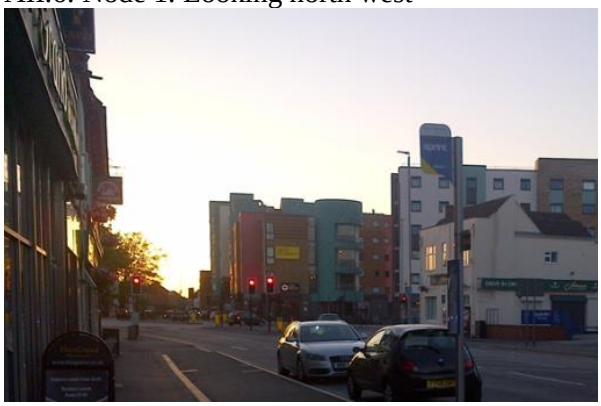
Source: author (not to scale)

AII.5: Node 1. aerial view



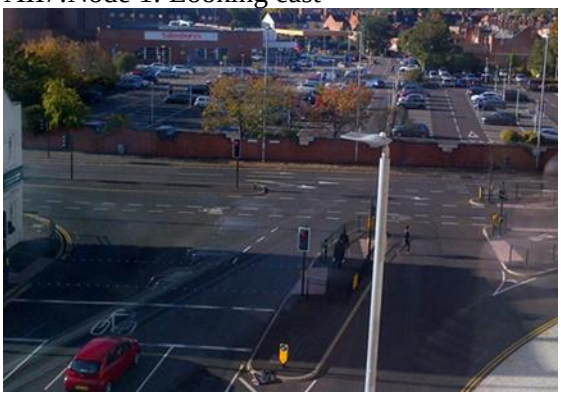
Source: Digimap

AII.6: Node 1. Looking north west



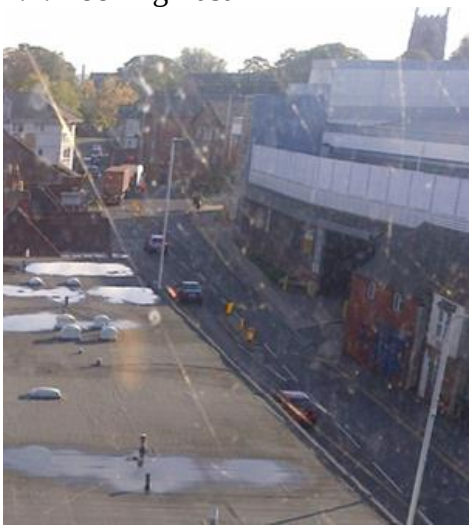
Source: author

AII7:Node 1: Looking east



Source: author

AII.7: Looking East



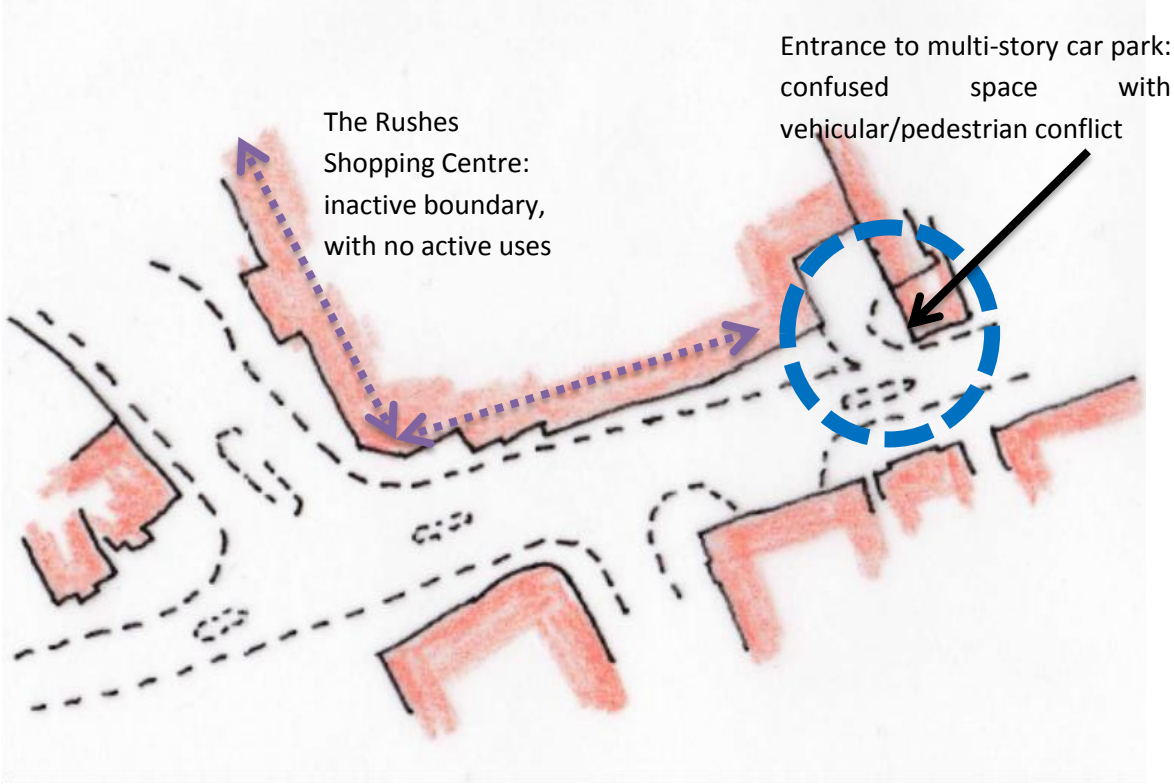
Source: author

AII.8: Looking West



Source: author

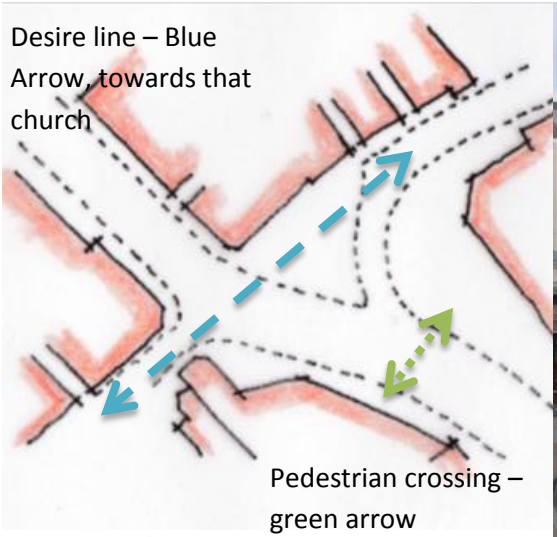
AII.9: Node 2. Bridge Street



Source: author

Node 3: Biggin Street junction with A6 Inner Ring Road

AII.10: Church Gate



Source: author

AII.11: from Market Place to Biggin Street



Source: author

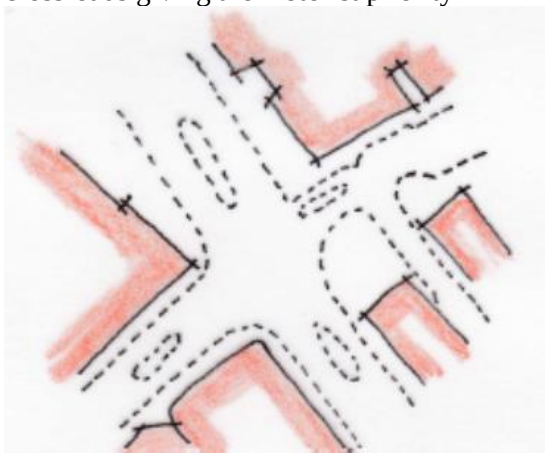
AII.12: Controlled crossing point, not on pedestrian ‘desire line’, see AII.12



Source: author

Nodes 4: A6 Inner Ring Road

AII.12: Node 4. Baxter Gate, large crossroads giving the motorist priority



Source: author

AII.11: Node 4, over engineered & poorly managed space



Source: author

Node 5: A6 Inner Ring Road

AII.11: Node 5. Leicester Road and High Street



Source: author

AII.12: Node 5. Leicester Road and High Street, No sense of place or arrival

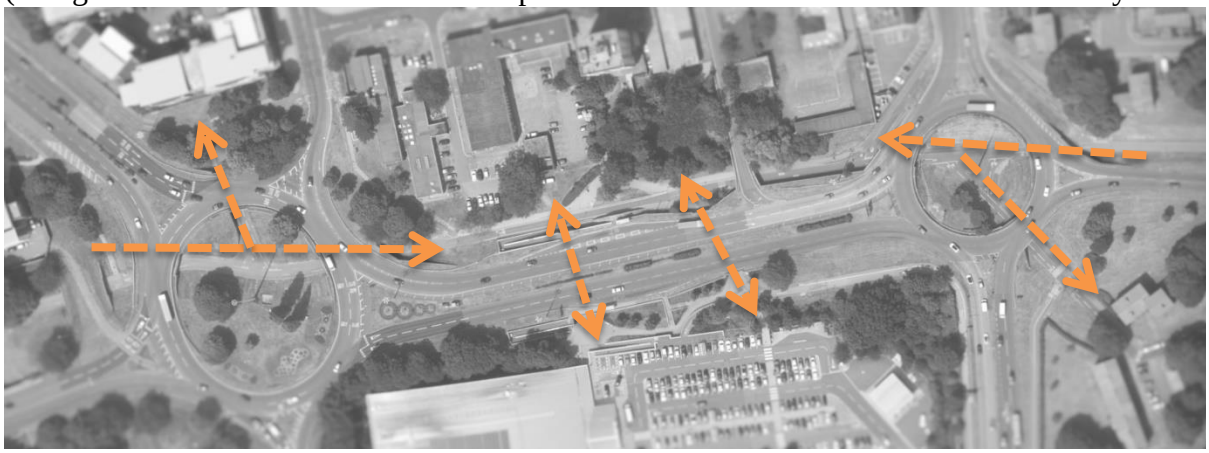


Source: author

Appendix II(b): Sketch Map Process – examples of pedestrian arrival to the town centre

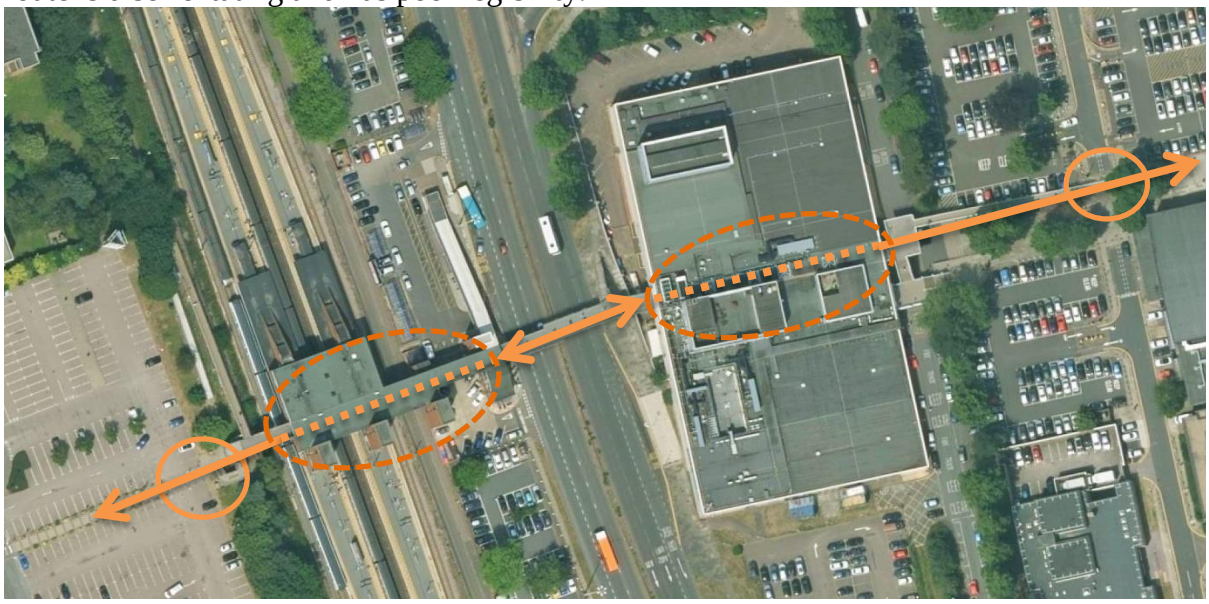
Sketch Map – example

AII.13: Arrival points to the town centre from the south, all routes are via underpasses (orange dashed arrows. The roads are separated from other forms of travel on foot or cycle.



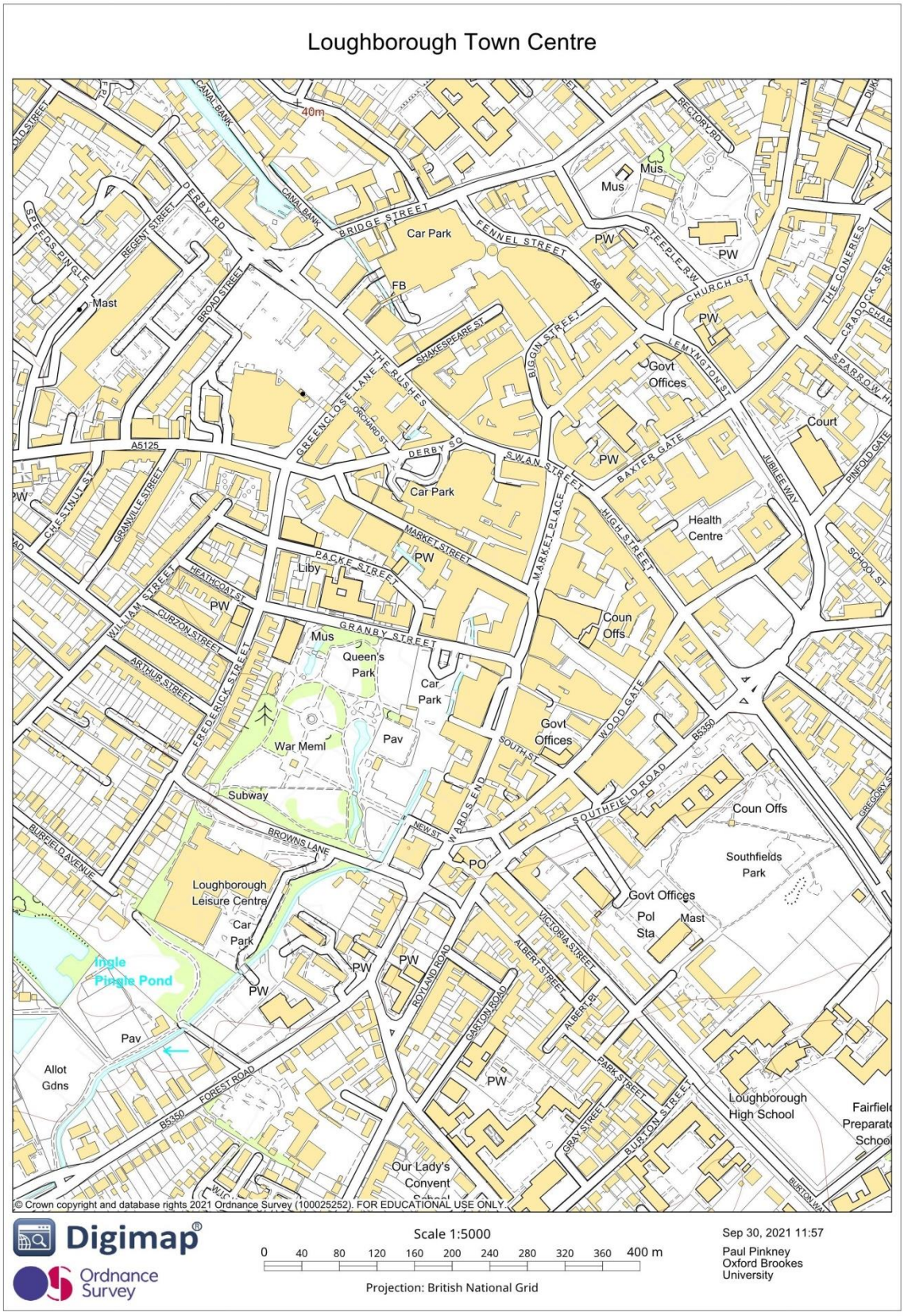
Source: digimap

AII.14: route between the leisure park, railway station and the town centre. The route involves a series of ramps and bridges (solid orange) and tunnels (dashed orange). The route is disorientating and has poor legibility.

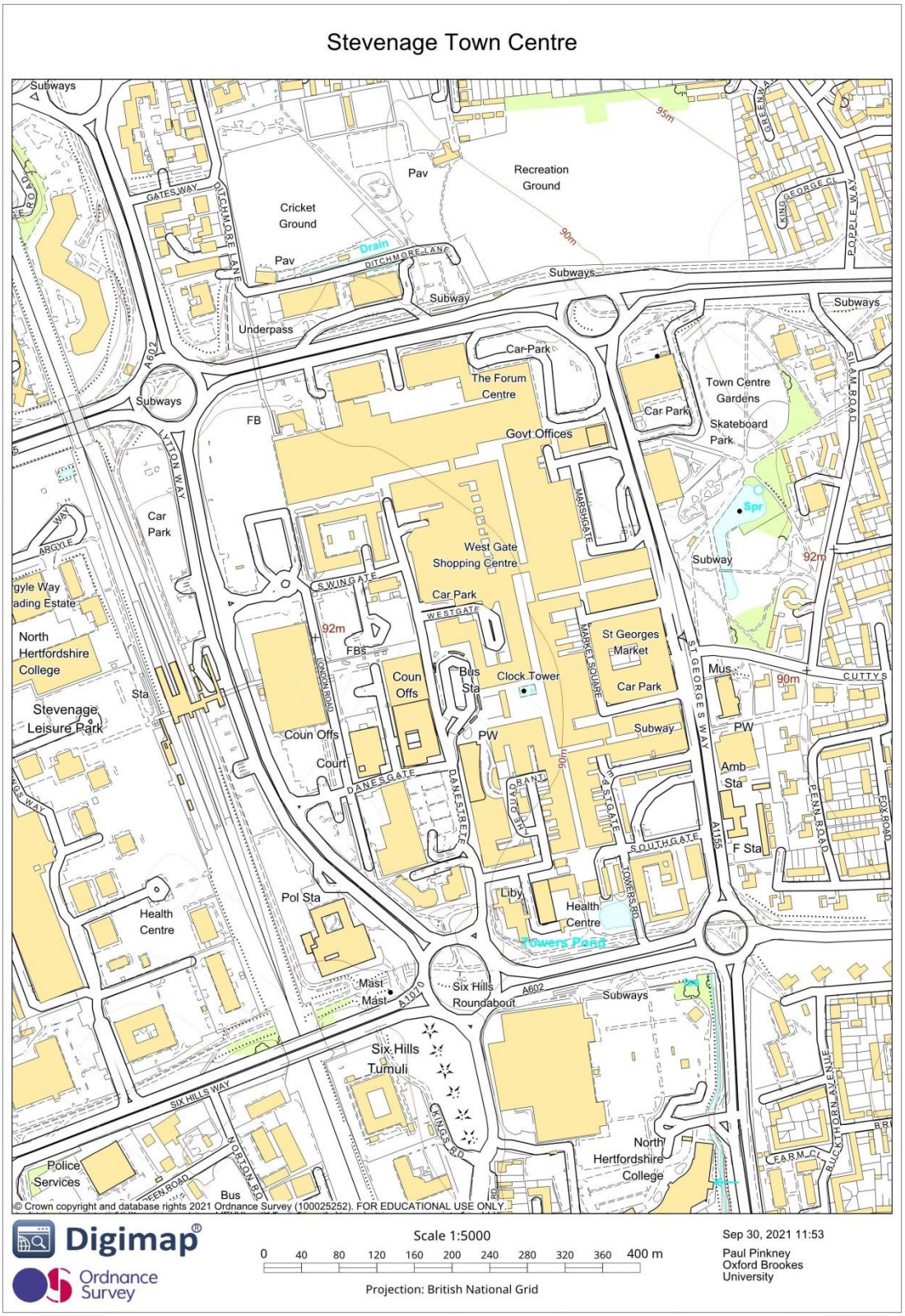


Source: Digimap

Appendix III(a): Loughborough Town Centre map to scale (1:5000)



Appendix III(a): Stevenage Town Centre map to scale (1:5000)



Appendix IV: supporting evidence for Chapters

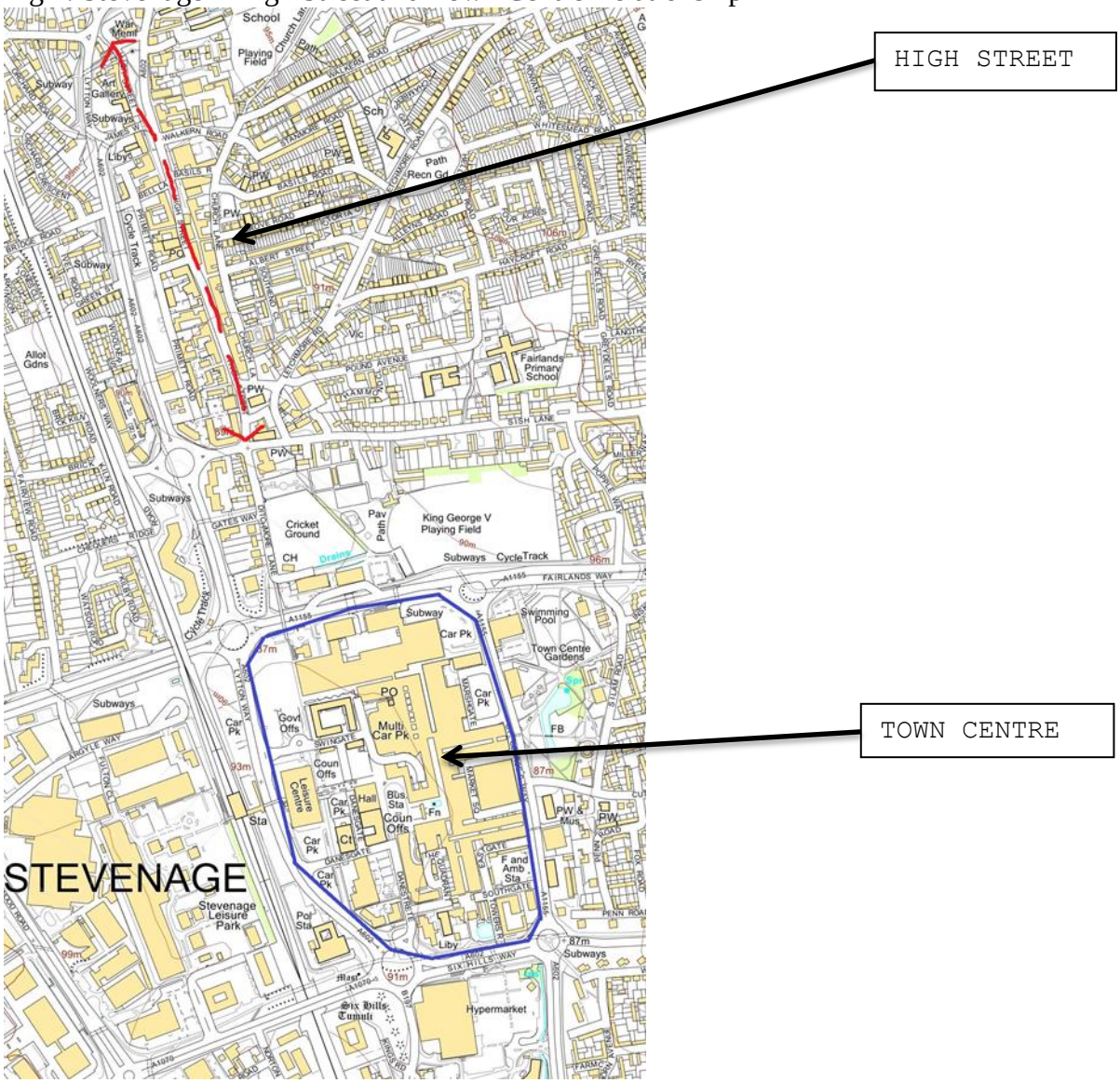
Introduction

This section provides supporting evidence for the chapters.

Chapter Two

Spatial relationship of the High Street and the Town Centre.

Fig 1: Stevenage – High Street and Town Centre Relationship



Source: Digimap annotated by author (NOT TO SCALE)

Fig.2: Loughborough – High Street and Town Centre Relationship

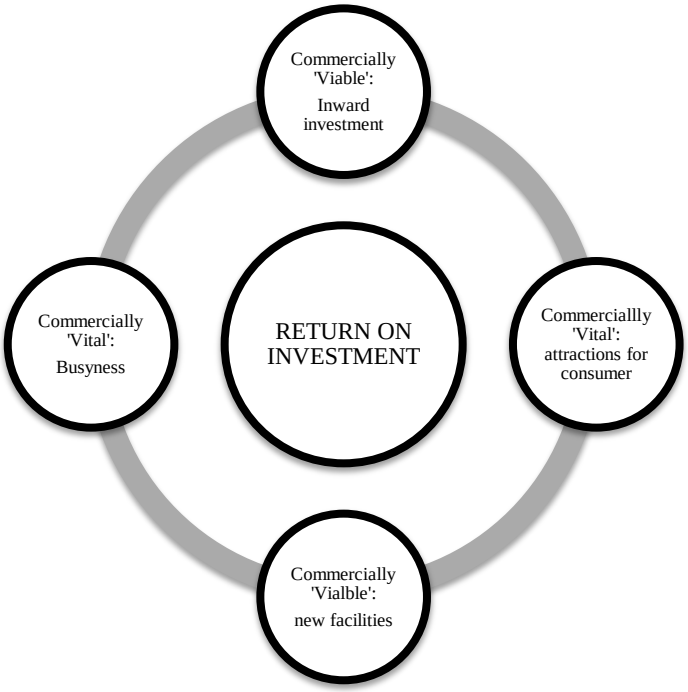


Source: Digimap annotated by author (NOT TO SCALE)

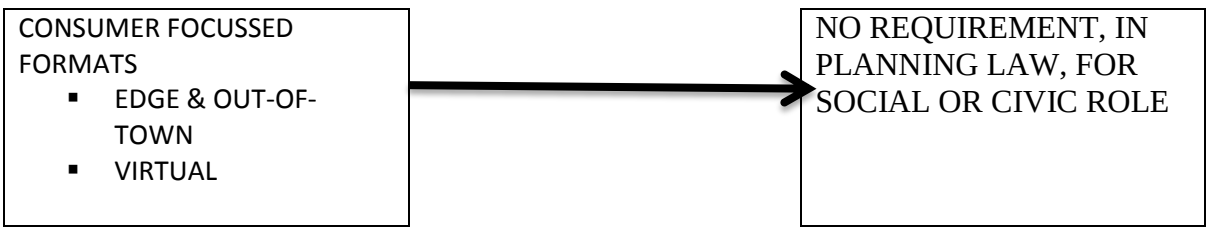
Chapter Three – supporting information

The ‘Ravenscroft’s cycle’ of town centre ‘vitality’ and ‘viability’ can be adapted to other formats that emerged as commercially ‘viable’ for town centre uses. The first format considered is the edge or out-of-town. Fig.1 demonstrates that the out-of-town format is less complex than the town centre, as there is no requirement in planning policy for the space to be socially ‘vital’, and is wholly focussed on the commercial ‘viability’ of the space or return on investment (Fig.2).

Fig.1: Developing ‘Ravenscroft’s Cycle’ - ‘Vital’ and ‘Viable’ cycle for other physical formats outside the town centre. Each component typically responds to the relative commercial health or return on investment from the asset.

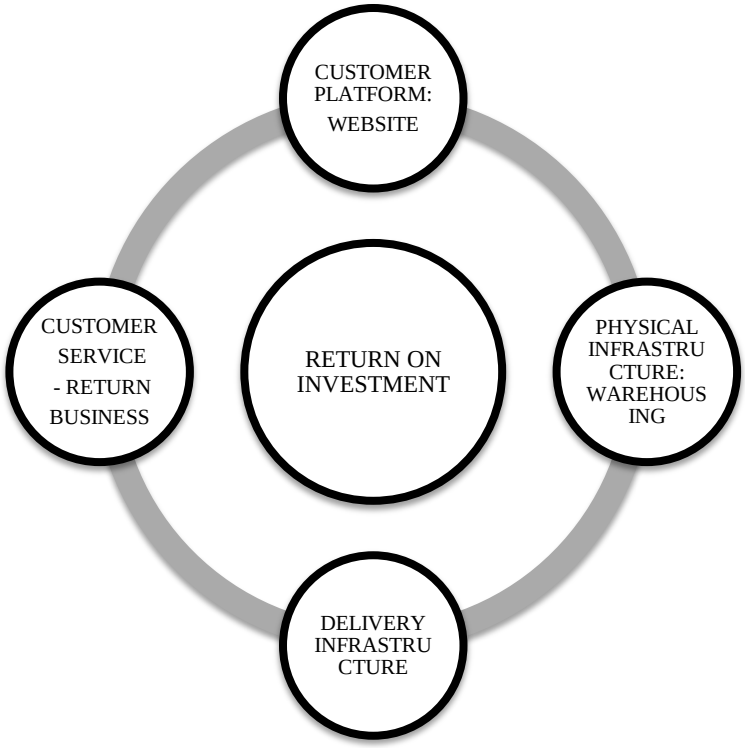


Developing ‘Ravenscroft’s Cycle’ - ‘Vital’ and ‘Viable’ cycle for other physical formats outside the town centre.



The virtual format emerged in the latter part of P2 and the share of the commercial market (in particular the comparison and convenience retail sector) accelerated in P3. The virtual format, in line with out-of-town, is not required through planning policy to be socially 'vital', nor is it essential to have traditional bricks and mortar shops (see Chapter Two, Table 2.7) (Fig.3).

Fig.3: virtual formats conceptual diagram



The virtual model, like the out-of-town, is less complex than the town centre and creates additional opportunities to have access to routes to the commercial market.

Chapter Four – supporting information

The following section offers further detail on the way in which the scenario testing was carried out.

Scenario Testing

Scenario Testing	A number of scenarios and actions are identified, following five components (set out below), and evaluated through the Scenario Planning Matrix (SPM). The Scenario Planning Matrix offers a systematic approach to examine the challenges facing town centres, in order to develop an 'adaptive resilient' approach and the development of recommendations.

Following the analysis of data captured through the ARM, a number of scenarios and actions are proposed and evaluated using the Scenario Planning Matrix (SPM).

The SPM is a systematic tool used here to examine the challenges facing town centres now. The challenges will be identified through the case study method, in order to create an 'adaptive resilient' approach - this is achieved through five components.

Fig.1: appropriate timeframe for adaptive-resilience strategy

SHORT TERM									MEDIUM TERM					LONG TERM
YEAR									DECADE					YEARS
YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	10	20	30	40	50	50 - 100

The development of theoretical recommendations are set within a timeframe for the delivery of an 'adaptive-resilience' intervention (see Fig.1), including:

Short Term interventions - the advantage of 'quick wins' to create impact and momentum is acknowledged, and to a large degree this has been the tactic of reviews of the town centre, such as the Portas Report (2011) and the Portas Pilots, and, the requirement for 'shovel' ready schemes, to deliver short term results, in recent government schemes (e.g. The High Street Futures Fund).

Medium Term adaptation - some measures to develop 'adaptive-resilience' will be complex, such as physical regeneration and adaptation, and require a longer period of time - provide a gestation period to be identified to allow, for example land assembly, raising finance.

Long Term strategy – for anticipated change, such as: Artificial Intelligence, climate change, technological advancement and for relevant national policies to be prepared.

Fig.2: **Indicators** – based on the literature, there are four key indicators of 'adaptive-resilience', these are:

(i)-*Visitor Behaviour* (VB)	The way in which people use the place at different times of the day
(ii) *Economic Change* (EC)	The ability of a place to change and adapt to economic change, through a mix of uses and an agile built form
(iii) *Policy* (P)	National and local policy environment the ability to promote adaptive-resilience
(iv) *Living Spaces* (LS)	The quality of the 'living space' is a key indicator to the potential 'adaptive-resilience' of a place (see Chapter Three - Gehl, 2001; Carmona, 2013; Carmona et al, 2018; Carmona, 2019).

Development of a Set of Theoretical Recommendations

DEVELOPMENT OF A SET OF THEORETICAL RECOMMENDATIONS	Generic and specific theoretical recommendations are identified to develop adaptive-resilience.

Following the scenario testing stage, a number of theoretical recommendations are proposed at the micro-specific and macro-generic scale that could, in theory, be implemented to promote an adaptive-resilience-response for a town centre.

Test the theoretical response with experts

Test the theoretical response with experts	Response and opinions of experts in their field to test the proposed recommendations.

The final element of the ARM is to test a set of recommendations, grouping them as micro-specific (relating to the situation that is unique to the location), and macro-generic (those findings that are likely to relate to a majority of town centres). This is a key part of the ARM process. The robustness of the recommendations, and effectiveness of the recommendations to address the change facing the town centre, will be determined by many variables – some that can be anticipated, others that cannot. The 'sense check' is an essential final element of Stage Two: by the end of Stage Two of the ARM the research problem and the research questions can be addressed (1.2).

(i) *Current Position* – this is informed by the case study, and through the generation of data through the fieldwork, a desktop study, and discussions with local experts. The empirical evidence is then analysed through stage one of the ARM, to form an understanding of the

challenge faced by the town centre face in terms of social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability'.

(ii) *Scenario* – having developed an understanding of the challenge facing the 'vitality' and 'viability' of the town centre a scenario is proposed, so that an 'adaptive-resilience' approach can be developed in the form of a set of theoretical recommendations.

(iii) *Trajectory* – the trajectory reflects the findings from the empirical data, and indicates whether the response to the identified challenge to the town centre is:

- improving or having a positive impact (symbol "+");
- neutral or no data was identified in the case study to indicate that the issue, or is not considered relevant or salient at the time the data was collected (symbol "/");
  or,
- a negative impact and expected to continue to be negative without intervention (symbol "-").

(iv) *Proposed Action[s]* – a number of high-level actions that are identified at both the macro-generic (MG), and the micro-specific (MS) level, that can be implemented to deliver the required outcome, and ensure that the town centre develops the characteristics of 'adaptive-resilience'.

(v) *Timeframe* – as identified through this research the town centre is a complex ecosystem, which evolves and changes over time.

Fig.3: Scenario Planning Matrix

PLACE

UID	CURRENT POSITION	TRAJECTORY + / -	SCENARIO	PROPOSED ACTION[S] (GM = Generic-Macro; MS = Micro Specific)	TIMEFRAME S/M/L	INDICATOR			
						VB	EC	P	LS
P#.#				(i)					
				(ii)					

DELIVERABILITY

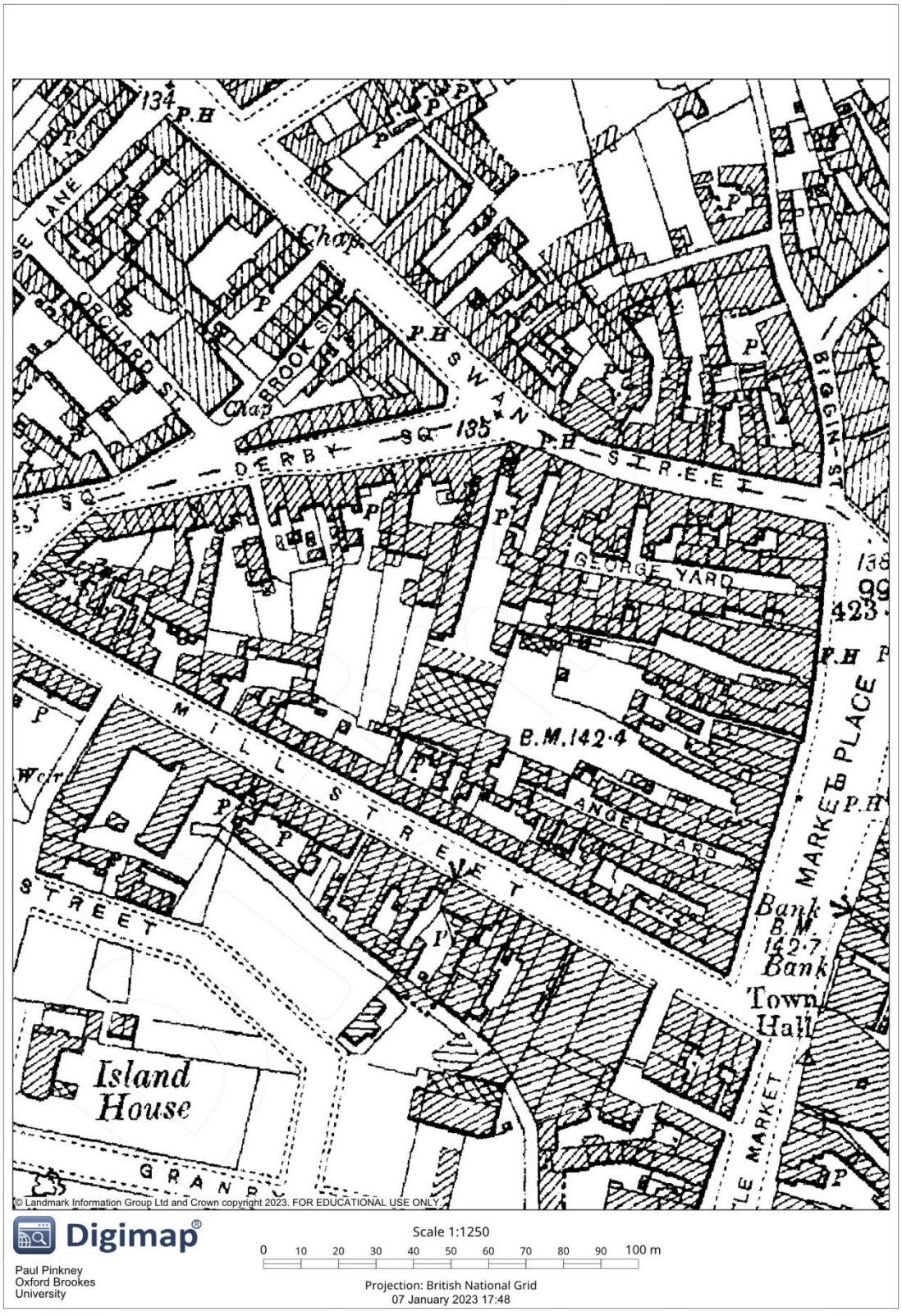
UID	CURRENT POSITION	TRAJECTORY + / -	SCENARIO	PROPOSED ACTION[S] (GM = Generic-Macro; MS = Micro Specific)	TIMEFRAME S/M/L	INDICATOR			
						VB	EC	P	LS
D#.#				(i)					
				(ii)					

MANAGEMENT

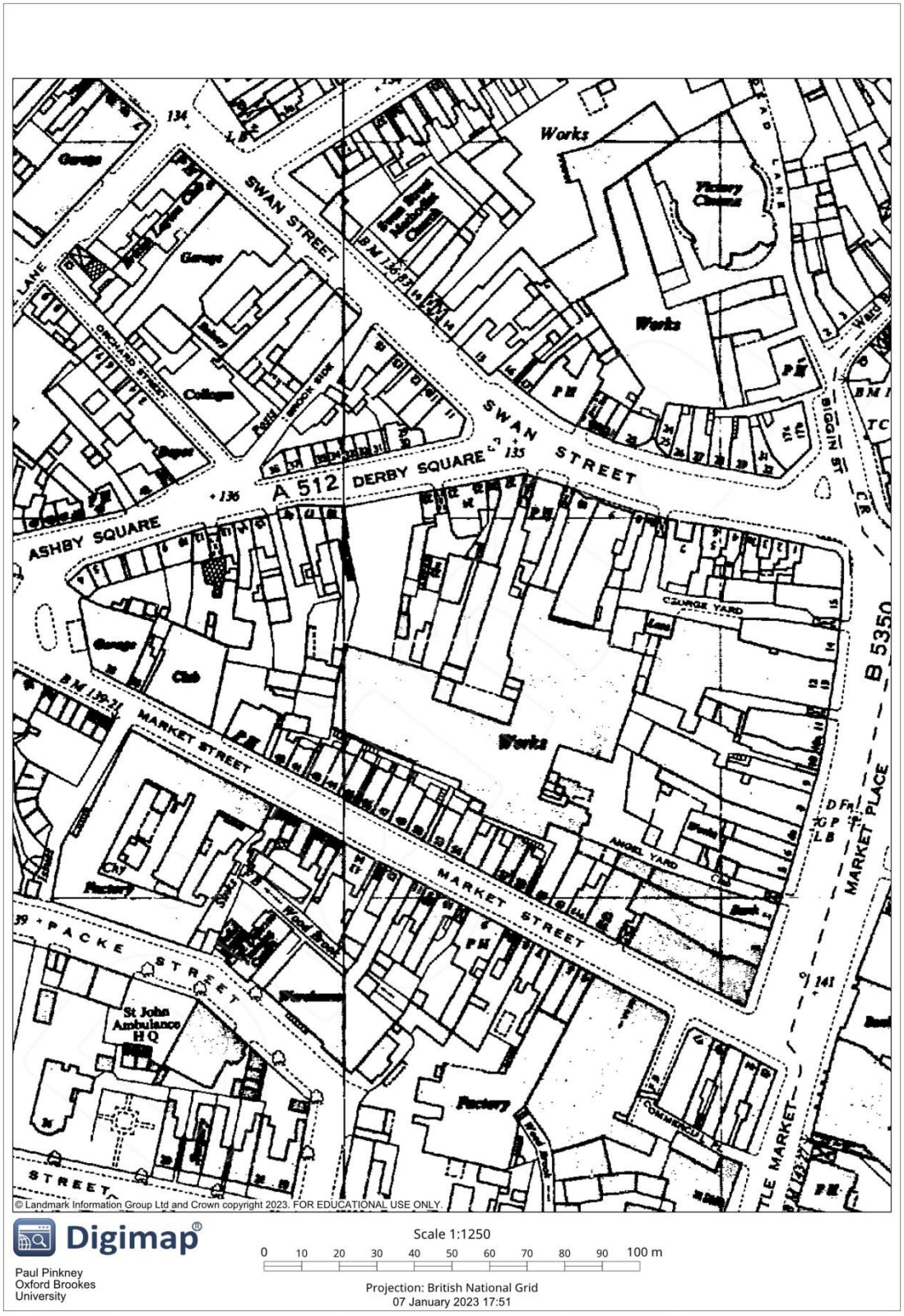
UID	CURRENT POSITION	TRAJECTORY + / -	SCENARIO	PROPOSED ACTION[S] (GM = Generic-Macro; MS = Micro Specific)	TIMEFRAME S/M/L	INDICATOR			
						VB	EC	P	LS
M#.#				(i)					
				(ii)					

Chapter Six – supporting information

Loughborough c.1900 – Map to scale

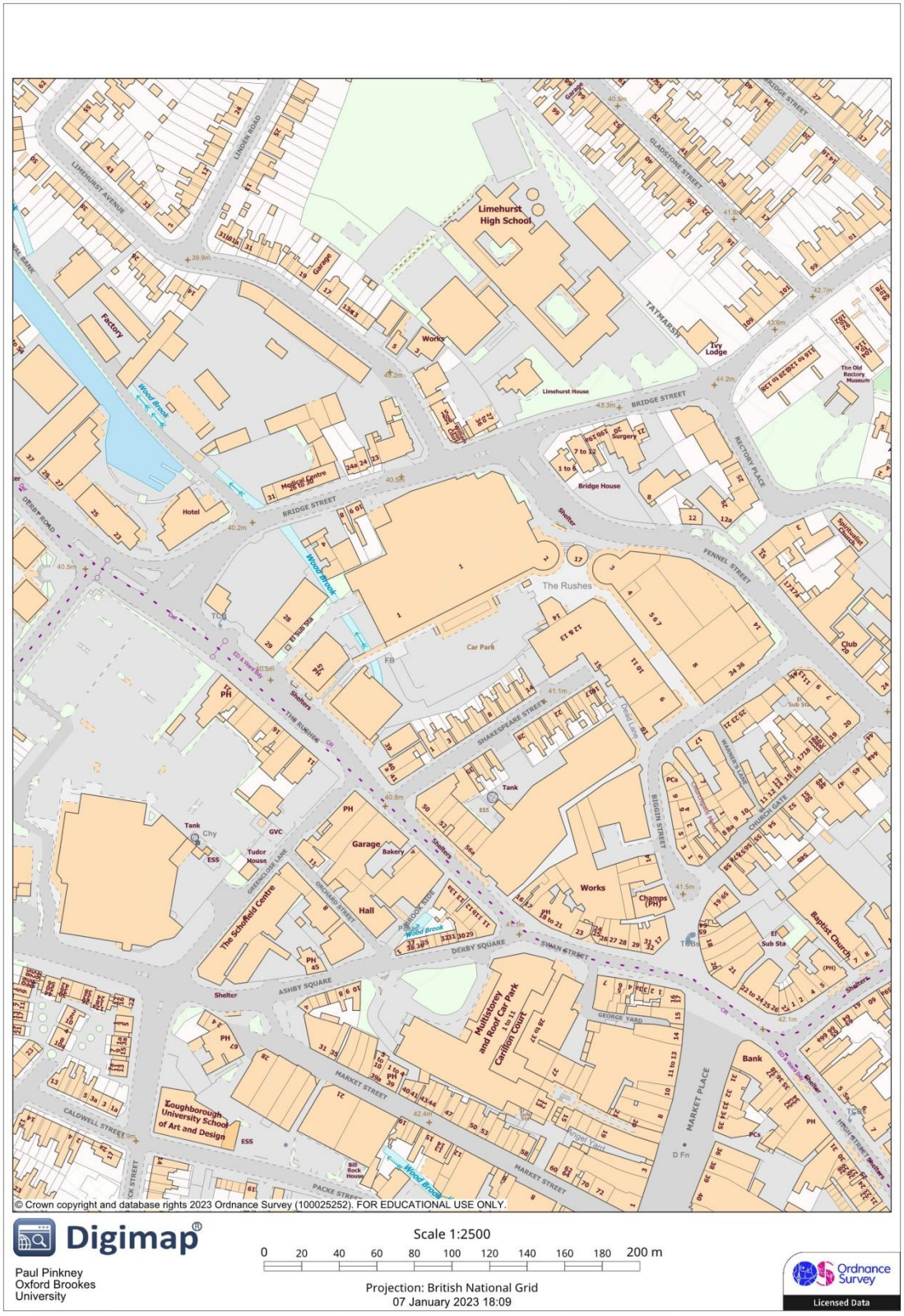


Loughborough 1960s – Map to scale



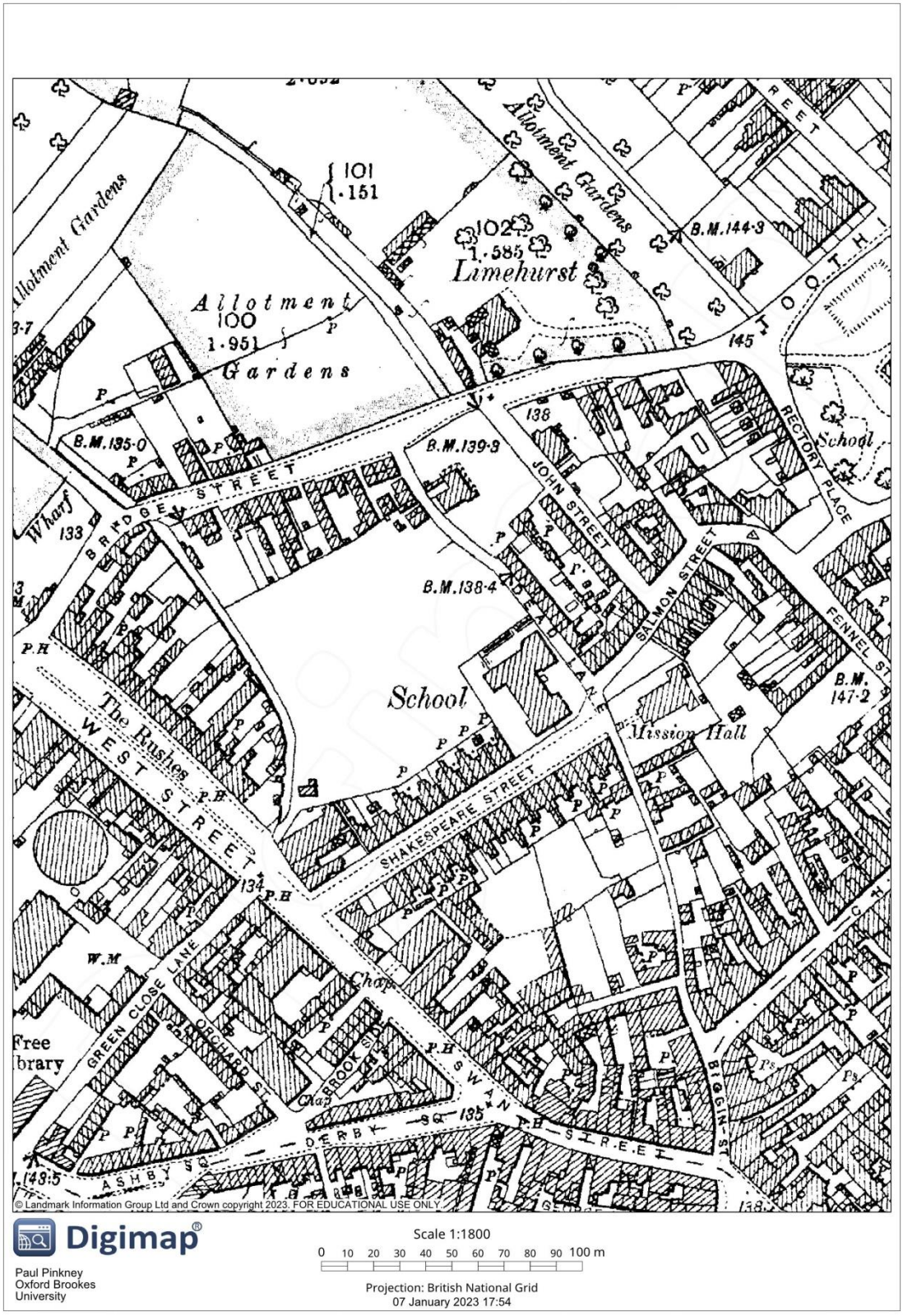
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Loughborough – contemporary – Map to scale

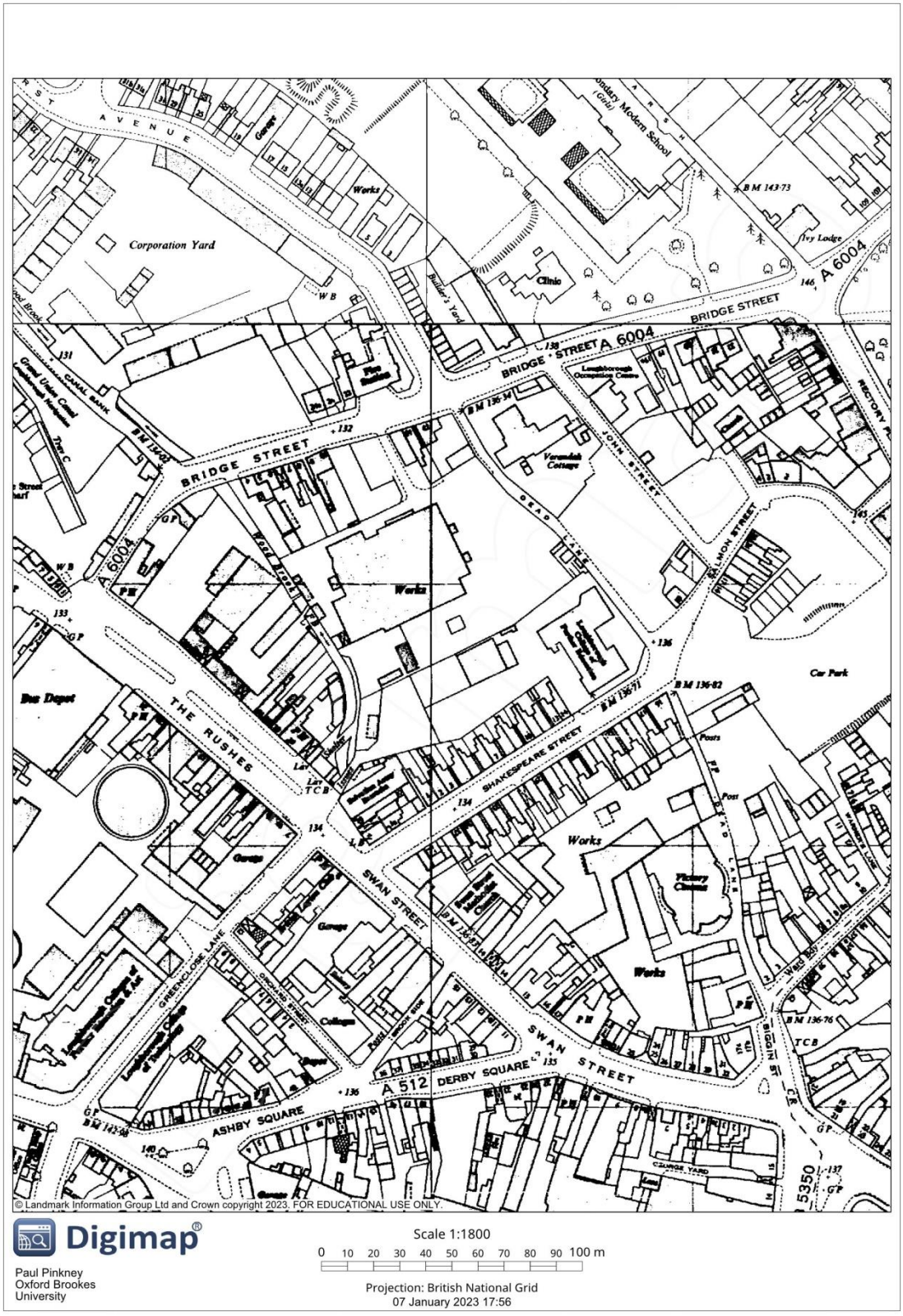


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Loughborough c.1900 – Map to scale



Loughborough 1960s – Map to scale



Additional Images to support Case Study Six

Part One – Place (6.3)

Fig.1: the Carillon Court was the first big box, mono-use development in the town centre. It replaced a netweork of smaller buildings and an emplyment site.



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.2: interior of the Charnwood precinct, renamed Carillon Court. The enclosed shopping area is showing signs of age.



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Fig.3: Town Hall, has been repurposed as a small civic theatre – it is no longer the location for local government services



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.4: All Saints Church, physically separated from the town centre by the inner relief road



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.5: listed building, The Griffin public house



Source: author, 25/10/2016

Fig.6: Bingo Hall is a converted cinema and is an example of art-deco style architecture which adds to a sense of place.



Source: author, 14/11/2019

Fig.7: example of art deco styling, still operating as a cinema with a café/restaurant



Source: author, 14/11/2019

Fig.8: Former industrial use building converted into apartments and work space, close to the railway station



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Formal pieces of public art

Fig.9: 'The Sockman' - bronze sculpture by Shona Kinloch (1998).



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.10: 'The Signaler' - sculpture by John Atkin (2003).



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.11: work on hoarding to the rear of the Carillon Centre, creating interest in a bland rear servicing area



Source: author, 05/11/2019

Fig.12: advertising text on restaurant wall



Source: author, 05/11/2019

Fig.13: detail on door next to café



Source: author, 05/11/2019

Fig.14: a cluttered and disorientating space.



Source: author, 05/11/2019

Fig.15: ‘street hurdle’ or somewhere to secure bicycles? Poorly positioned street furniture.



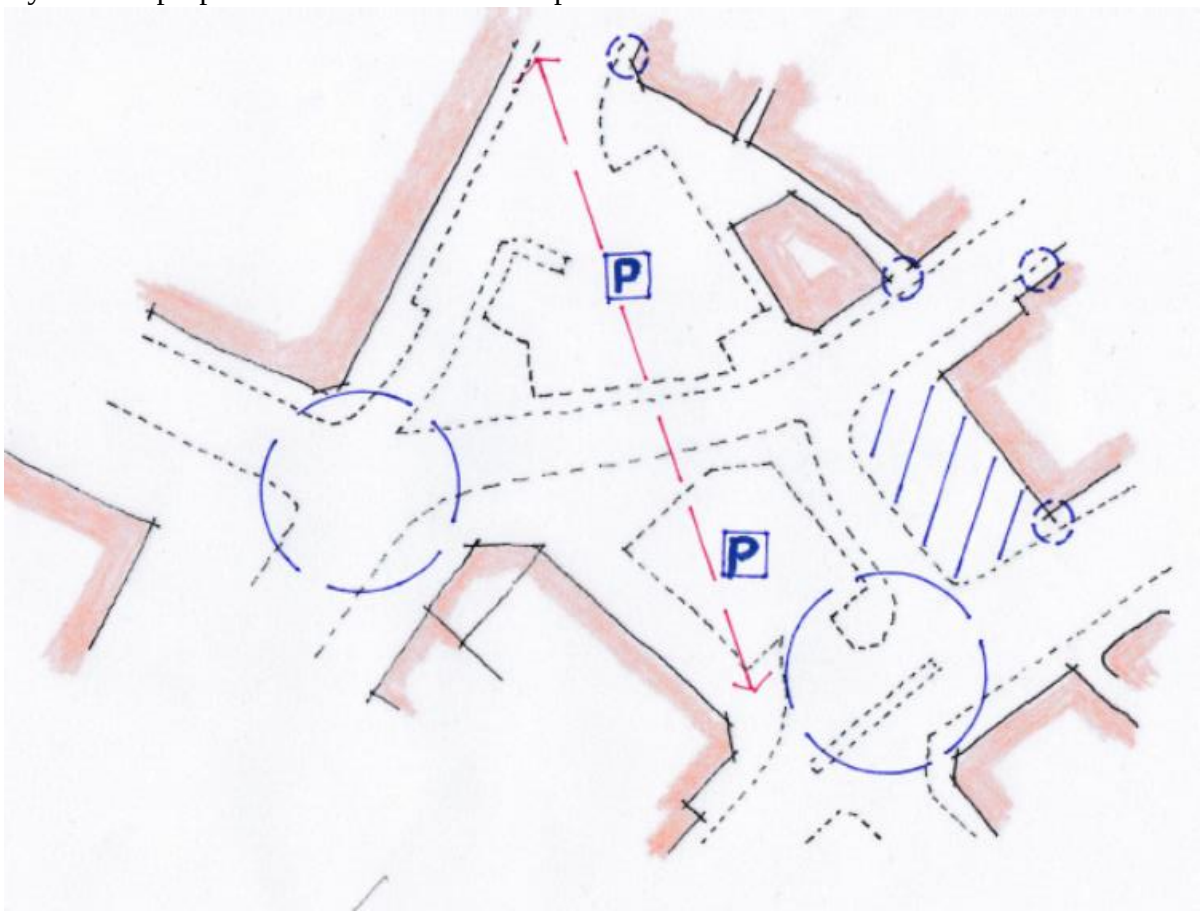
Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.16: excessive use of bollards, creates unnecessary clutter in the street



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.17: Bedfordshire Square, vehicle dominated space with narrow pavements and confused layout. It is proposed for environmental improvement.



Source: author

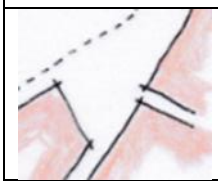
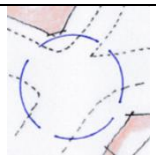
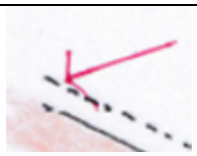
KEY to – Fig.17: Bedfordshire Square, vehicle dominated space proposed for environmental improvement.				
Building edge	Narrow pavement & crossing point	Main node	Parking Area	Desire Line
				

Fig.18: Bedford Square, current configuration



Source: author, 04/11/2019

Fig.19: £1.9m proposal for environmental improvements of Bedford Square



Source: Leicester Mercury[7]

Fig.20: example of the width of the inner relief road, Baxter Gate



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Fig.21: vehicles have precedence, Bridge Street



Source: author, 01/10/2019

[7] https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/plans-revealed-19m-loughborough-town-3916565 accessed 21/05/2020

Fig.22: uninspiring gateway to the town centre from the railway station. Route is poorly designed giving priority to the motorist, resulting in torturous route for the pedestrian via ‘sheep pens’.



Source: author, 01/10/2019

Fig.23: Loughborough train station, sanitised space for transit



Source: author, 14/09/2018

Fig.24: street at night, no passive surveillance



Source: author, 24/10/2016

Fig.25: evening economy, fast food offer



Source: author, 28/06/2018

Fig.26: The Unicorn public house, one of a number of traditional style pubs in the town centre



Source: author, 24/10/2016

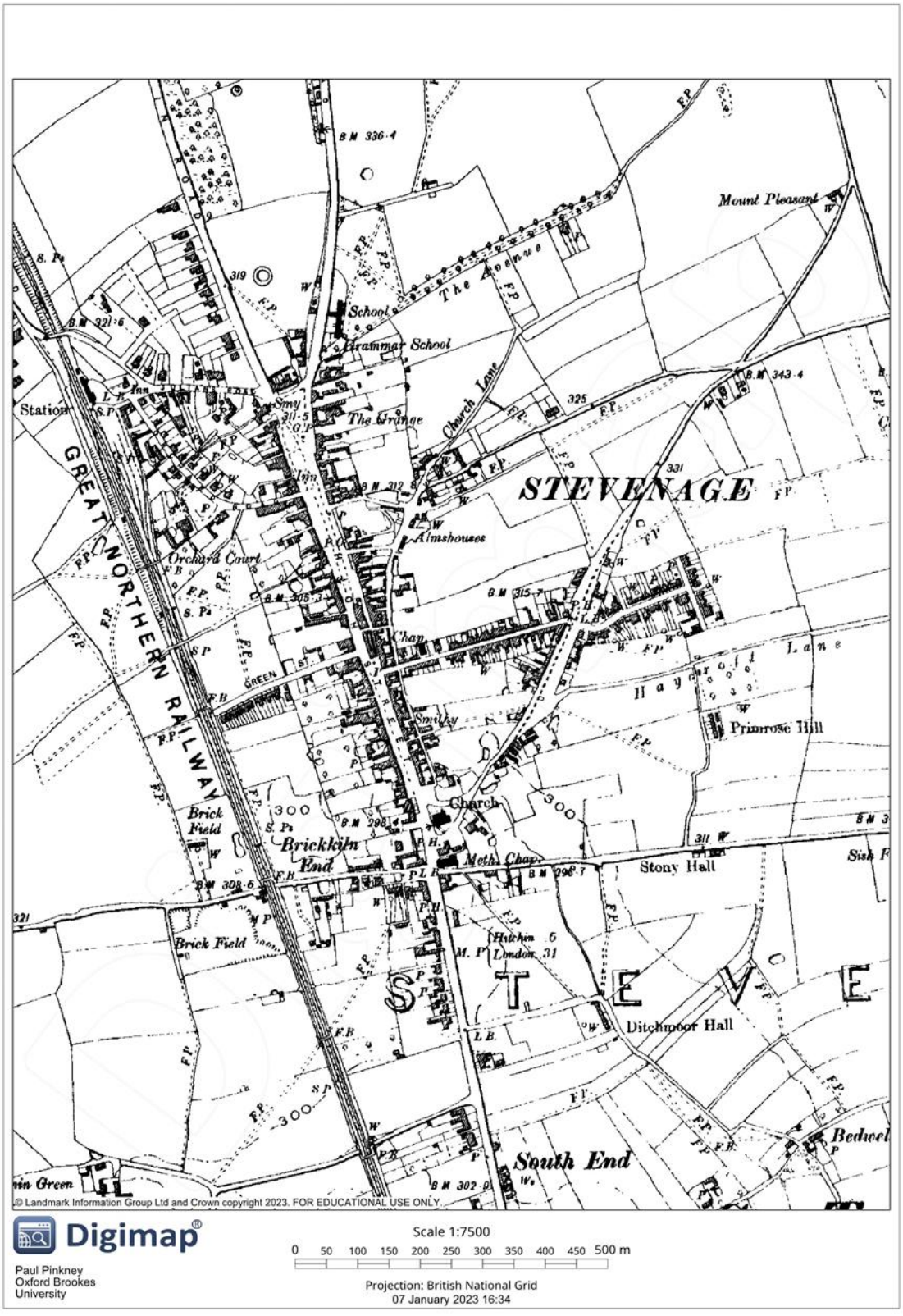
Fig.27: large and intrusive CCTV street furniture, to compensate for lack of 'natural' surveillance



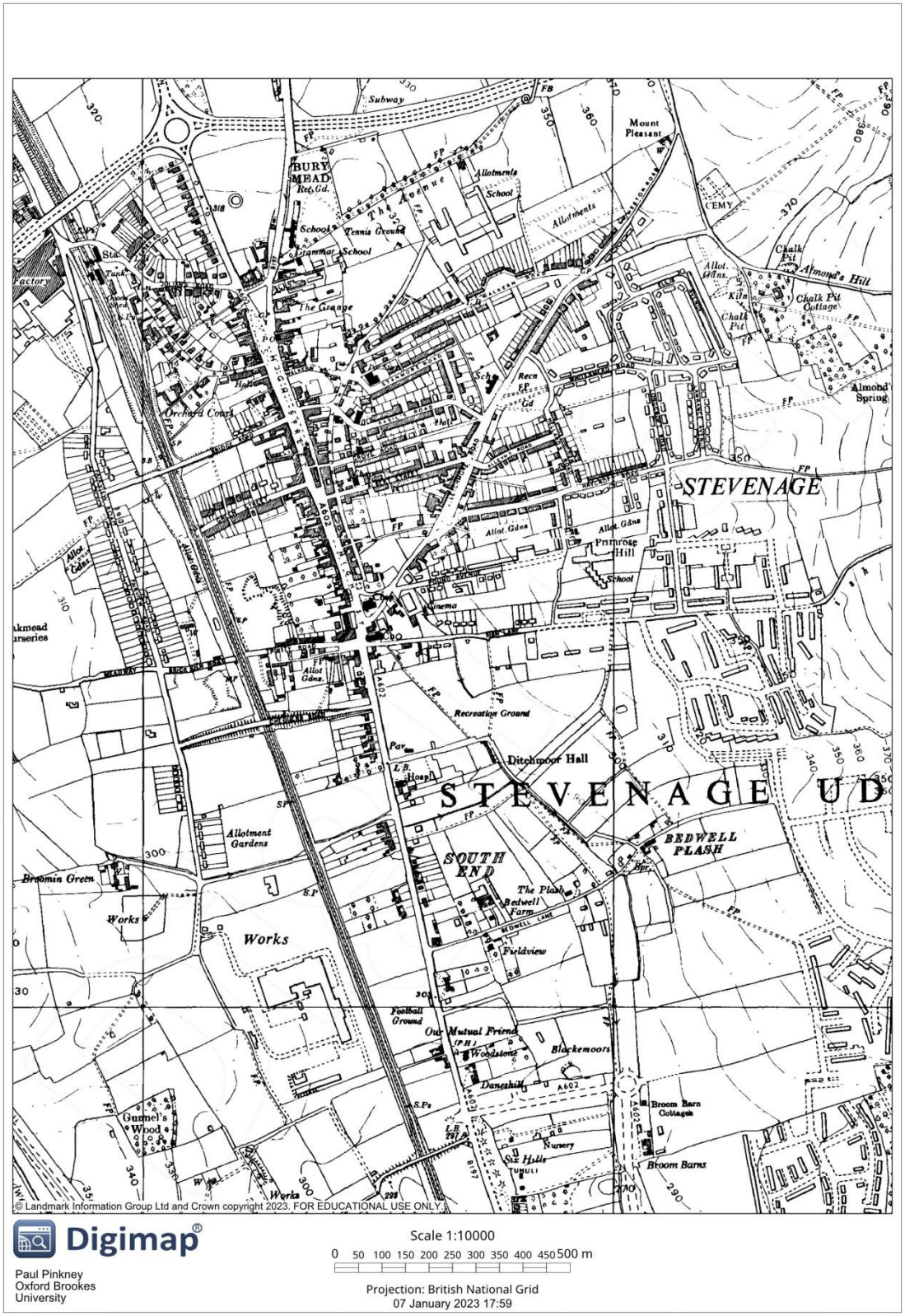
Source: author, 05/11/2019

Chapter Seven

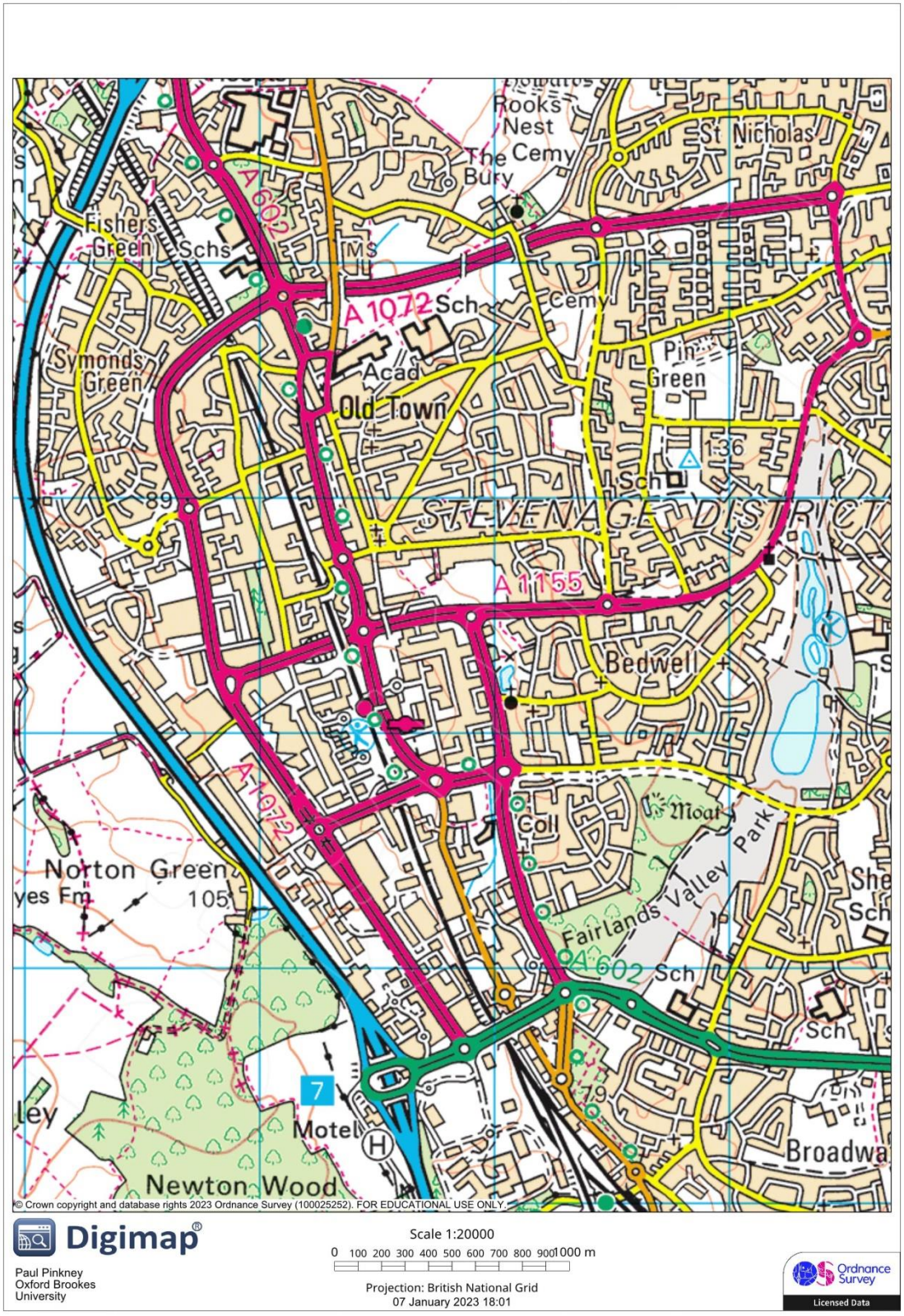
Stevenage 1890s – Map to scale



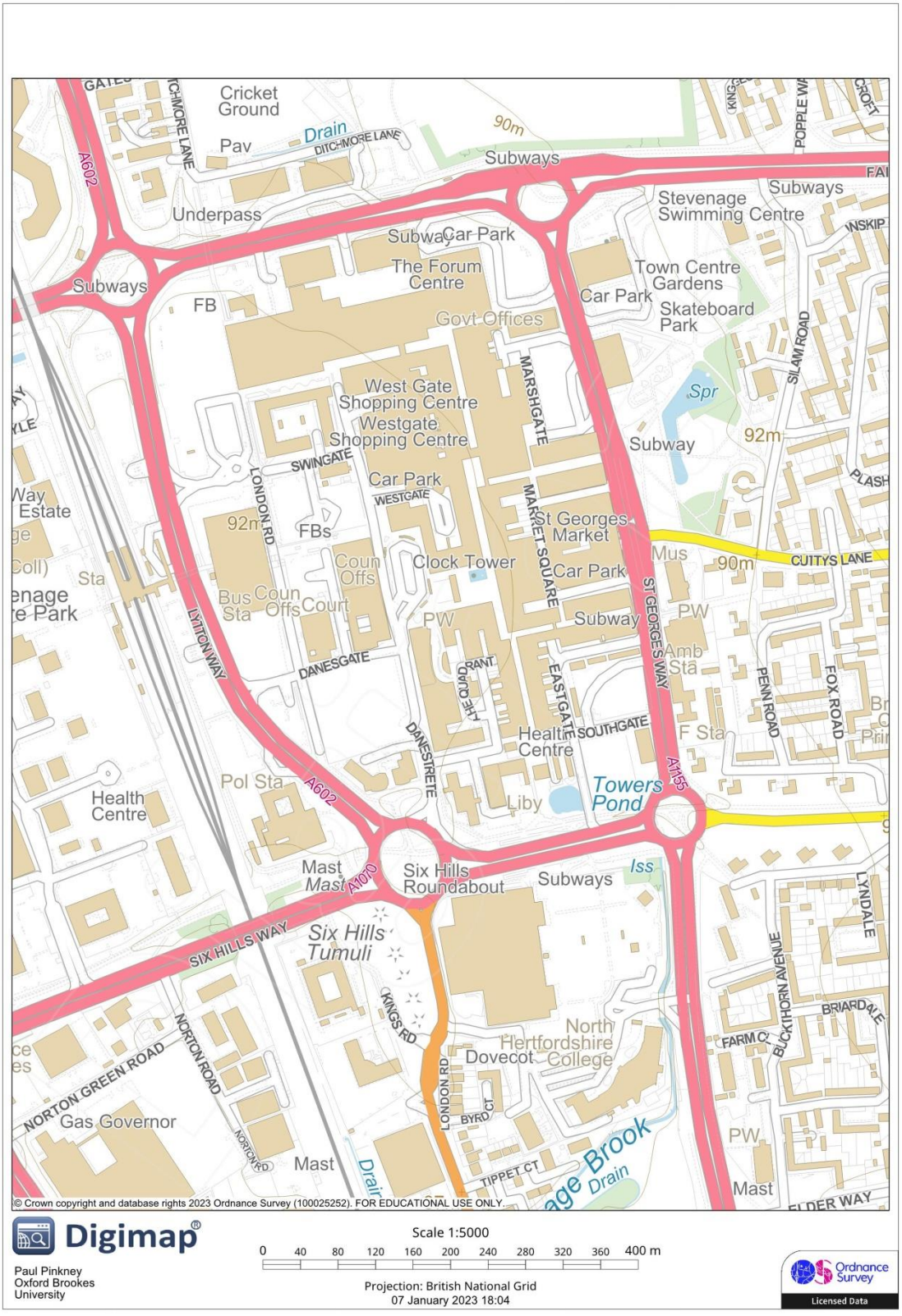
Stevenage 1960s – Map to scale



Stevenage – contemporary – Map to scale



Stevenage – contemporary town centre area– Map to scale



Additional Images to support Case Study Seven

Part One – Place (7.3)

Fig.1: Town Square Conservation Area, change or adaptation regulated to preserve the original built form and architecture.



Source: SPD: Town Square Conservation Area Management Plan. [8] Not to scale.

Fig.2: Mural 1 - there is a tradition of murals in the town centre, this example is on the side of a shop in the Market Square



Source: author, 16/01/2020

[8] Stevenage Borough Council (2010) Town Square Conservation Area Appraisal

Fig.3: Mural 2 in an underpass – this one links the town centre to the town centre gardens.



Source: author. 16/01/2020

Fig.4: Mural 3 - a modern example of the mural in the town centre reflecting the connectivity to London (TfL[9] style 'Stevenage' sign), King's Cross can be reached by train in around 25 minutes



Source: author, 16/01/2020

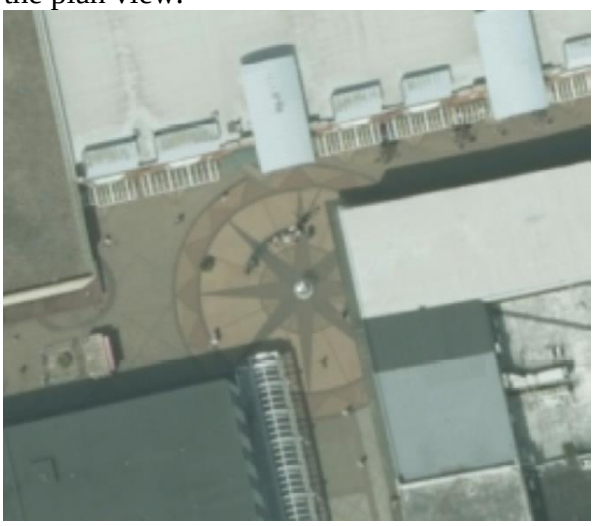
[9] Transport for London

Fig.5: original street furniture, designed to create a sense of place and support the cohesive design of the town centre precinct.



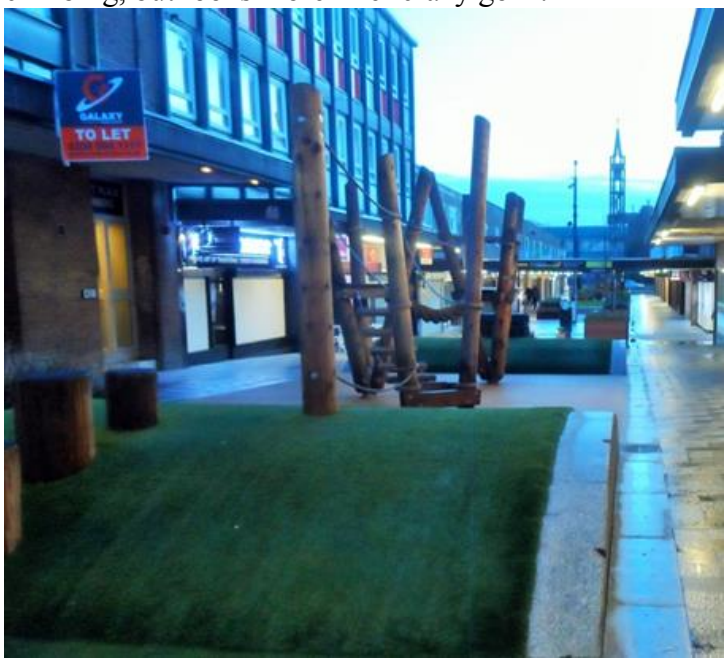
Source: Franklin Frith Collection

Fig.6: the Forum development of big-box format with specially designed pavement and public art. The paving scheme is less effective at ground level, than from aerial or the plan view.



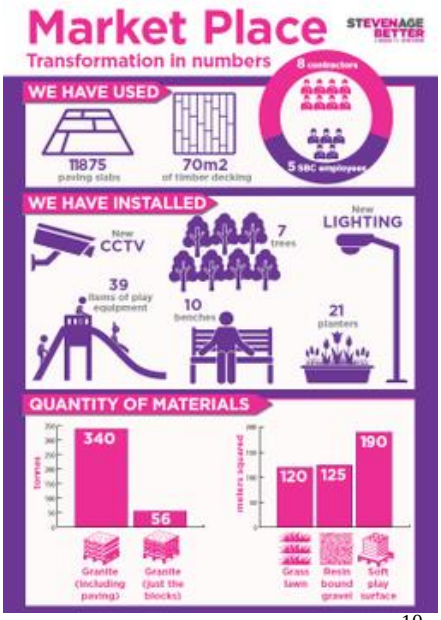
Source: Digimap

Fig.8: Market Street - bespoke street furniture for climbing, but looks more like 'crazy golf'.



Source: author 17/01/2020

Fig.8: Stevenage Even Better marketing on improvements made in Market Place



Source: Stevenage Even Better[10]

[10] https://twitter.com/stevenagebetter?lang=en accessed 21/12/2020

Fig.9: heavily engineered approach to segregate the pedestrian, the cyclist and vehicular traffic.



Source: author 17/01/2020

Fig.710: flooded cycle way, the cyclist has to follow the narrow pedestrian route



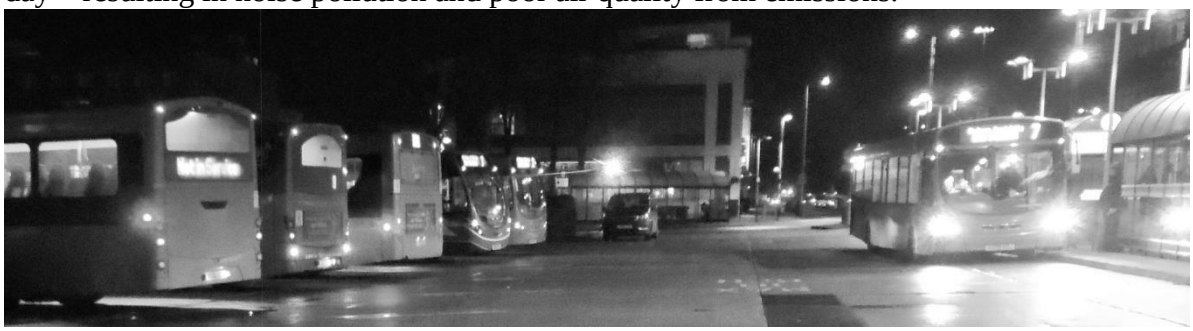
Source: 17/01/2020

Fig.11: segregated cycle lane with pedestrian crossing point



Source: 17/01/2020

Fig.12: bus station at night - with buses ‘laying over’, waiting and idling throughout the day – resulting in noise pollution and poor air quality from emissions.



Source: author 16/01/2020

Fig.13: typical example of an underpasses at night -quiet and unwelcoming,



Source: author 16/01/2020

Fig.14: ramp to and from the railway station. An example of poor legibility and permeability.



Source: author 17/01/2020

Chapter Eight

Additional Images to support Case Study Eight

Part One – Place (8.3)

Fig.1: locally distinctive form - domestic scale of buildings and old signage on building 'Rathbone's Butchers', reflecting the former use of the town centre street and showing the authenticity and history of the town centre – Butchers Row (Banbury)



Source: author, 24/10/2019

Fig.2: key space and place - signage on the building is listed, although the use of the building has changed, to protect the unique heritage (Banbury)



Source: author, 17/07/2016

Fig.3: national ‘anchor’ store closing down, Castle Quay (Banbury)



Source: author, 19/07/2016

Fig.4: excessive and intrusive use of street furniture to ‘manage’ anti-social parking, note that vehicles are still parking on the pavement (Manchester)



Source: author, 16/09/2015

Fig.5: high quality residential accommodation, delivering a mix of uses horizontally and vertically (Banbury)



Source: author, 19/07/2016

Fig.6: town centres offer a location for start-up and independent businesses, which the edge and out-of-town (asset managed) locations do not provide space for (Banbury)



Source: author, 19/07/2016

Fig.7: repurposed transport infrastructure for conference and exhibition space (Manchester)



Source: author, 16/09/2015

Fig.8: closed local independent clothing retailer - Banbury



Source: author, 19/07/2016

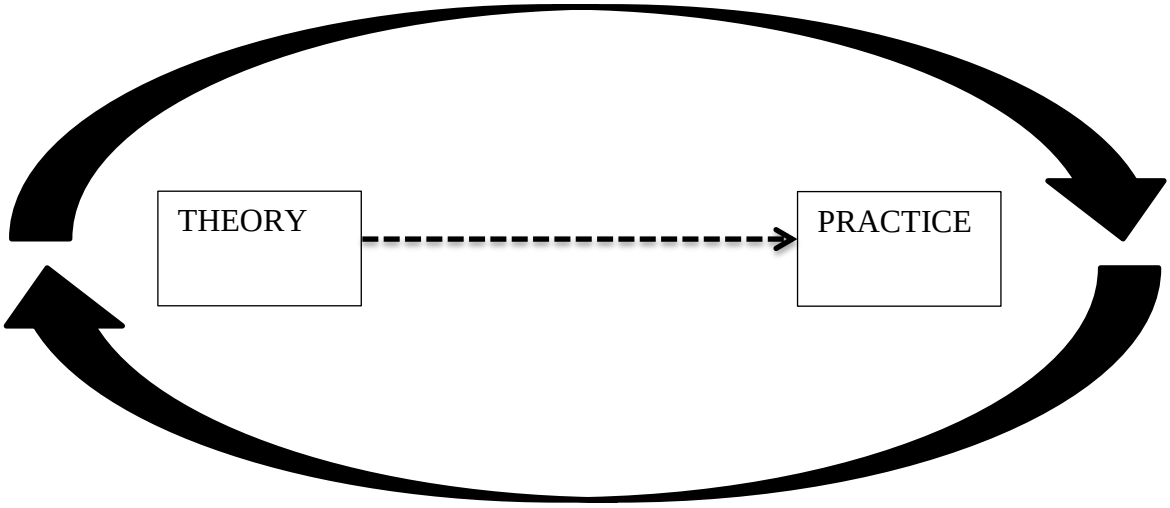
Chapter Nine – supporting information

The following section considers the potential of synergising the theoretical approach to the challenge facing the town centre and practice based response. It is set out here in support of the findings of Chapter Nine and in line with the potential for future research.

Synergising Theory and Practice

The crises facing the town centre have intensified and evolved over the research timeframe. The following section examines the potential to build on the research findings, and to develop the ARM from a research framework into an analytical tool to be used in practice to address the real-life challenge facing the town centre. The process proposed seeks to move beyond the '*….barrier that is rarely crossed*….' between theory and application (Fig.1) (Carmona 2020, p.8).

Fig.1: cyclical 'Theory' and 'Practice' model



The previous section presented a number of macro-generic recommendations that were developed through the analytical stages of the ARM, and has captured the reaction of a number of practice experts. At this stage, the efficacy of the ARM can be reviewed, and proposals to build on the research finding proposed (Table 9.4).

(a) The recommendations are robust and salient, as tested through the research
There were varying degrees of agreement and support amongst the participants, but there was a consensus that the recommendations were relevant to the research problem. A small number caveated their general support, with phrases such as: (i) '*I can't fault your theory, but*….' (PK); (ii) they liked the idea, but were not sure that it is '*legally practical*' (PH); or, that a proposal would be practically '….*impossible*….' to implement (PB2). However, they did not offer alternatives to the recommendations.

(b) The town centre is now entering a new phase which calls for a paradigm shift.

The macro generic findings suggest a conflicting relationship in the present system between the commercial and social drivers, which is evident in the built environment in the analysis of place. This conflict is not new, as Harvey (1976), writing over forty years ago (in Phase One) observed, when he said there remains space for a '*….theory to chart the path from an urbanism based on exploitation to an urbanism appropriate for the human species*' (Harvey 1976, p.314). Whilst this research recognizes a need to address the shifting equilibrium between social 'vitality' and commercial 'viability' of place, it does not claim to have found a solution. Rather, the research is highly suggestive that the town centre is entering a new phase (Phase Four), and proposes a new theoretical approach and a set of concepts that can be tested in theory and in practice to uncover new learning, moving the debate forward.

(c) The ARM can be used across formats

The theoretical position developed through this research, and the conceptual analytical model (the ARM) can be adjusted for use in practice to diagnose the challenges facing all formats, including edge and out-of-centre space, to create an adaptive resilience strategy programme. This would be part of a hierarchy, discussed above.

Potential to develop the research framework into an analytical tool to be used in Practice

The following section briefly sets out the potential to inform practice from this research, through the 'permeability' stage, to create space for speculation and synergy – practically moving from the grey part of the division of ARM diagram, to the white (see Fig.3). It should be noted, however, that what is proposed here is a cyclical model: 'permeable and diffuse' - blending research, theory and practice which has the potential to create 'additionality' (Carmona 2020, p.6-8)(Fig.2).

Fig.2: permeable and diffuse - 'additionality': the benefit of synergising research, theory and practice.

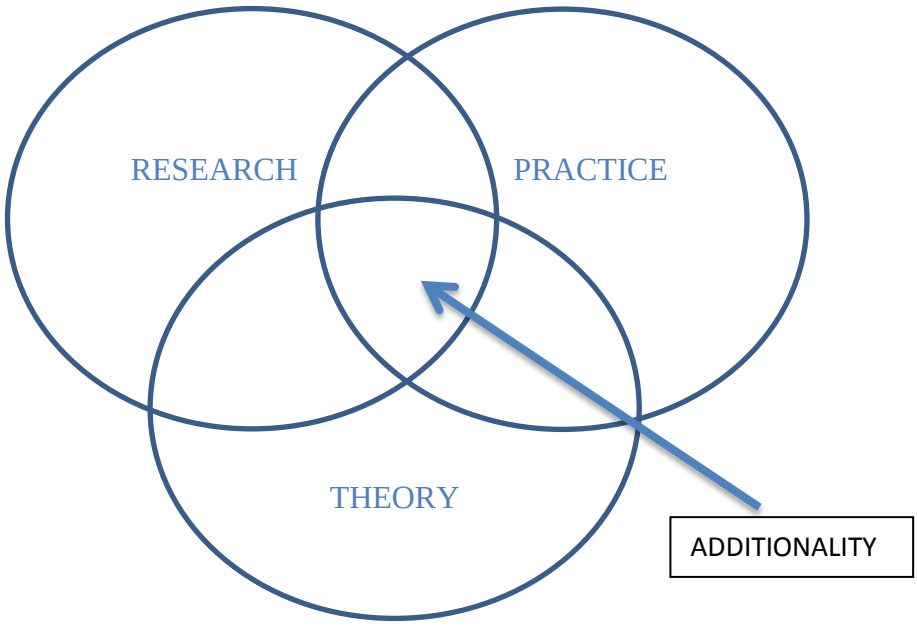
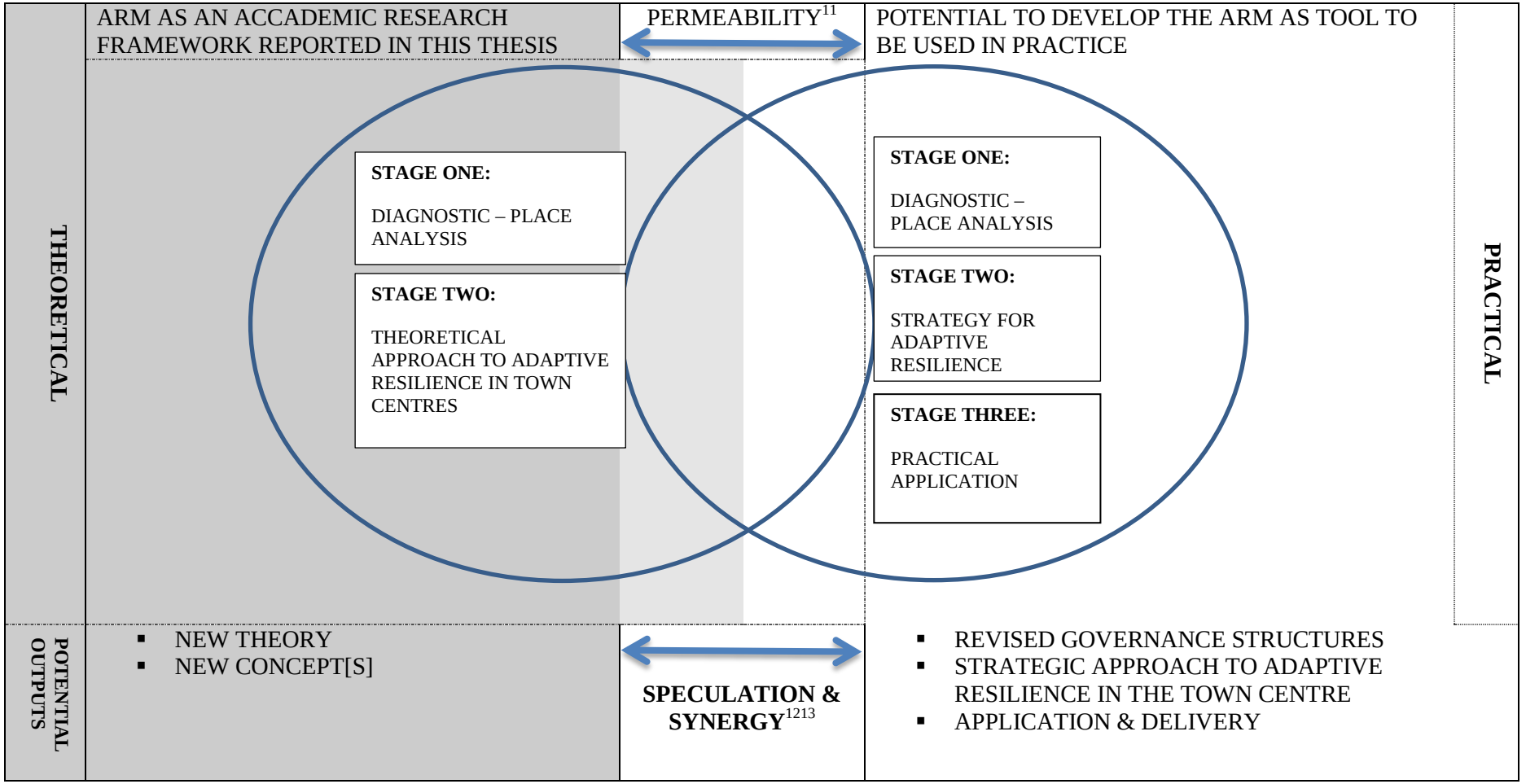


Fig.3: division of ARM and potential to develop ARM as a practice tool, following learning from the research framework



[11] Carmona, M. (2019) To truly 'live', urban design needs accessible interdisciplinary research. Journal of Urban Design. 25:1.
[12] Carmona, M. (2019) To truly 'live', urban design needs accessible interdisciplinary research. Journal of Urban Design. 25:1.
[13] Larco, N. (2021) Understanding the impacts of new mobility, autonomous vehicles, and E-commerce on urban design. Journal of Urban Design. 26:2 Page 139

Fig.4: opportunity to develop practice outcomes from the research: hybrid deductive and inductive method and transfer to practice

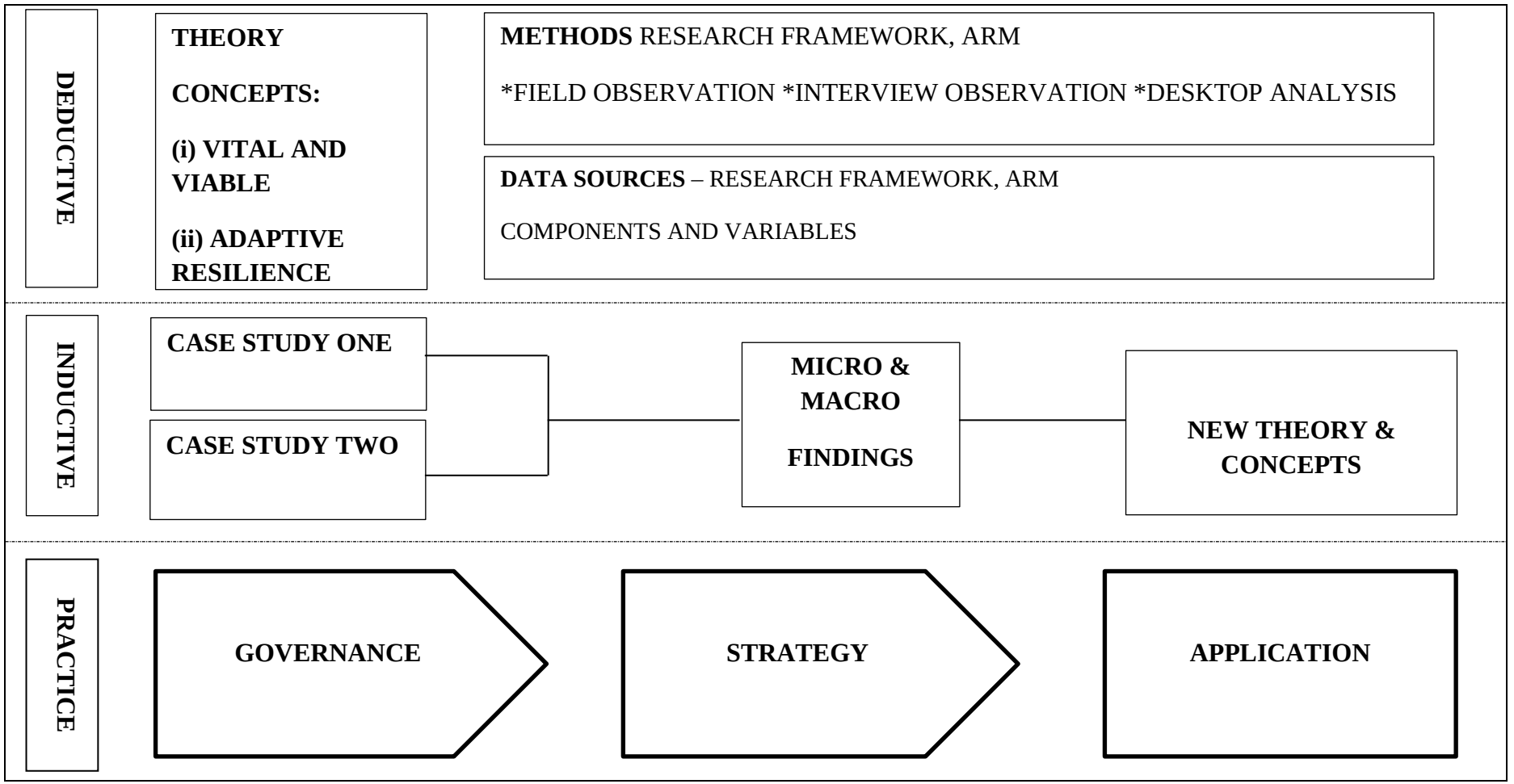


Table 1: synergising theory and practice, Macro-Generic

FINDINGS	CONCEPT									THEORETICAL RECOMMENDATIONS
	I	N	T	R	I	C	A	T	E	
THEME: PLACE										
KP(i) the town centre is an authentic and complex social and commercial ecosystem	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	RMa1; RMa2; RP1; RP2; RP3; RP4; RP5; RP6; RP7; RG1; RG1; RF1; RM1; RM2; RM3
KP(ii): the quality of the town centre environment is of high importance	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	X	O	RMa2; RF1
KP(iii): town centres should be active places throughout the day, evening and night-time (where appropriate)	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	RMa2; RP2; RP3; RP7; RG1; RM1; RM3
THEME: DELIVERABILITY										
KD(i): spatial planning and decision making is localised and introspective	X	O	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	RMa1; RP1; RP2; RP3; RP4; RP5; RP7
KD(ii): the town centre is one format which is commercially 'viable' for town centre uses	O	O	O	O	X	X	X	X	X	RMa1; RMa2; RP1; RP2; RP3; RP4; RP5;
THEME: MANAGEMENT										
KM(i): the crisis facing the town centre cannot be resolved through place management alone	X	O	O	O	O	X	O	X	O	RP1; RP2; RP3; RP4; RP5; RG1; RF1; RM1; RM2; RM3
KM(ii): governance and accountability for the town centre is opaque	X	O	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	RP1; RP7; RG1; RM2; RF1; RM1; RM2; RM3

KEY to Theoretical Recommendations									
RMa	Market	RP	Policy	RG	Governance	RF	Funding	RM	Management

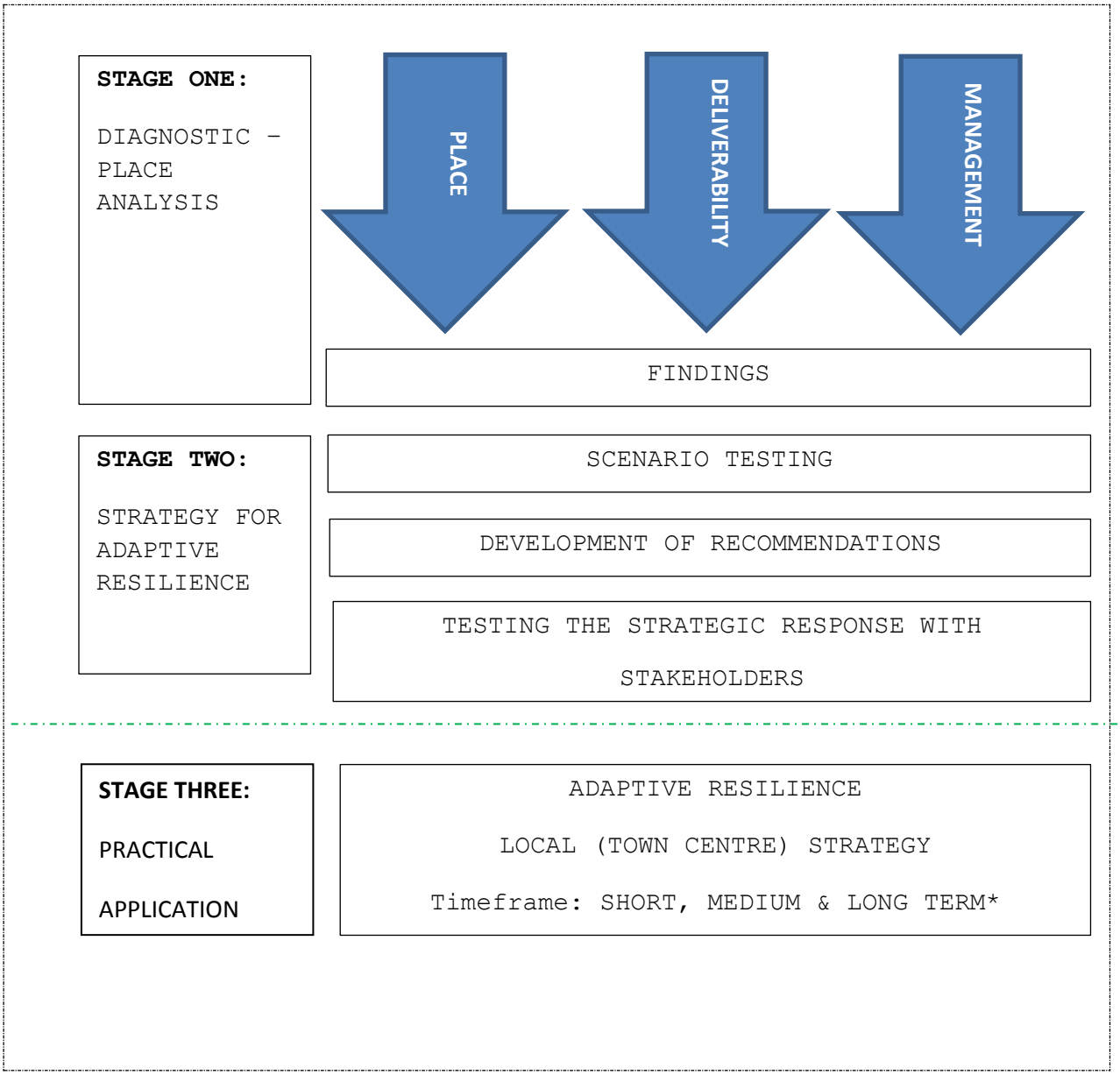
X = Primary link

O = Secondary link

Converting the ARM: to the 'PracticeARM' (PARM) as an analytical tool to be used in practice

It is proposed that the PARM would consist of three stages, which are explored below (Fig.5).

Fig.5: the PARM as an analytical tool to be used in practice



STAGE ONE: *Diagnostic – Place Analysis*

This stage is consistent with the research framework as tested through the case studies and requires no further discussion.

STAGE TWO: *Strategy for Adaptive Resilience*

Stage Two of the ARM, as a research framework, is adapted for use in practice as the PARM.

Table 2: developing the theoretical framework into a tool to be used in practice (highlighted in italics)

ARM	**PARM**
THEORETICAL APPROACH TO ADAPTIVE RESILIENCE IN TOWN CENTRES ▪ SCENARIO TESTING ▪ DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS ▪ TESTING THE ***THEORETICAL*** RESPONSE WITH EXPERTS	STRATEGY FOR ADAPTIVE RESILIENCE ▪ SCENARIO TESTING ▪ DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS ▪ *TESTING THE **STRATEGIC** RESPONSE WITH STAKEHOLDERS*

The focus of Stage Two of the PARM is the development of an Adaptive Resilience strategy that can be implemented in practice (Fig.5). The first two components are the same as those used in the research framework (ARM), although the way that they are implemented, and the outputs will differ (Table 2). The final component tests the strategic response in practice with stakeholders – this is different to the academic process which tested a theoretical response with experts in the field.

STAGE THREE: *Practical Application – Local (Town Centre) Strategy*

A further stage is proposed in the PARM, which is not part of the research framework, to provide a strategic adaptive resilience model to be used in practice, established at a local level with wide community and stakeholder consultation. The strategy would follow a *plan, do, review* sequence within an agreed timeframe. The PARM is not prescriptive, but a bespoke strategic response created at the local level. The local strategy is designed to create a holistic framework, and to provide long-term stewardship for the town centre; so that it retains relevance as civic, social, and commercial space as part of a network of centres/formats (Fig.6).

Fig.6**: Regeneration Governance Diagram**, example of local level governance

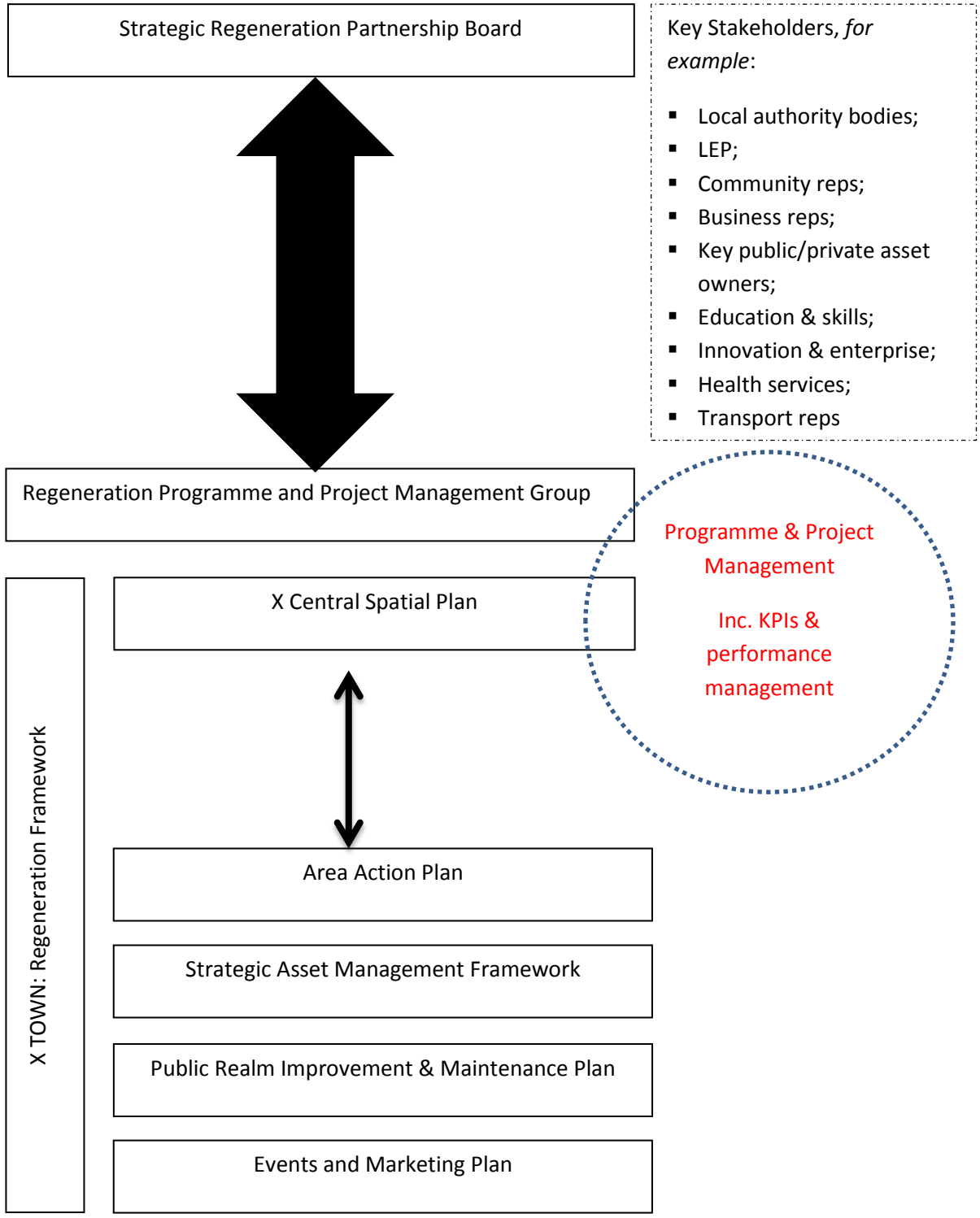
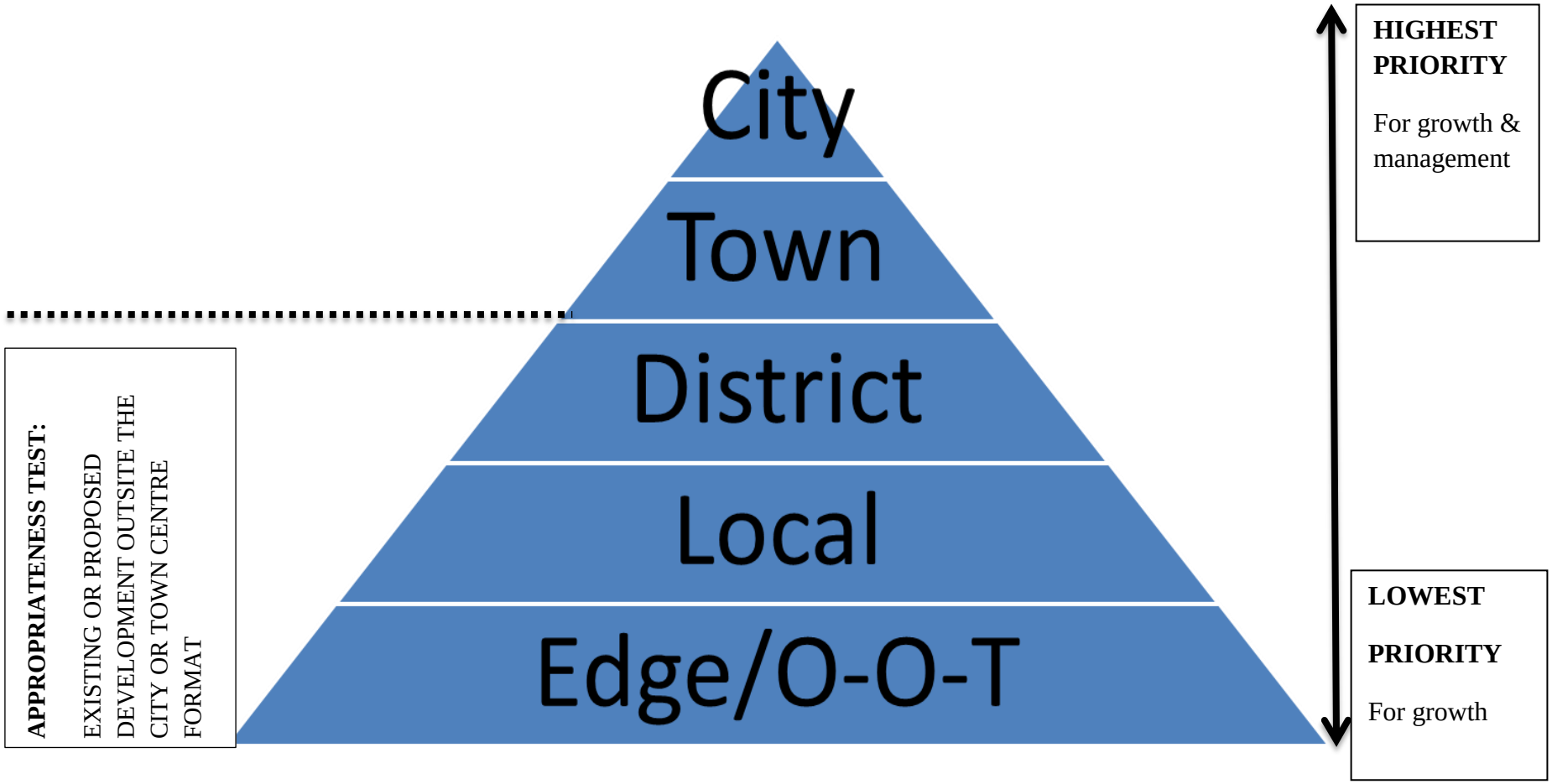


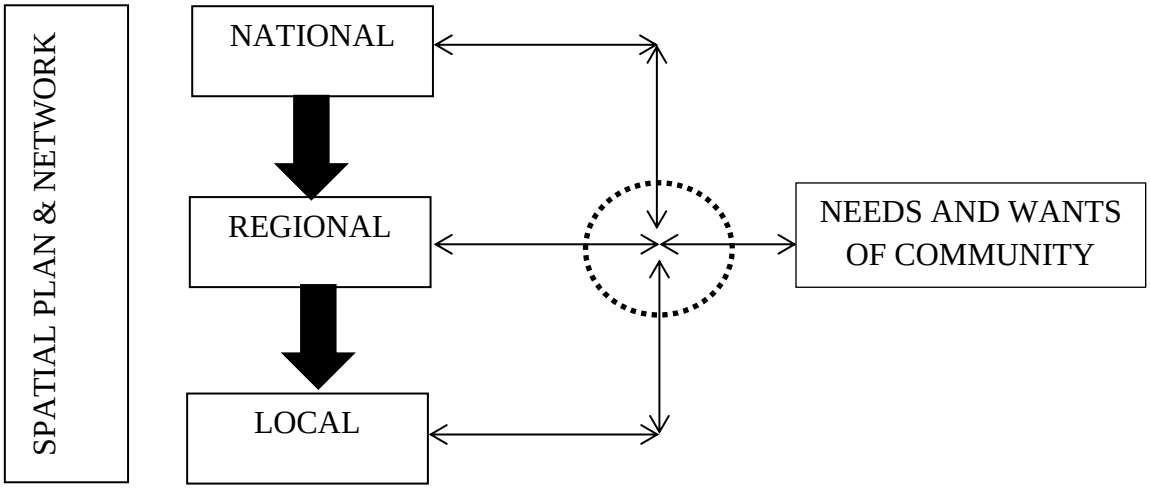
Fig.7: hierarchy of centres, including threshold for the 'Appropriateness Test' (see Recommendation Four)



OTHER FORMATS – the appropriateness test principle

The ARM as a research framework was designed to generate new knowledge relating to a specific space – the town centre. However, it is clear from the findings of the research that the town centre is just one format that operates within a new, yet to be defined, market where other places are commercially viable to deliver what were traditional town centre uses. All formats have some physical presence, and can be identified and analysed through the hierarchy of place diagram, and tested through the appropriateness test . In theory, the PARM can be used to analyse all formats and to develop a network of 'vital' and 'viable' centres that are appropriate, sustainable, and located to respond to the needs of the community. Furthermore, this can be achieved at various morphological levels – local, regional and national (Fig.8).

Fig.8: plan led approach to sustainable '*vital*' and '*viable*' centres through the PARM process.



It will be important, if the town centre is to be at the heart of communities, that all formats and places are considered part of the network.. The way town centre uses are delivered in place has changed, across the formats. The cultivation of strategic adaptive resilience offers an opportunity to experiment and innovate in the built environment. This is particularly salient as the problem of the town centre moves into Phase Four with the growth of virtual, hybrid-virtual formats, and the severe commercial disruption to the traditional bricks and mortar format.