



Optimising our Approach to Town Centres and High Streets in the West Midlands: a Discussion

Housing and Land Delivery Board
March 2023

Where we need your input

1. Note existing research into existing investment in W. Midlands Town Centres and High Streets

- Multiple sources of funds disguise a high aggregate investment level
- Are investments appropriately targeted?
- Are investments synergistic and do they encourage leverage?

2. Consider what indicators to track

- What are the most relevant and reliable data sources?
- Which indicators should we track to focus future workstreams? (e.g. footfall, vacancy rates, spend, comparison-vs-convenience, chains-vs-independents etc..)
- What are the salient indicators for a place-based/single settlement approach?

Where we need your input

3. Note existing approaches and alternatives

- What we have in the West Midlands
- Alternative approaches in other cities/regions
- Can we be collectively more “muscular” and focused in this space?

4. How you would like us to move this work forward towards solutions

- Data-rich paper for the Board’s next meeting
- Process to identify solutions
- How best to engage LA partners and externals including DLUHC

Multiple sources of funds disguise high aggregate investment

We have identified c. 90 public sector investments across W. Midlands town centres, funded through WMCA and competitive bidding by LAs.

WMCA invests across:

- Housing
- WMDC
- Transport (TfWM)
- Skills and more

DLUHC invests through:

- Future High Streets Fund
- Towns Fund
- Levelling Up Fund
- Town Partnerships

Multiple sources of funds disguise high aggregate investment

We have identified c. 90 public sector investments across W. Midlands town centres, funded through WMCA and competitive bidding by LAs.

Board members will be familiar with examples of both WMCA devolved funding and successful funding via competitive bids. **Are there good examples of these working in concert or is our approach too fragmented?**

Should we request that funding sources combine to deliver larger projects?

Is there any appetite to proactively suggest more joined-up approaches to DLUHC?

Better data to drive more successful bids

Monitoring town centre performance better can provide a rich data base from which to bid for funding based on need. WMCA's data is limited.

Data providers focussed on aspects of activity in town centres:

- Urban Big Data Centre
- Consumer Data Research Centre
- Local Data Company
- Huq
- Barclays consumer spending
- Tesco buying habits
- NHS data
- Costar

Better data to drive more successful bids

Monitoring town centre performance better can provide a rich data base from which to bid for funding based on need. WMCA's data is limited.

To what extent should we explore alternative data approaches, especially where these add to needs-based inputs to grant applications?

Has, for example, the DLUHC deep-dive in Sandwell led to more funding?

Are there obvious sources that we have missed?

Are there important high streets and local parades serving communities that are not fulfilling their potential or missing out on key investments?

How should we present any findings back to H&L Board?

Building on our existing priorities



Examples we can learn from

The challenges facing W. Midlands town centres and high streets are not new or unique.

Are the lessons being learned from:

- Portas and Grimsey Reviews?
- LGA's Revitalising Town Centres programme?
- IPM's Vital and Viable programme?

What can we learn from:

- Scotland's Town Centre Action Plan?
- London's Good Growth Fund and High Streets for All Challenge?
- The Town Boards format?

Examples we can learn from

The challenges facing W. Midlands town centres and high streets are not new or unique.

What role do Board members wish to take? Which other stakeholders should be involved?

Have we missed obvious institutional opportunities? **Are we doing enough?**

What reflections do Board members have on initiatives such as Town Centres Taskforce, Town Boards, and BIDs?

Our ask from H&L Board

1. Note existing research into existing investment in W. Midlands Town Centres and High Streets

- Should we carry on fine-tuning this body of research, noting it is dispersed and requires resource?

2. Consider what indicators to track

- Would you like us to produce a list of e.g. 6 key indicators based on our selected data providers?

Our ask from H&L Board

3. Note existing approaches and alternatives

- Which existing approaches would you want us to pursue, if any, or should we offer a bespoke proposal?

4. How you would like us to move this work forward towards solutions

- Should we bring proposals forward to the next meeting, how extensive should they be?