

The Retail Planning Knowledge Base Briefing Paper

Town Centre and High Street Reviews

Anne Findlay and Leigh Sparks
Institute for Retail Studies
Stirling Management School,
University of Stirling
STIRLING FK9 4LA, SCOTLAND

Tel: (01786) 467398

E-mail: Leigh.Sparks@stir.ac.uk
a.m.findlay@stir.ac.uk

Website www.stirlingretail.com

July 2014

Town Centre and High Street Reviews

The recession stemming from the 2008 banking and credit crisis has seen major alterations to the high streets of the UK, with a large spike in vacancy rates and retail failures. The recession though overlays more fundamental structural change in retailing, consumer behaviour and how people use places generally. This structural realignment through components such as decentralisation of activities (and not only retailing) and the technological advances of the internet (as in online and mobile shopping) has had far-reaching effects, and will continue to do so.

Taken together the first decade of the 2000s has seen a developing and deepening “crisis of the high street”, though in reality it is also a place and a sector crisis as patterns of demand and supply alter. Not all places, towns or high streets are as adversely affected as others, but the notion of a crisis has led to a search for explanations and remedies.

As a consequence of this ‘crisis of the high street’, in early 2011 the UK Government asked the ‘retail guru’ Mary Portas to conduct a review of the future of the high street. The Portas Review was published in November 2011. To all intents and purposes it was a supply-side analysis of space and use of the high street. Frustrated with the content of, and progress after, the Portas Review, Bill Grimsey, a colourful ex-retailer, portraying himself as an ‘anti-Portas’, assembled a small group which produced an alternative review in September 2013. His report, while also focused on a supply-side analysis, began with a strong analysis of the demand side in terms of changing consumer needs and behaviour and the retail responses to these structural changes.

In between these two reviews, the Scottish Government commissioned Malcolm Fraser – a leading architect – to produce a national review of town centres. Based around the Patrick Geddes mantra of ‘folk, work, place’ the report sought to identify a ‘people-focused, productive and rooted Scotland’ delivered through a broad-brush vision of town centres (note, not high streets), recognising the roles of different levels of government and people in place-making, and not just businesses or retail or commercial support.

These three reviews obviously do not sit in isolation. Prior to Portas, there were other bodies concerned about the emerging situation, including the British Retail Consortium. Portas and Fraser have had formal responses from the Governments that commissioned them. Portas herself has recently revisited the need for high streets and progress against her report recommendations. Devolved and other government levels have produced their own investigations and reports, including potential implications for policy, most notably in Northern Ireland and Wales. Many commentators and think tanks, including some set up by the government as a response to Portas (the Future High Streets Forum), have put their points of view into the public domain, and academics and practitioners have also had things to say on the changes and their implications. Professional and trade bodies (such as the British Council of Shopping Centres, Deloitte, English Heritage amongst many others) have debated the responsibility for the situation and the ways forward. In Spring 2014 the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee of the House of Commons produced a report into the Retail Sector. This in particular condemned the rates burden on town centre retailers. The Government has responded to the report in recent days, suggesting that the rates consultation underway will be investigating possible changes.

There is thus no shortage of commentary and suggestions over past and future policy for high streets and town centres.

The three main reports, Portas, Grimsey, Fraser, represent an interesting sequence of thought. Portas is very retail supply side focused and highly critical of costs in and management of high streets. Grimsey would not necessarily disagree but is much stronger on the structural changes that have brought high streets to this position and the need for digital solutions and stronger place management to be an integral part of the future. Fraser situates high streets within their broader towns and town centres and focuses on the need for 'place' to be more overtly embraced in our thinking about high streets. This reflects an emerging focus on the structural change to high streets and town centres, and a realisation that community focused place-making is fundamental to the successful future of towns.

This briefing paper summarises the main literature sources in this area. It draws on, and extends, a previous summary of the three main reviews (which can be found in Findlay, A. and Sparks, L. Reviewing high streets and town centres, **Town and Country Planning**, November 2013, 456-458, or at http://stirlingretail.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/tp_nov13_web.pdf). This briefing note also provides a guide to the wider literature around the main reviews.

Key Findings:

- The Portas Review and the Fraser Review in Scotland were independently commissioned reports, though with discussions with Government.
- The Grimsey Review was independent and not working to pre-set criteria.
- The Welsh Review and the Northern Irish Reviews were government reports, focusing on planning and legislation.
- The various reviews have stimulated debate about town centres and high streets on the political and policy agendas, and have attracted considerable media attention.
- There is an important difference between 'the high street' (the focus of the Portas Review) and town centres (the focus of the Fraser Review), yet in many cases these terms are conflated.
- There is consensus that high streets and town centres matter to British society and the welfare of towns.
- Town centres and high streets are more than retail places; most notably so when the focus is on the high street seen within its town centre.
- Proposals and responses demonstrate that there is no one size fits all solution.
- There is some agreement on the need for entrepreneurship, excitement and difference to be brought back to high streets.
- There is less consensus about how much policy making and planning can contribute, with calls for both more **and** less planning.
- The costs of doing business in town centres is seen as increasingly prohibitive (notably through rates).
- There is concern that there is not the political will to make many of the recommendations work, particularly in terms of planning.

- There is a danger that the palliative steps will be followed through but that the more radical and difficult issues will not be tackled.
- Proposals are sometimes seen as alternatives or options when they actually depend on each other and integrated solutions are needed.
- There is no commitment to long term funding for high streets or town centres, though some governments have recently begun to provide more structured funds.
- There is too much retail space in some town centres for modern needs and a period of considerable adjustment will be required.

1. Recommendations of the Three Main Reviews

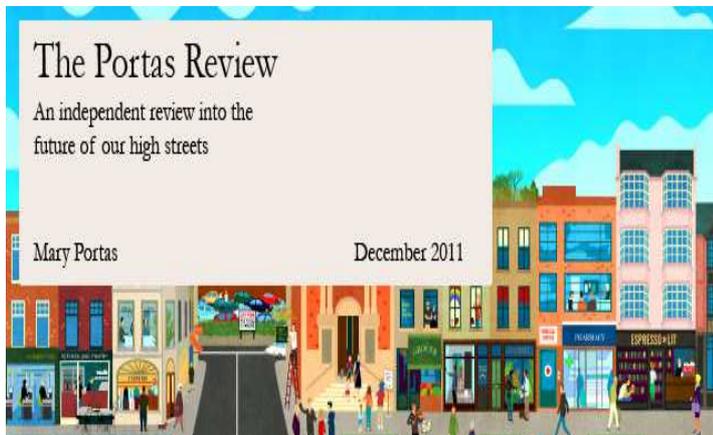


Table 1: The Portas Review Recommendations

Getting our Town Centres Running Like Businesses

1. Put in place a “Town Team”: a visionary, strategic and strong operational management team for high streets.
2. Empower successful Business Improvement Districts to take on more responsibilities and powers and become “Super-BIDs”.
3. Legislate to allow landlords to become high street investors by contributing to their Business Improvement District.
4. Establish a new “National Market Day” where budding shopkeepers can try their hand at operating a low-cost retail business.
5. Make it easier for people to become market traders by removing unnecessary regulations so that anyone can trade on the high street unless there is a valid reason why not.

Getting the Basics Right to Allow Businesses to Flourish

6. Government should consider whether business rates can better support small businesses and independent retailers.
7. Local authorities should use their new discretionary powers to give business rate concessions to new local businesses.
8. Make business rates work for business by reviewing the use of the RPI with a view to changing the calculation to CPI.
9. Local areas should implement free controlled parking schemes that work for their town centres and we should have a new parking league table.
10. Town Teams should focus on making high streets accessible, attractive and safe.
11. Government should include high street deregulation as part of their ongoing work on freeing up red tape.
12. Address the restrictive aspects of the ‘Use Class’ system to make it easier to change the uses of key properties on the high street.
13. Put betting shops into a separate ‘Use Class’ of their own.

Levelling the Playing Field

14. Make explicit a presumption in favour of town centre development in the wording of the National Planning Policy Framework.
15. Introduce Secretary of State “exceptional sign off” for all new out-of-town developments and require all large new developments to have an “affordable shops” quota.
16. Large retailers should support and mentor local businesses and independent retailers.
17. Retailers should report on their support of local high streets in their annual report.

Refining Landlords Roles and Responsibilities

18. Encourage a contract of care between landlords and their commercial tenants by promoting the leasing code and supporting the use of lease structures other than upward only rent reviews, especially for small businesses.
19. Explore further disincentives to prevent landlords from leaving units vacant.
20. Banks who own empty property on the high street should either administer these assets well or be required to sell them.
21. Local authorities should make more proactive use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers to encourage the redevelopment of key high street retail space.

22. Empower local authorities to step in when landlords are negligent with new “Empty Shop Management Orders”.
23. Introduce a public register of high street landlords.

Giving Communities a Greater Say

24. Run a high profile campaign to get people involved in Neighbourhood Plans.
25. Promote the inclusion of the High Street in Neighbourhood Plans.
26. Developers should make a financial contribution to ensure that the local community has a strong voice in the planning system.
27. Support imaginative community use of empty properties through Community Right to Buy, Meanwhile Use and a new “Community Right to Try”.

Re-imagining our High Streets

28. Run a number of High Street Pilots to test proof of concept.

Table 2: The Grimsey Review Recommendations

Making the transition

1. Accept that there is already too much retail space in the UK and that bricks and mortar retailing can no longer be the anchor to create thriving high streets and town centres.
2. Set an objective to repopulate high streets and town centres as community hubs encompassing: more housing, education, arts, entertainment, business/office space, health and leisure and some shops.
3. Establish a Town Centre Commission for each town with a defined skill base and structure to build a 20-year vision for each town supported by a broad business plan in five-year chunks.
4. Require local authorities to hold a public meeting annually to present the 20-year vision, town centre plans and progress made in the year, supported by an annual progress report.
5. Prepare for a ‘wired town’ vision or ‘networked high streets’ that puts libraries and other public spaces at the centre of each community based on the technology that exists today and will develop in the future.
6. Establish a ‘Digital Maturity Demographic Profile’ for each town to prepare for ‘networked high streets’ and tailor connection and communication strategies accordingly.

Creating a fairer, more economically sustainable high street

7. Reintroduce immediately the 2015 business rates revaluation to realign property values and freeze business rates from 2014.
8. Once revaluations have taken place any future increases should be an annualised Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation rate rather than a one-month snapshot.
9. From 2017 revaluations must be conducted annually.
10. Any business occupying a retail property in the retail core of a town centre that has been vacant for 12 months should receive 50% rate relief for two years.
11. There must be a political will and determination to reduce property taxation once the Government’s fiscal debt consolidation plans have been fully implemented.

12. The business rates system needs a root and branch review to establish a flexible system that will reflect changes in economic conditions as they occur.
13. Local authorities to use a portion of their reserves to offer loans to qualifying small businesses.
14. Understand the success of the Bank of Dave set up and establish a process, including local crowdfunding, for local people to collectively invest in the local community and start up businesses.
15. Connect planning applications to the business plan for each town and ensure that developments fit within the criteria set.
16. Enable the change of use process to be used to convert entire sub-high streets to residential or other uses within the agreed high street plan and relocate the successful independent retailers into the main commercial centre.
17. Make it easier for motorists to shop by building in a two hour free high street and town centre car parking system to the overall business plan for the location.
18. Local authorities to freeze car-parking charges for a minimum of 12 months.

Community first

19. Reduce mandatory rate relief for charities from 80% to 70% and of the remaining 30% payable in business rates apportion a third to a ring-fenced local authority pot for projects that benefit the community.
20. Establish greater clarity on the mandatory rate relief criteria for charities, social enterprises and Community Interest Companies. Organisations whose primary function is to exist for the benefit of the local community - i.e. hospice shops - should be given priority status for top up relief from local authorities.
21. Landlords of empty shop units should be required to apply for a change of use and make the asset productive in the community as housing, health, leisure, culture or education facilities in line with the town plan.
22. Make it compulsory for all Mega Mall developments to create a percentage of affordable space within the development for local traders and market stall pitches.
23. Evaluate the future of out-of-town shopping parks and prepare a plan to bring unwanted space back into use to benefit the community.
24. The Community Infrastructure Levy should be used to support the delivery of a town centre plan.

Better-managed high streets

25. Put in place common key performance indicators to measure the economic health of each town and link the reporting through a data dashboard to provide independent, objective and current data on performance.
26. Create a full time high streets minister to replace the current part time position that is tagged on to the duties of housing minister. Encourage greater cross-departmental work between the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Communities and Local Government to fully understand shared Government responsibilities for helping improve local high streets.
27. Establish a comprehensive evidence base that tracks the change in retail and leisure locations from a local, regional and national perspective. Actively encourage and fund research based on this data by academic institutions in partnership with the private sector in order to ensure ongoing thought leadership into the nature and reasons behind changes taking place.
28. Ensure that the economic blueprints produced by Town Commissions are sustainable and environmentally practical by understanding and emulating innovation from the Transition Town trials, for example.

29. Make it compulsory for national retail and leisure chains to invest 0.25% of one year's sales (2014) into a local economic development fund to sponsor local start up businesses in a similar way to the Prince's Trust. This would be a one-off levy.

30. Implement the Town Centre Commission process through five trials to test the methodology, information requirements, modelling techniques and viability of the whole process including public consultation.

31. A timetable should be set to conduct the trials by March 2014 and aim to exit 2014 with plans, measures and central technology in place for all town centres for implementation from 2015 onwards.

Table 3: The Fraser Review Recommendations

The Evidence Base

We accept that there is a need for action to be based on a clear understanding of the health of our town centres. The evidence here is patchy and inconsistent and the different types of data need brought together to present a useful overall picture. We recommend a model is developed, through a demonstration project, showing how data can be collected, presented and shared.

Town Centres First

At the heart of our key actions and recommendations, and running through this Review, is the need for the implementation of a Town Centre First Policy: a request to government, local authorities and the wider public sector, and the communities, institutions and people of Scotland; that to achieve a social, bustling and sustainable Scotland we must put the health of our town centres at the heart of our decision-making processes.

The Scottish Government and local authorities need to recognise and prioritise the importance of town centres in plans for economic recovery and sustainable economic growth.

The Scottish Government and all public sector bodies need to ensure that funding and investment programmes are aligned to achieve the maximum effect in supporting diversity, enterprise and creativity in our town centres.

The Scottish Government should allocate additional, dedicated funding to support and further develop the recommendations proposed by this Review.

Town Centre Living

Housing associations or other bodies, working with local authority housing, regeneration and planning officers, to offer owners a "Develop and Manage Package" for their properties that would repair, upgrade, tenant and maintain them, allowing those owners to realise value on their property and bringing beneficial use back into them. And the Scottish Government's new £2m Town Centre Housing Fund will allow the first, exemplar proposals to test the Housing Act's provision, identify sources of funding and establish models that can work across the whole of Scotland.

Local authorities to recognise the importance of bringing residential footfall back into town centres and prioritise appropriate sites for town centre housing development within their local housing strategies.

Public agencies and the private sector to be alive to the potential for the conversion of empty offices and redundant public buildings.

All housing providers to consider the needs of, and market for, family homes in town centres and the new, or refreshed old models that can deliver the amenity that modern family living requires.

Vibrant Local Economies

Town Centre Investment Zones: Scottish Government and a willing Local Authority to establish and monitor the results of a demonstration 'Town Centre Investment Zone' to trial enhanced business rate discretionary relief for, say, a 5 year period within the defined area of the town centre.

Local authorities to work with local businesses (both private and social enterprises) as collaborative partners to pilot regulatory one-stop shops providing a "route map" through statutory processes for prospective, start-up and existing town centre business.

Town centre businesses and local authorities to review existing Business Gateway and social and community enterprise support and resources.

Enterprising Communities

A Community Estate Agency, where professionals and local groups can collaborate to identify people and partnerships, and suitable properties from a "town centre asset audit"; and development trusts or other appropriate models can provide support capacity, and draw down seedcorn funding, to evolve business plans and identify funding.

A Scottish Government Microfinance Fund, or fortified existing fund, tasked with lending responsibility to community enterprises with sustainable business plans. Such a fund could grow as businesses pay back their loans, underpinning a new sector of the economy.

Accessible Public Services

Community planning partnerships to be fortified through the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill, with public accessibility to services and the Town Centre First presumption brought to the fore within the "Single Outcome Agreement" criteria that govern their decisions.

"Place-Based Reviews" carried out at the first stage of the Scottish Futures Trust's public infrastructure assessments, with the wider financial implications of decisions evaluated as a matter of course not choice.

Digital Towns

Town Centre WiFi: Commercially-driven, secure link-ups of town centre businesses' WiFi's, so that they combine to offer a shopper, or general visitor, free and immediate access to a virtual town centre marketplace from the comfort of the corner seat in a café, or a bench in the park on a sunny day.

Town Centre Digital Demonstration Project: a demonstration digital learning network, aligned to local Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the Digital Scotland Strategy, growing and enhancing digital skills and pooling existing community, business and local authority resources, knowledge and expertise.

High speed broadband to be available to communities in all town centres across Scotland.

Pro-Active Planning

Town Centre First: Planning Policy already includes a "Town Centre First" presumption for retail development, with a "sequential test" to apply it. This test should be applied to all footfall-creating uses, from leisure and office, to public facilities and homes, for we should not - for all the reasons set-out in this Review - build anew on the edge of town when there are empty sites within it.

Local demonstration projects to fast track and evaluate the concept of a single "Town Centre Use Class" in willing participant towns.

Incentivise town centre development by reducing the cost of developer contributions there.

Local authorities should ensure that development properly reflects the cost to the public purse, and note that costs associated with an out-of-town development are heavy, and may include schools, parks, roads, new public transport links, sewers and the like; while a comparable town centre development may even save the public purse the cost of, say, closing down a school.

Proactive Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) use to stimulate re-use of vacant and underused sites and buildings in town centres where owners are resisting regeneration, and the consideration of changes to CPO legislation to facilitate this.

And Finally, for Communities

Town Futures/Planning for Change: this Review seeks a new narrative for our towns, with communities fully engaged and involved in forming it. We believe they would greatly benefit from a "Masterplanning Toolkit" to implement their vision, that is complementary to the town-centred, pedestrian-friendly Scottish Government "Designing Streets" planning policy, which has set-out the culture-shift necessary to change the post-war roads presumption to a 21st century people one.

In England a selection of the recommendations from the Portas Review were adopted. Others such as use class changes and betting shops are in process. Proposals concerning rates, ownership, and the exceptional sign off for out of town retail proposals were not taken up. The National Planning Policy Framework was influenced by the Portas Review.

The Portas Review has been controversial, not least due to the publicity of associated television series with the Portas Towns and the investigation of the spending and other actions arising from the Review and the Town Teams. The Grimsey Review, which at the outset set itself up as the "anti-Portas" has raised the doubts about progress. However in a number of places there have been significant developments and Portas herself has considered progress recently. She points to a variety of positive steps:

- Public debate has been animated and has drawn attention to high streets and town centres.
- Action has been taken.
- Portas Pilots have been set up.
- Local Market Fortnight has taken off.
- The future High Street Forum has been set up.

- Money has been allocated.
- Town teams and volunteers are working to improve high streets.

But also a number of concerns:

- Need more commitment and action from Government.
- Reform of business rates.
- Landlord registers need to be set up.
- Long term financial support is required.
- Access and parking need attention.

The rates issue has perhaps been the lightning rod for attention to high streets since the Portas and the Grimsey reviews, with the government coming under widespread media, business and parliamentary concern and attack. Whilst there is a general recognition that there are major issues with the rates system and burden, no agreed way forward has yet been found. Grimsey would argue that there remains a fundamental issue over the management of high streets and towns. He views the current situation as a failure of management and leadership and have called for various steps to be taken to replace current operations. Some possible approaches are more radical than others and there is a continuum of potential alternatives to current management systems and approaches in towns. Grimsey is now advising the Labour Party on these issues.

In Scotland there is much warmth in the Scottish Government's Action Plan towards the Fraser Review and re-alignment within government is taking place to focus on priorities. A position of Minister for Towns was created in Scotland. The focus is on demonstration projects and ideas and on local areas taking responsibility for change. The new Scottish Planning Policy is heavily influenced by the principles of the Fraser Review in terms of town centres.

2. The Recommendations of the Two Devolved Government Reviews



Supported by the Northern Ireland Executive through the Department for Social Development



November 2012 Final

Table 4: The National Assembly for Wales Recommendations

- Recommendation 1.** We recommend that as part of its revision of national planning policy on economic issues, the Welsh Government should ensure that Planning Policy Wales fully protects town centres from the potential impacts of out-of-town retail developments, and that the Government should also take steps to improve the implementation of national and local planning policy on the ground. (Page 14)
- Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should guide local authorities towards making better use of their contractual agreements with out-of-town retailers to further protect the vitality of town centres. (Page 15)
- Recommendation 3.** We believe that examples of good practice in promoting town centres should be disseminated more widely, and recommend that the Centre for Regeneration Excellence in Wales should develop its role in this area, including educating and encouraging professionals in the sector. (Page 15)
- Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should commission more research on the effects that supermarkets can have on the quality of town centres in order to better inform and improve the impact analysis of proposed developments within the planning control system, and that local retail impact assessments should be obligatory for all supermarket proposals. (Page 17)
- Recommendation 5.** We recommend that local planning authorities should be encouraged, within their Local Development Plan, to see office and work-place development as a means of increasing footfall within town centres, and that they should assess the possible outcomes of, and alternatives to, out-of-town office development proposals more carefully. (Page 18)
- Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should establish dedicated Ministerial leadership for town centres, including setting up a town centre policy forum chaired by the lead Minister, that would bring together officials from different Departments and key representatives from the private, public and voluntary sectors to share good practice and to identify a plan of action and monitoring framework for regenerating Wales's town centres. (Page 21)
- Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that the development of integrated and sustainable transport in Welsh town and city centres is a priority in the delivery of the National Transport Plan. Further, the Welsh Government should provide clear guidance to local authorities to ensure that transport integration is a core element of all town centre regeneration and redevelopment plans. (Page 24)
- Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should establish a rigorous performance monitoring framework and commission a detailed, independent evaluation of the Sustainable Travel Centre scheme. This should include assessment of the impact of each scheme on the vitality of the town centres involved, including access for people with disabilities. (Page 28)
- Recommendation 9.** We believe that town centre businesses may need to operate more flexible working hours in order to meet changing customer needs. We therefore recommend that the Welsh Government should update its Technical Advice Note on Planning and Retailing to include guidance for local authorities about imposing conditions on retail development regarding more flexible working hours. (Page 29)
- Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should work with local authorities to develop planned and innovative approaches that incentivise property owners to let their vacant town centre properties for living and working uses that would contribute to the vitality of town centres but would not undermine the properties' long-term value. (Page 30)
- Recommendation 11.** We recommend that Cadw should continue with its characterisation studies of towns and villages and that they form an integral part of any regeneration scheme. We also recommend that the Welsh Government should make greater use of the Design Review Service and encourage its development partners to do the same. (Page 33)
- Recommendation 12.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should review national planning policy and guidance for retailing and town centres to ensure that local planning authorities set out a positive vision for all their town centres and high streets in their Local Development Plan, and to provide a strong planning application decision-making framework for ensuring appropriate development can be guided to suitable locations that are highly accessible by sustainable transport. (Page 35)
- Recommendation 13.** We recommend that within the framework of the Local Development Plan, each town should have a comprehensive plan in place, developed by a local partnership of key stakeholders and engaging the community, which contains actions for addressing the issues affecting the viability of the town centre. (Page 37)
- Recommendation 14.** We believe that the key to success in town centre regeneration at a local level is strong, effective leadership. We therefore recommend that the Welsh Government should consider how better to support people who have the necessary skills and the respect of the local community to act as champions for bringing together the different aspects and players in town centre regeneration. (Page 38)
- Recommendation 15.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should help local authorities and communities to be proactive in seeking and accessing sources of investment for town centre regeneration projects where public funding is unavailable. (Page 40)
- Recommendation 16.** We recommend that the Welsh Government's independent panel on business rates should consider changes in legislation and in the application of discretionary powers, with the aim of improving the mix and quality of the retail offer in town centres. (Page 43)
- Recommendation 17.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should consider developing a pilot scheme, within EU competition rules and in partnership with local authorities and property owners, which helps new businesses set up in town centres. (Page 44)
- Recommendation 18.** We recommend that during negotiations over draft legislative proposals for EU Structural Funds 2014-2010, the Welsh Government should seek to ensure that the new Regulations are sufficiently flexible to enable the Funds to be used to support town centre regeneration activities in the next round. (Page 45)
- Recommendation 19.** We recommend that the Welsh Government should commission a full and transparent assessment of the effectiveness of the Swansea Business Improvement District and consult with a broad range of stakeholders to inform further BID development in Wales. (Page 47)
- Recommendation 20.** We recommend that the Welsh Government through Visit Wales should encourage town partnerships to market their unique selling points such as architectural heritage and environmental quality, local produce and local culture, perhaps involving groups of towns within a region so that their different offers can complement each other. This could be part of the town centre plan we recommended above. (Page 49)
- Recommendation 21.** We believe that the Welsh Government should develop a robust framework for the design, development and delivery of town centre regeneration projects in which objectives and targets can be clearly set; data collected; where outcomes and impacts can be measured; and performance and success evaluated and compared. (Page 50)

Table 5: The Northern Ireland High Street Taskforce Recommendations

Recommendations

Following from the conclusions reached by the Taskforce it recommends the following actions to respond to the economic pressures currently being experienced by Northern Ireland's city and town centres and high streets.

Recommendation 1: DSD Regeneration Programmes

The Taskforce recommends that DSD should continue to deliver its regeneration policies and programmes for city and town centres and consider giving priority to delivering future public realm improvement schemes and site acquisitions for those high streets experiencing the highest levels of dereliction.

Recommendation 2: Reshape and Expand the 'ReStore' programme

The Taskforce recommends that DSD should quickly move its 'ReStore' programme from pilot status to a substantive programme (subject to a positive evaluation of its impact) which should be rolled-out to all major city and town centres in Northern Ireland including arterial routes in Belfast.

Recommendation 3: Regeneration in Rural Settlements

DSD and DARD should investigate the potential of extending the town centre regeneration programmes into rural settlements.

Recommendation 4: Town Teams

The 'Town Teams' infrastructure should be asked to prepare a vision and implementation plan to promote and market the uniqueness and attractiveness of their respective areas. They should also bring together statutory and private sectors to cooperate in improving the management of their area and cut through any unnecessary red tape hindering the development of the high street by resolving the sort of local issues identified by the high street meetings. The 'Town Teams' should focus on making high streets accessible, attractive and safe.

Recommendation 5: Empower High Streets to set-up BIDs

The taskforce recommends that support arrangement be provided to empower Northern Ireland's high streets to be ready to establish a BID once the legislation is passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Recommendation 6: Community Asset Transfer and Meanwhile Use

DSD should ensure that the formulation of policy proposals for Community Asset Transfer considers the potential of community use to address vacancies and dereliction.

Recommendation 7: Revise LOTS to focus on revitalising the High Street

DSD should consider introducing a revitalised LOTS scheme with a focus on regeneration-led town centre living to bring after-hours vitality to the high street. This means bringing residents into the town centre who can embrace the lifestyle provided by vibrant urban streets including the evening economy.

The Taskforce believes that the recommendations provide the basis for a DSD action plan for Northern Ireland's high streets to develop local regeneration strategies and initiatives to help weather the current recession and plan for the future. The successful implementation of this action plan will require the cooperation of private and statutory sectors focused on delivering business development and growth.

3. Themes from the Reviews and the Literature

There are a number of common themes running across the various reviews. These are summarised below in Table 6. Table 7 provides key findings organised by their sources in the literature.

Table 6: Common Themes in the Main Reviews

	Portas (2013)	Grimsey (2013)	Fraser (2013)	Welsh Government (2012)	Northern Ireland Government (2012)
Management of Towns/Places	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Start-ups/Market Skills	✓	✓			
Rates	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Parking	✓	✓			
Uses/Use Classes	✓	✓	✓		
Town Centre First	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Large Retail Support	✓	✓			
Vacant Property Issues	✓	✓		✓	✓
Planning Engagement	✓	✓		✓	
Information/Evidence	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Community Hubs		✓	✓		✓
Digital Futures		✓	✓		
Investment Models		✓	✓	✓	
Minister/Government		✓	✓	✓	
Town Centre Living		✓	✓		✓
Regeneration (General)					✓
Footfall from work				✓	
Transport				✓	

Table 7: Common Themes in the Literature

<p>Government Responses to Reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action needs to be taken • Not all proposals from the reviews were translated into action • Support for and action are different things • Tracing the impact of initiatives will be difficult.
<p>Official Publications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of debate is evidence of how town centres, high streets and retailing has secured a place on the political and policy agendas. • There is dissatisfaction about various aspects of the implementation of the Portas recommendations. • Controversy over spending levels in the Portas Pilots.
<p>Academic Commentaries and Papers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tensions between planning and making town centres work better exist. • The remedies are not based on theoretical or often practical understandings of town centres or high streets. • There is too much alarmism and this is dictating policy when long term vision is required, based on structural change underway. • Cost burdens are too high in town centres and high streets.
<p>Consultant and Policy Group Reviews, Reports and Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town centres are not stand alone places. • Vision is required. • Palliative change won't be enough. • Policy group commentators are least supportive of the emphasis on town centres. • There is general accord with action for high streets and town centres. • Making Localism work will be crucial in England. • Not all recommendations are being implemented with only a minority fully implemented • Pilot schemes may not be extended to other places.
<p>Planning Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning is too weak to achieve the principles set out by Portas. • Disappointment that the recommendation for an 'exceptional sign-off' clause for all new out-of-town development was not taken up. • Concern over Town Centre First; both in general terms and in how it can be extended to sectors beyond retailing.

4. Selected Literature

Town/High Street Reviews

External Advisory Group

National Review of Town Centres: Community and enterprise in Scotland's town centres.

Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2013, 18p. Available online at:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/07/7250/downloads#res-1

Grimsey, B.

The Grimsey review: an alternative future for the high street.

2013. Available online: www.vanishinghighstreet.com

Northern Ireland Executive

High Street Task Force Review.

Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive, 2012. [http://www.belfastcentre.com/wp-](http://www.belfastcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/High-Street-Taskforce.pdf)

[content/uploads/2013/03/High-Street-Taskforce.pdf](http://www.belfastcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/High-Street-Taskforce.pdf)

National Assembly for Wales

Regeneration of town centres.

Cardiff: National Assembly of Wales, 2012.

senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s5298/Town%20Centre%20Regeneration%20Report%20-%20January%202012.pdf

Portas, M.

The Portas Review: an independent review into the future of our high streets.

London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011, 50p. www.bis.gov.uk

Official Responses to Reviews

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Understanding high street performance.

London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011, 128p. Available online at:

www.bis.gov.uk

Department of Communities and Local Government

High streets at the heart of our communities; the Government's response to the Mary Portas review.

London: DCLG, 2012. Available online at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/regeneration/portasreviewresponse>

Department of Communities and Local Government

Portas pilots: prospectus – an invitation to become a town team.

London: CLG, 2012. Available online at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/portas-pilots-prospectus-for-becoming-a-town-team

See also: **Portas pilots: 2nd round prospectus.**

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6291/2120140.pdf

Future High Streets Forum

Great leadership: great high streets.

London: ATCM, 2014, 28p. www.atcm.org/policy_practice/future_high_streets_forum/fhsreport1-good_leadership-great_high_streets

Genecon

Town centres and retail dynamics: towards a revised retail planning policy for Wales. Cardiff:

Welsh Government, 2014, 112p. <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/desh/research/140502town-centres-and-retail-dynamics-research-en.pdf>

National Assembly of Wales

Welsh Government response to the Business and Enterprise Committee Report on the regeneration of town centres.

Cardiff: National Assembly of Wales, 2012.

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s15487/Welsh%20Government%20Response.pdf>

Portas, M.

Why our high street still matters.

London: Mary Portas, 2014, 40p. www.portasagency.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/WhyOurHighStreetsStillMatter_MaryPortas.pdf

Scottish Government

Town Centre Action Plan: the Scottish Government Response.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh, 2013, 11p. www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00437686.pdf

Official Publications

Department for Communities and Local Government

The future of high streets.

London: DCLG, 2013, 8p.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/168023/Future_of_High_Streets.pdf

House of Commons

Town centres, planning and supermarkets.

London: House of Commons, 2012, 9p. Available online at: www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn01106

House of Commons

Future of town centres and high streets,

Hansard, 17th January 2012. www.publications.parliament.uk

House of Commons

The high street,

Hansard, 21st May 2013. Available online at:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130521/halltext/130521h0001.htm

House of Commons: Business, Innovation and Skills Committee

The Retail Sector

London: House of Commons, 2014, 70p

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmbis/168/168.pdf>

See also

The Government's Response to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee Report on the Retail Sector, available at

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmbis/189/189.pdf>, 2014, 21p

House of Commons

Oral evidence taken before the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee: the UK retail sector.

London: House of Commons, 2013, 30p.

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmbis/uc168-ii/uc168.pdf

House of Commons

Oral evidence taken before the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, UK retail sector.

London: House of Commons, 2013, questions 252-349. Available online at:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmbis/uc168-iv/uc16801.htm

Academic Commentaries and Papers

Dobson, J.

High street regeneration and rebranding pushing Portas further: life beyond the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker,

Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal, 6(2), 2012/13, 112-121.

Dobson, J.

Life beyond retail: a new and better vision for town centres,

Journal of Town and City Management, 3(2), 2011, 201-214.

Findlay, A. and Sparks, L.

Reviewing high streets and town centres,

Town and Country Planning, 82(11), 2013, 456-458.

Guy, C.

Exceptional sign-off,

Town and Country Planning, 81(7/8), 2012, 311-313.

Guy, C.

Propping up a failing sector,

Town and Country Planning, 81(4), 2012, 171-173.

Jones, P., Clarke-Hill, C., Hillier, D. and Comfort, D.

The low-down on the high street,

Town and Country Planning, 81(4), 2012, 204-208.

Lock, D.

High streets - the need for affordable shops,

Town and Country Planning, 81(4), 2012, 174-175.

Wrigley, N. and Dolega, L.

Resilience, fragility, and adaptation: new evidence on the performance of UK high streets during global economic crisis and its policy implications,

Environment and Planning A 43, 2011, 2337-2363;

Consultant, Lobby and Policy Group Responses

Action for Market Towns

Portas Plus or Minus.

Bury St Edmund: AMT, 2012. towns.org.uk/2013/05/02/portas-plus-or-minus/

British Council of Shopping Centres

Beyond Retail: redefining the shape and purpose of town centers.

London: BCSC. <http://policy.bcsc.org.uk/beyondretail/index.asp>

British Retail Consortium

21st century high streets: what next for Britain's town centres?

London: BRC, 2012, 36p. Available online at:

www.brc.org.uk/brc_policy_master.asp?id=611&spolicy=21ST+CENTURY+HIGH+STREETS

English Heritage

The Changing Face of the High Street – decline and revival: a review of retail and town centre issues in historic areas.

London: English Heritage, 2013

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/changing-face-high-street-decline-revival/>

Fenech, C.

The Deloitte Consumer review: re-inventing the role of the high street.

London: Deloitte, 2013, 24p. www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedKingdom/Local%20Assets/Documents/Industries/Consumer%20Business/uk-cb-consumer-review-edition-6.pdf

Future Spaces Foundation

The Future High Street – Perspectives on Living, Learning and Livelihoods in our Communities

London: FSF, 2014, 90p
<http://www.futurespacesfoundation.org/our-work.html>

Goddard, C.

Unlocking town centre retail developments.

London: GVA, 2012, 11p. Available online at: www.gva.co.uk/research/

Morton, A. and Dericks, G.

21st century retail policy; quality, choice, experience and convenience

London: Policy Exchange, 2013, 77p. Available online at:
www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/21st%20century%20retail%20policy.pdf

Swinney, P. and Sivaev, D.

Beyond the high street: Why our cities really matter,

London: Centre for Cities, 2013, 44p. Available online at: www.centeforcities.org

Urban Pollinators

The 21st century agora; a new and better vision for town centres.

London: Urban Pollinators, 2011. <http://urbanpollinators.co.uk>