Stockport Council Joint Scrutiny Review into Vital and Viable District Centres

Institute for Place Management - Phase 1 Report

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1. Introduction

District centres are of vital importance for Stockport's residents and play a central part of civic life across the Borough. In order to better support these district centres, the Council has begun a partnership with the Institute of Place Management (IPM) based at Manchester Metropolitan University, which is internationally recognised for its work in understanding how places function ad supporting their success. The project will support the joint Communities & Housing and Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Review into District Centres and help develop a long-term strategy for Stockport's district centres that is rigorous, deliverable, and based upon the latest objective evidence.

This work will, in turn, have a measurable impact upon the sustainability and liveability of Stockport's existing centres as places that serve the needs of their catchment communities, and support thriving, relevant, and accessible district centres across Stockport.

Each of the eight district centres has unique characteristics, as well as its own strengths and challenges. Therefore, we are taking a place-based approach to identifying those interventions which could improve each centre's vitality and viability. Stockport's district centres also play a major role in the delivery of a number of the Council's key priorities, including the emerging Local Plan, current and future transport investment, schools' capacities, and health and social care integration, amongst others. The success of Stockport's district centres will have a major impact on the Council's ability to deliver a broad range of priorities. Finally, there are also a variety of other stakeholders that play a part in ensuring district centres are vibrant, including local retailers, leisure providers, community groups, and residents. Therefore, this Phase 1 report balances locally responsive solutions with appropriate policies that can apply across all district centres in order to ensure that they fully meet the needs of their local residents and of the Borough as a whole.

Using the IPM's Vital and Viable framework for centre assessment, which has been developed and tested over a number of years, the report presents our analysis of each centre in light of the IPM's '25 factors'. Based on this baseline qualitative and quantitative analysis, we are able to identify each centre's strengths and weaknesses, present a series of 'quick win' recommendations, and provide an initial centre classification for each centre.

The report is structured as follows:

a) It details the issues currently impacting traditional retail centres in the UK
b) It discusses the challenges of defining district centre
c) The report details key findings stemming from the IPM's *High Street UK 2020* (HSUK2020) and *Bringing Big Data to Small Users* (BDSU) projects which underpin our analysis of Stockport's district centre performance
d) Our first phase analysis of the district centres (based on primary audit visits and secondary analysis) is set out in the context of 25 key factors which affect vitality and viability
e) The report concludes by identifying each centre's key strengths and weaknesses based on the first phase analysis and proposes a number of potential 'quick win' recommendations for enhancing vitality and viability

2. Challenges impacting traditional retail centres

As many of our traditional retail centres and high streets have been market places for around a thousand years, it is perhaps easy to think that they are places of constancy and that the challenges they are facing today are unprecedented. It is certainly the case that the challenges are significant; but traditional retail centres have always faced change, and the majority have proved to be resilient in their response. Many have overcome disruptive change from industrial development, the impact of new transport modes, and rapid population growth. Though most city, town, and district centres are still retail centres, they are also increasingly looking to their other traditional roles as places of entertainment and leisure, as civic, educational and service centres, of employment and business, and as places to live to ensure they have a sustainable future.

There are a number of critical trends that are currently impacting traditional retail centres in the UK. Population growth in the country as a whole is significant, having risen from 52.4 million in 1960 to just over 66 million in 2017, and forecast to reach 72.7 million by 2040 (ONS, 2018). This creates demand for the services that town centres offer; but some of that demand is now being met elsewhere. Since the 1970s, we have seen much retail expenditure head to out of town locations. Despite various attempts by central government to restrict new development of out of town centres through planning policy, some 4.6 million square metres of new out of town floorspace was built in the first decade of this century. This, coupled with changes to our shopping habits, has contributed to a developing issue of over-supply which we are now beginning to see affect our traditional centres, leading to vacant primarily A1 usage units. Average GB retail vacancy fell from 14% in 2012 to 11% in the first half of 2017, though is now beginning to rise again to 11.5% in the second half of 2018 (Local Data Company, 2019). This recent trend is likely to continue over the coming years, with retail vacancy increasing, simultaneous with a fall in demand for this space. As a result, reduction in space or a change in usage are the likely outcomes.

In terms of changing shopping habits, as well as out of town retailing attracting expenditure away from town centres, the UK is also the world-leader in adapting to online retail. According to the Centre for Retail Research (2016), some 16.8% of UK retail spend was online in 2016. The growth in this has been very rapid. In 2002 it was just 1.6%, and is forecast to reach 21.5% in 2018. It is perhaps no surprise, therefore, that the share of retail expenditure in town centres which fell below half in 2000, continues to decrease, having fallen below 40% in 2014 (Parliament, 2014). The growth of online retailing has been having a profound impact on the presence of multiple retailers in town centres. Various commentators have suggested that a multiple retailer needed to be in over 250 town centres in 2000 to have a national presence but can now exist in just 70.

Away from pure retail, other impacts are also being felt on the High Street. Around one fifth of all pubs in the UK have closed since 2010 (CVS, 2017); and though the rate of closure appears to have slowed, there are concerns about the impact the recent business rate revaluation will have on many pubs. And it is a combination of these factors that have driven a general rise in retail vacancy across the UK.

Despite vacancy levels beginning to rise over the last twelve months, the fall in retail vacancy between 2012 and 2017 suggests some cause for optimism. Branded coffee shops continue to expand across the UK, growing by 6.9% in 2016 alone (Allegra, 2016) and, on current trends, will overtake the number of pubs by 2030. This has contributed to an overall growth in leisure in town centres in 2016, and likewise service retailing is increasing (hairdressers, nail bars and the like) as is convenience retailing (Local Data Company, 2016).

Whilst much focus has been assigned to reversing the fortunes of city and town centres, surrounding these larger places are smaller district centres like the eight in Stockport, on which local communities rely. And it is these smaller centres at the centre of the Vital and Viable District Centres project to which we now turn our attention.

3. District centres

3.1. What are district centres?

Understanding what a district centre actually is has always been a difficult task for planners and academics. This is since they “generally lack the historical associations of market towns, and often have a less clearly defined and established role” (DoE, 1998: 5). Usually, researchers based their assumptions on subjective sub-divisions of these centres, taking into account various measures (e.g. business trade, retail turnover, size, catchment, merchandise, uses, assortment, and floorspace) (Guy, 1998; Reynolds and Schiller, 1992). Schiller and Jarrett (1985) argued that district centres are less specialised than regional and town centres, as they tend to be the main weekly shopping centres that supply convenience and durable goods. Whilst the diversity of these centres led Reynolds and Schiller (1992) to classify them into minor and major, depending on the number of variety stores in the centres. However, with the closure of many shops due to the effects of retail decentralisation, many district centres declined to a residual status serving less mobile local residents, and offering a top-up or emergency shopping function for the remainder (Thomas and Bromley, 1995).

In PPG6, a district centre was defined as "groups of shops, separate from the town centre, usually containing at least one food supermarket or superstore, and non-retail services such as banks, building societies and restaurants" (DoE, 1998: 18; also see DoE, 1993, 1996). However, this definition can also apply to large food stores with other unit shops and in-store services that can potentially perform the role of a district centre, even though these were not recognised as such (Lowe, 1998). One significant outcome of such policies, was the advent of the corporate food store in district centres, which was considered by some academics as a vital anchor in maintaining the quality and range of shopping in district centres (Thomas and Bromley, 2002, 2003; Wrigley and Dolega, 2011).

In the NPPF, a minor adjustment was made to the existing PPG6 definition, highlighting the importance of local public facilities (such as a library) in district centres, and the social community focus that these centres provide (DCLG, 2012; Gransby, 1988). However, the ambivalence of what a district centre is, and how it differs from the traditional town centre, still remains, as the report clearly states that:

> “A town centre is an area defined on the local authority’s proposal map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of

purely neighbourhood significance".

What is not under question from the above, is the importance of district centres in planning policies and sustainable development. District centres, just as any other type of centre, need to steer away from mono-functional, retail-oriented representations, and emerge as multi-functional ones, supporting leisure and recreation, employment, tourism, heritage, culture, housing, employment, education, health and wellbeing, as well as retail (Millington et al., 2015), thus becoming resilient to anticipated future economic changes (DCLG, 2012). As such, there is a clear requirement for centres to adapt to ensure that they meet this challenge.

3.2. Stockport's district centres

Stockport Council has developed strategies for its district centres, driven by a recognition of the important function they provide in Stockport's communities, for almost two decades. The original District Centres Strategy emerged in 2001, this led to the eight individual centres creating action plans which interpreted the strategy at a local level. A local centres strategy was developed in 2004, and was subsequently reviewed in 2007. This led to the introduction of a renewed district and local centres strategy, intended to drive district centre development for the following five years (until 2012). The Council is now looking to reassess its approach to supporting district centres. It has enlisted the assistance of IPM in order to provide independent external assessment of each centre along with insight into the opportunities and challenges they face.

In the original 2001 document, the Council recognised that district centres have an important and broad ranging role at the heart of the local communities they serve. In particular, the centres support the local economy, provide a broad range of services and leisure opportunities, serve as a focal point for social interaction, and essentially act as hubs for the local community. The objectives set out in the 2007 strategy document to ensure these centres retain this level of functionality include taking measures to improve overall business performance and support, identify new development opportunities, make improvements to safety in the centres, accessibility, and improve and maintain the environment/public realm. They also outline a requirement to work on promotion and marketing, as well as support and maintain local partnerships between stakeholders within each centre.

All of these things remain relevant today, and as such the centres, facilitated by the Council's understanding of them in terms of the important role they play in the borough, are in a good position to progress from a strategic perspective. The decision to re-establish focus and continue efforts to ensure these centres continue to fulfil their important community function is timely, as it comes at a particularly challenging time for centres of all sizes. Through our research in places across the country, IPM has sought to identify these challenges and impediments to success so that they can be counteracted accordingly. The report will now briefly summarise this underpinning research, before we proceed to address Stockport's centres in detail.

4. HSUK2020 project: Factors impacting vitality and viability

There are two main research projects conducted by the IPM underpinning the Vital and Viable District Centres project, and the analysis of the centres within it, the first of these being High Street UK 2020 (HSUK2020). And this project will now be briefly outlined.

In 1994, the government commissioned the publication of a research report called *Vital and Viable Town Centres: Meeting the Challenge* (HMSO, 1994). This report led to changes in national planning policy, which then placed a clear focus on town centres first for future development. The report defined vitality and viability in respect of town centres; they are both concerned with life: the first (vitality) being about whether a centre feels lively and the second (viability) whether a centre has the capacity to attract the investment needed, not only to maintain the fabric of the place, but also to allow for adaptation to changing circumstances. The terms vitality and viability were used in national planning policy, used by local authorities and local partnerships, and much discussed by researchers. A wide range of initiatives were also undertaken in town centres across the country with the aim of promoting vitality and viability.

In 2014, as part of the ESRC-supported HSUK2020 project, the IPM undertook a comprehensive literature review to identify factors contributing to centre vitality and viability (see Parker *et al*., 2017). This produced some 160 factors and these were discussed with a number of stakeholders from ten UK town centres who were partners in the project. This meeting identified additional factors, some of which were found in the wider literature, and some of which had not yet been researched. In total, the study identified 201 factors that impact on town centre vitality and viability. However, as they stood they had no sense of priority or importance. And so 22 leading town centre experts drawn from practitioners and researchers were asked to rank them using two scales: how much a factor impacted on town centre vitality and viability, and how much local control could be exercised over a factor. This then led to the 'Top 25 Factors' impacting vitality and viability, detailed below:

1. ACTIVITY HOURS	Ensuring the centre is open when the catchment needs it. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment?
2. APPEARANCE	Improving the quality of the visual appearance. How clean is the centre?
3. RETAILERS	Offering the right type and quantity of retailers. What retailers are represented?
4. VISION & STRATEGY	Having a common vision and some leadership. Do stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans?
5. EXPERIENCE	Considering the quality of the experience? Measuring levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. What is the image of the centre?

6. MANAGEMENT	Building capacity to get things done. Is there effective management – of the shopping centre(s) and town centre?
7. MERCHANDISE	Meeting the needs of the catchment. What is the range and quality of goods on offer?
8. NECESSITIES	Ensuring basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking; amenities; general facilities, like places to sit down and toilets etc.?
9. ANCHORS	The presence of an anchor which drives footfall. This could be retail (like a department store) or could be a busy transport interchange or large employer.
10. NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS	Presence of strong networks and effective formal or informal partnerships. Do stakeholders communicate and trust each other? Can the Council facilitate action (not just lead it?)
11. DIVERSITY	A multi-functional centre. What attractions are there, apart from retail? What is the tenant mix and tenant variety?
12. WALKABILITY	The 'walkability' of the centre. Are linked trips between areas possible – or are the distances too great? Are there other obstacles that stop people walking?
13. ENTERTAINMENT & LEISURE	An entertainment and leisure offer. What is it? Is it attractive to various segments of the catchment?
14. ATTRACTIVENESS	The 'pulling power' of a centre. Can it attract people from a distance?
15. PLACE ASSURANCE	Getting the basics right. Does the centre offer a basic level of customer service, is this consistent? Or do some operators, or parts of the offer, let this down?
16. ACCESSIBLE	Each of reach. How convenient is the centre to access? Is it accessible by a number of different means, e.g. car, public transport, cycling etc.?
17. PLACE MARKETING	Communicating the offer. How does the centre market and promote itself? Do all stakeholders communicate a consistent image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow – with signage and guides etc.

18. COMPARISON/CONVENIENCE	The amount of comparison shopping opportunities compared to convenience. Is this sustainable?
19. RECREATIONAL SPACE	The amount and quality of recreational areas and public space/open space. Are there places that are uncommodified? Where people can enjoy spending time without spending money?
20. BARRIERS TO ENTRY	Refers to obstacles that make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the centre's market. What is the location doing to make it easier for new businesses to enter?
21. CHAIN VS INDEPENDENT	Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix of a centre/High Street. Is this suitably balanced?
22. SAFETY/CRIME	A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting. Perceptions of crime are usually higher than actual crime rates. Does the centre monitor these and how does it communicate results to stakeholders?
23. LIVEABILITY	The resident population or potential for residential in the centre. Does the centre offer the services/environment that residents need? Doctors, schools etc.
24. ADAPTABILITY	The flexibility of the space/property in a centre. Are there inflexible and outdated units that are unlikely to be re-let or re-purposed?
25. STORE DEVELOPMENT	The willingness for retailers/property owners to develop their stores. Are they willing to coordinate/cooperate in updating activities? Or do they act independently?

You can read more about the IPM's HSUK2020 project on the IPM blog here, or alternatively in the Journal of Place Management and Development's open access special issue here.

5. The BDSU project: Footfall signature types

The second key study underpinning the Vital and Viable District Centres project is Bringing Big Data to Small Users (BDSU). It is a collaborative research and development project funded by Innovate UK, led by retail intelligence specialists, Springboard, and involving the IPM, Manchester Metropolitan University, Cardiff University, MyKnowledgeMap, and other key partners. Springboard have provided footfall data for more than 100 town and city centres, dating back as far as ten years, that looks at footfall changes on an hourly basis. Footfall measures the number of people passing a particular point or points in a centre. It has been recognised in national planning policy statements as the prime indicator of town centre vitality since 1994.

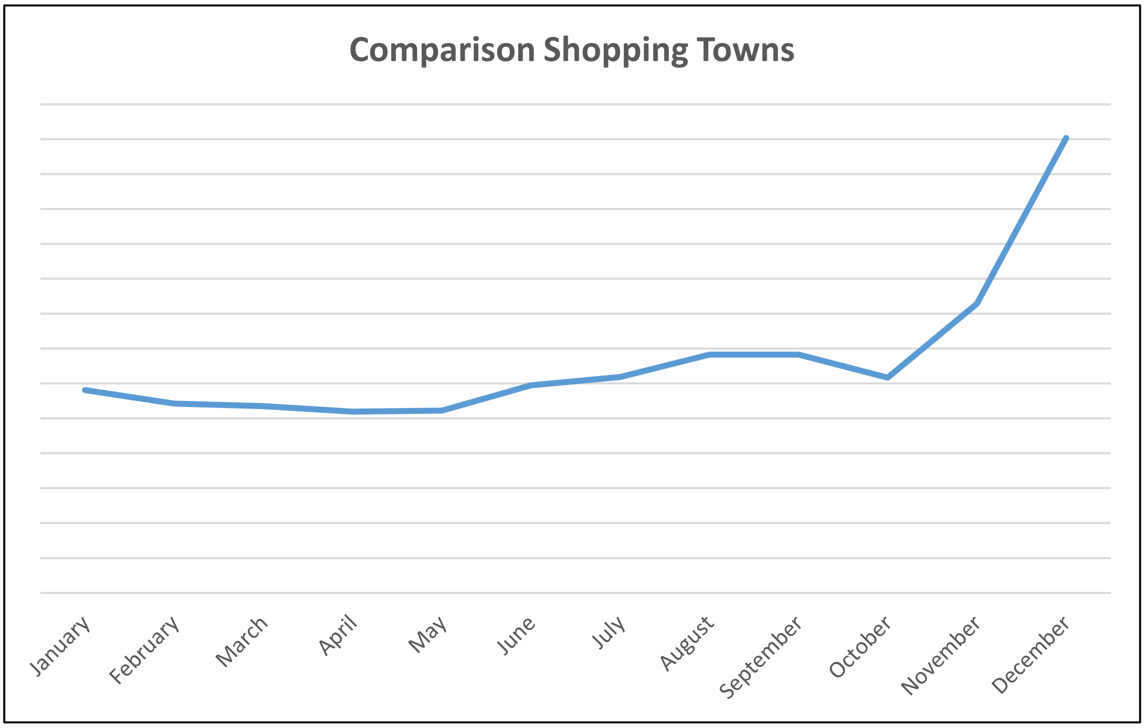
Analysis of this data has identified four basic patterns that have profound significance in thinking about the future of traditional retail centres. The patterns show usage of a centre by month over a twelve-month period. Whilst it had traditionally been assumed that most centres show an increase in footfall in the pre-Christmas period and that this is the busiest time of year, the patterns show that this is not true of all centres. And, even where it is the case, the significance of the upturn in activity has in many cases been over-estimated. It is important to stress that the patterns reflect actual usage of a centre, and that footfall is not the same as retail sales, as people may be in a centre for many other reasons than to shop.

The project has identified that all centres fit within these four pattern types, though some do so more closely than others. It is evident that some towns are changing and are transitioning from one town type to another. The significance of the town types is that data analysis shows that the more closely a town is used in line with one of the patterns, the more resilient its footfall is. Footfall in centres has been reducing as a whole, and the research suggests that will continue as we look to 2020. But towns that have footfall patterns more closely related to the four patterns are seeing footfall decline less rapidly than centres with more hybrid patterns, as they have a clearer offer and image.

The four key footfall signature types identified in the project are detailed below:

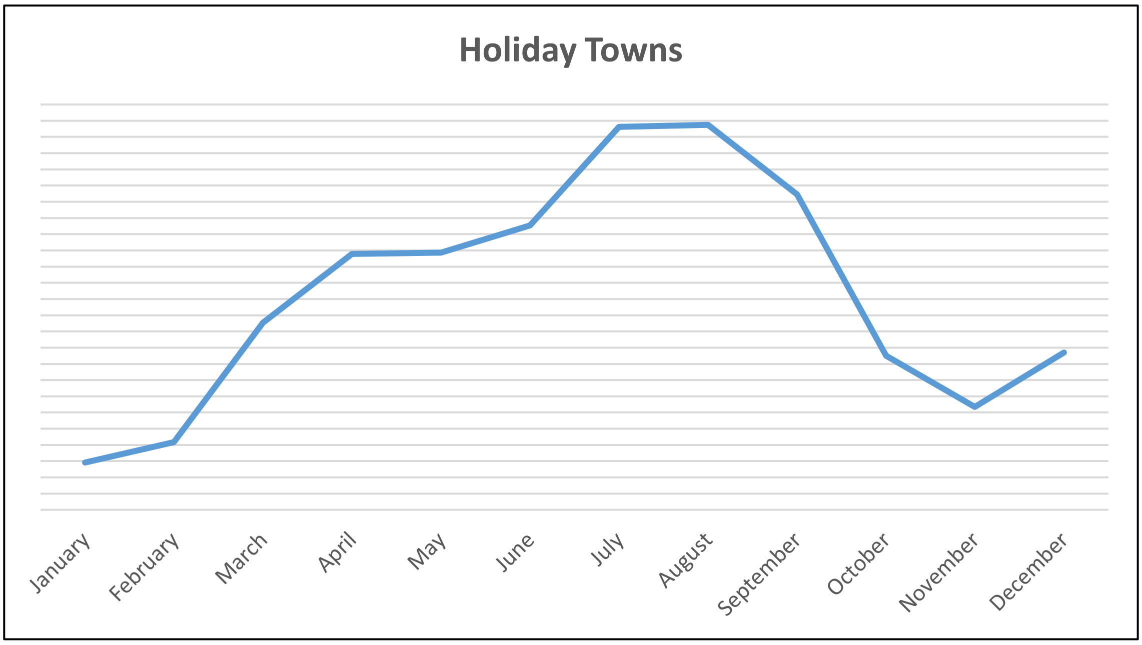
Comparison shopping towns

Comparison shopping centres tend to be located in larger town and city centres, and their monthly town signatures can be identified by a footfall peak in December, coinciding with the Christmas preparation period (as seen in the figure below). Here you will typically find a range of department stores, major variety stores, and a solid line-up of fashion and other comparison retailing. They draw people from a wide catchment area, though visits may be relatively infrequent. As such, they need to be accessible by a choice of means of transport with good links to the region they serve. These centres compete with other similar centres and with other retail channels.



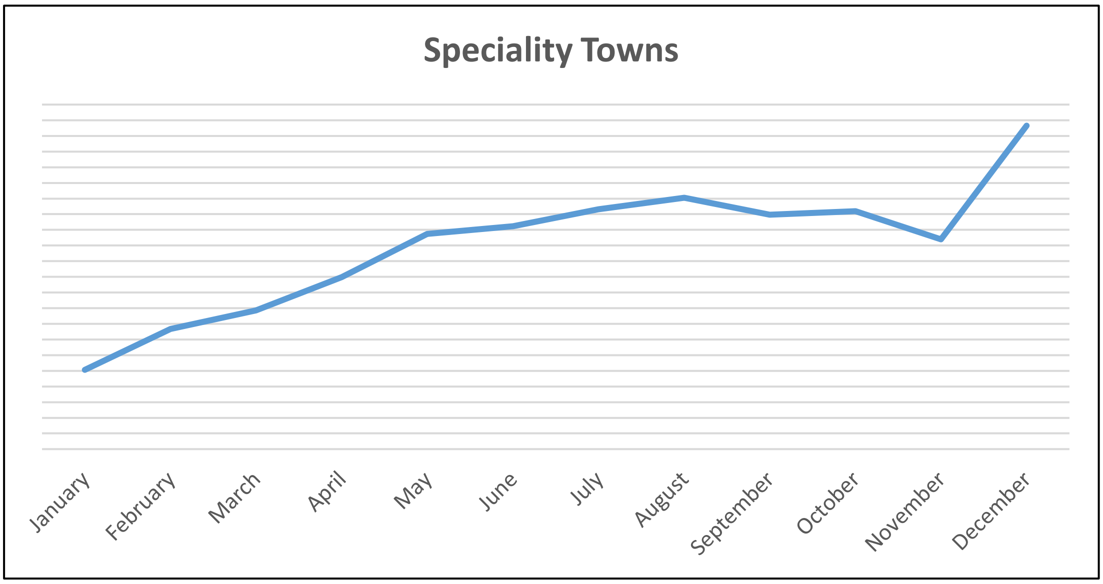
Holiday towns

In holiday towns, the peak pedestrian flow is in the summer months (as seen in the figure below). Although these are usually coastal resorts, this pattern is also found in some inland places with strong visitor appeal. Their anchor is usually not retail but perhaps a natural feature like a beach or the countryside. The retail offer in the town is very much geared towards tourists and does not serve the local community very well, as reflected in the lack of use out of season. These centres need to maximise trade in the peak months, through extended opening hours and increased trading areas, but in the future, they need to look at extending the visitor season and providing more for local communities.



Speciality towns

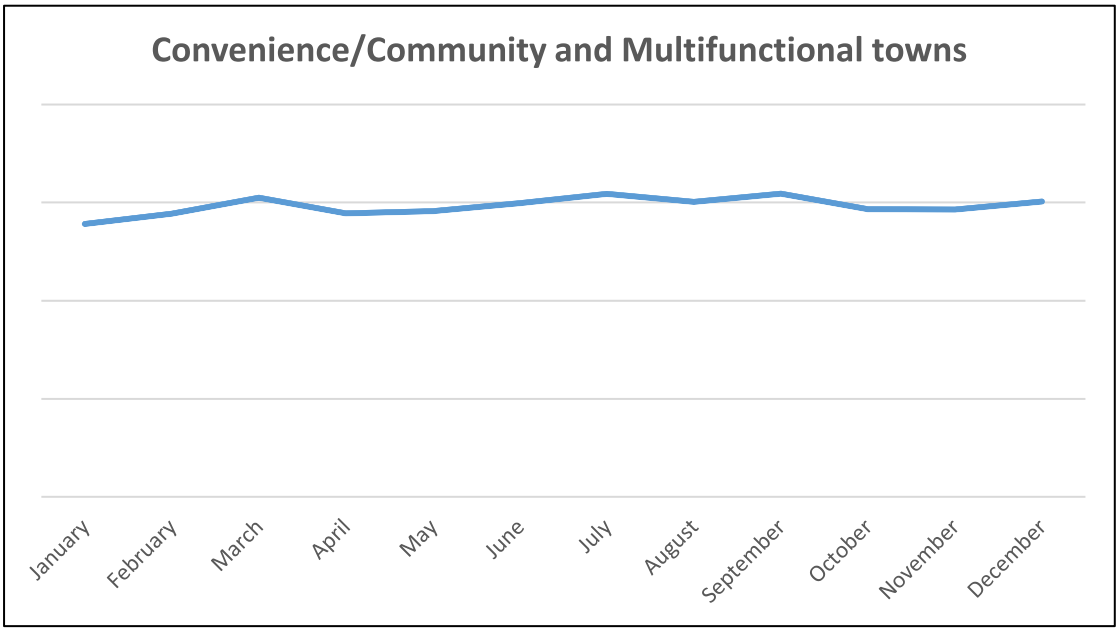
Speciality towns have a notable Christmas shopping peak, but they also attract visitors through the spring and summer (see figure below). They offer something unique and special that appeals to visitors from a wide area, in many cases including overseas visitors. Their anchor is not retail but perhaps a distinctive cathedral, museum, city walls, or unique quarter. Speciality towns primarily organise themselves to protect and promote their identity and positioning. It would appear that people spend longer on their visits to these centres and this may be supported by a strong retail and leisure/hospitality offer. This means these centres do also provide well for their local communities. They need to focus on how they make themselves more special and distinctive, whilst still meeting the needs of their catchment.



Convenience/community towns and multifunctional centres

The largest group of centres identified by usage, termed convenience/community towns and multifunctional centres, have a fairly steady footfall profile throughout the year (see figure below). And centres of this kind are focused on their local community. Their anchor might be food retailing, employment, access to public transport, or a strong resident base. They are places that offer a convenient mix of goods and services. Centres with a relatively low volume of footfall through the year need to think about how they are locally connected and focus efforts on improving convenience for people in the immediate area. This may be through ensuring trading hours meet local needs, through introducing new offers such as parcel collection from retail units or lockers, pop-up retailers and restaurants or regular markets which bring in new product lines and services on an occasional basis, home-working and small business facilities, a very strong customer service approach focused on maintaining customer loyalty, or other things that enhance convenience and respond to community need. Centres with a higher annual footfall may be quite large and have a strong retail offer but they have steady footfall flows because they are multifunctional centres. Their employment base, hospitality offer, culture and entertainment, strong service offer, and central housing all ensure that footfall remains steady through the year. They also need to think about connectivity, but perhaps at a regional level, and about ensuring they can support the range of activities that take place in the centre.

Understanding what type of centre you are is a basic first step in determining how best to go forward. It also ensures that decisions you make are rational, and hence have a better chance of success. The 25 priority factors for vitality and viability (as discussed in the previous section) will apply to all centres; but the interpretation and implementation of these factors depends to a large extent on knowing what kind of centre you are.



6. Analysis of Stockport's District Centres

Within Phase 1 of the project, the IPM research team visited the eight district centres. During these visits, the land use survey for each centre was updated, as well as taking photographs and considering each centre in light of the aforementioned '25 Factors'. This primary audit analysis was then enriched with secondary desk research into each centre. We will now present the findings from this analysis, beginning with the updated land use survey and then exploring each of the factors for vitality and viability in turn.

6.1. Land use classifications and vacancy rates

There are similarities and differences between each of the 8 district centres. Whilst they are broadly similar in terms of their provision, they possess differing characteristics in terms of their size and the range of retail, services and leisure opportunities they offer.

There are other differences, which the audit assessment will highlight in more detail. Yet irrespective of these differences, each centre shares the same purpose, which is to provide for their local communities. To achieve this, and for centres to retain their vitality and viability, the extent and variety of interventions required will vary based on each centre's specific requirements. The first step to establishing whether centres are meeting the requirements of the communities they serve is to look at current provision in terms of how units in the centre are being used, and the level of vacancy in each.
Through a combination of historical data collected by the Council dating back to 2012, and an audit of each centre carried out by IPM in March 2019, we were able to assess the current range of uses and vacancy rates in each centre, and how vacancy rates have changed over the preceding seven years.

Table 1 – Land use classifications by centre – March 2019 (actual)

Land use class	BRAMHALL	EDGELEY	HAZEL GROVE	CHEADLE	CHEADLE HULME	MARPLE	REDDISH	ROMILEY	AVERAGE
TOTAL (incl. C3)	122	128	190	162	104	198	90	118	139
TOTAL (excl. C3)	**118**	**127**	**174**	**162**	**104**	**167**	**80**	**104**	**130**
A1	65	76	80	89	42	86	42	56	67
A2	13	3	18	21	13	13	10	7	12
A3	13	5	15	22	11	10	8	10	12
A4	5	5	12	6	5	6	1	6	6
A5	4	16	15	7	8	16	8	7	10
B1	0	0	2	1	5	2	1	1	2
C3	4	1	16	0	0	31	10	14	10
D1	5	3	6	5	7	6	1	3	5
D2	0	0	0	1	2	3	3	0	1
SG	2	5	2	1	1	5	2	4	3
VACANT	**11**	**14**	**24**	**9**	**10**	**20**	**4**	**10**	**13**

Table 2 – Land use classifications by centre – March 2019 (averages by use class)

Land use class	BRAMHALL	EDGELEY	HAZEL GROVE	CHEADLE	CHEADLE HULME	MARPLE	REDDISH	ROMILEY	AVERAGE %
A1	53.3	59.4	42.1	54.9	40.4	43.4	46.7	47.5	**48**
A2	10.7	2.3	9.5	13.0	12.5	6.6	11.1	5.9	**9**
A3	10.7	3.9	7.9	13.6	10.6	5.1	8.9	8.5	**9**
A4	4.1	3.9	6.3	3.7	4.8	3.0	1.1	5.1	**4**
A5	3.3	12.5	7.9	4.3	7.7	8.1	8.9	5.9	**7**
B1	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.6	4.8	1.2	1.3	1.0	**1**
C3	3.3	0.8	8.4	0.0	0.0	15.7	11.1	11.9	**6**
D1	4.1	2.3	3.2	3.1	6.7	3.0	1.1	2.5	**3**
D2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	1.9	1.8	3.8	0.0	**1**
SG	1.6	3.9	1.1	0.6	1.0	2.5	2.2	3.4	**2**
VACANT (% excl. C3)	**9**	**11**	**14**	**6**	**10**	**12**	**5**	**10**	**9**
VACANT (% incl. C3)	**9**	**11**	**13**	**6**	**10**	**10**	**4**	**8**	**9**

A1 dominates in each of the centres, typically accounting for around 50% of total ground floor usage. Whilst A1 provision is broadly consistent as a percentage of total usage, other classes vary significantly between centres. Centres such as Bramhall, Cheadle and Cheadle Hulme, for example, have a proportionally higher A3 provision, indicating that these centres perhaps serve more than a convenience function, with people visiting for entertainment and leisure purposes (in A3 terms, eating out). Centres such as Hazel Grove possess a higher than average A4 provision (12 bars/pubs representing 6.9% of total usage). This would suggest that recreational drinking drives the evening economy in this centre. A5 (takeaway) provision is likely to be another driver of evening footfall in some centres, particularly Edgeley and Reddish. Conversely, the activity hours of these retailers are likely to have a detrimental effect on the daytime economy and sense of vibrancy in these centres (owing to the fact they are likely to be closed until late afternoon/evening time).

B1 provision is more prevalent in some centres than others, with Cheadle Hulme in particular possessing a number of office-type buildings. Whilst this does little to attract visitors to the centre per se, it does lead to a set number of employees coming in to the centre throughout the week which provides an opportunity for local businesses. Similarly, there is a substantial disparity between centres when it comes to C3 provision, with Marple in particular possessing a significantly higher number of residential properties within the centre boundary area than other centres. Whilst there are positives attached to this in terms of providing centre users, in a similar vein to B1 provision, residential properties themselves do little to contribute to centre vibrancy.

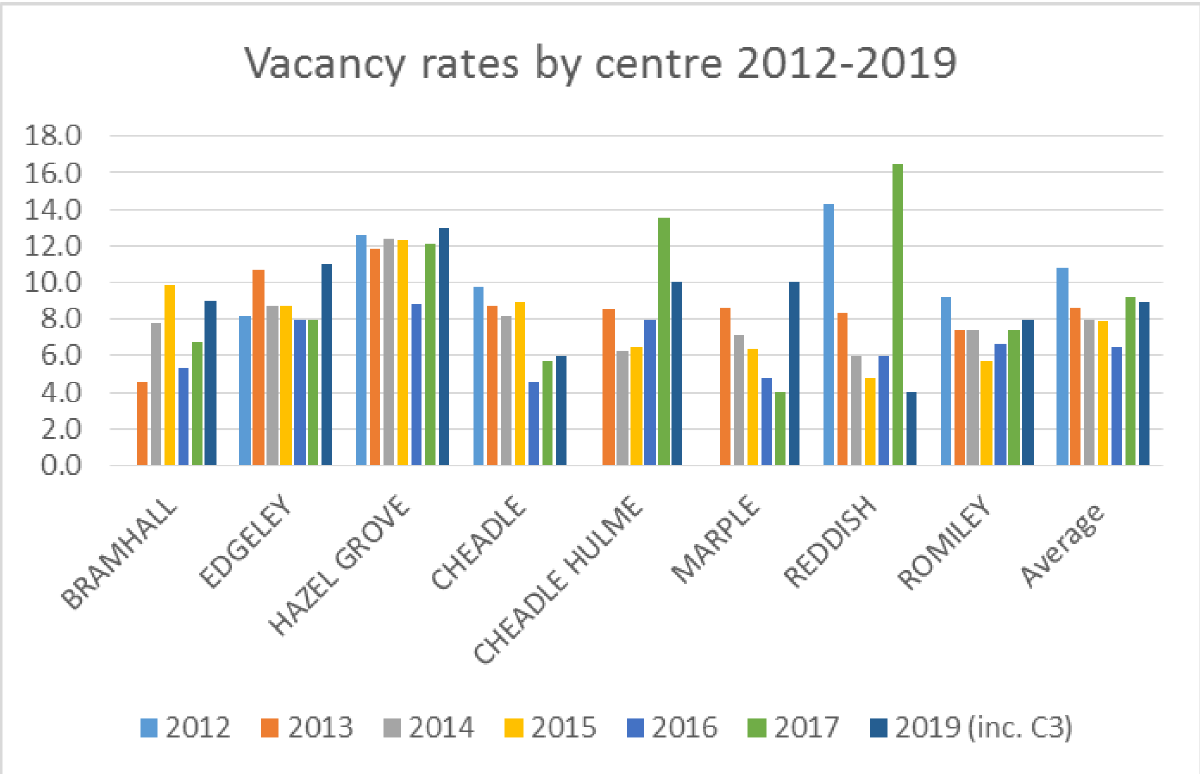
D1 provision, which improves liveability in centres and caters to the core requirements of the community, is relatively strong across all 8 centres, with only Reddish, Romiley and Edgeley falling below the average. Whilst this provision (for example, doctors, libraries, schools) is important as a means of bringing people into the centre, it is also a use class that is most exposed to local authority funding restrictions, and the trend for a reduction in such provision is likely to continue. As such, there is likely to be an increasing emphasis placed on non-public funded D1 facilities (nurseries, churches, learning/training centres, galleries).

Typically, district centres have not been considered as providers of entertainment and leisure opportunities, at least not in the same way larger towns and cities are. However, owing to the changing nature of retail and shopping habits (addressed earlier in this report), even smaller centres should be seeking to enhance non-retail provision in order to remain viable. Centres such as Marple and Reddish do well in this respect (D2, thanks to provision such as the Regent Cinema and the Olive community space, respectively). Romiley possesses a theatre (classified under sui generis), so this too is relatively unusual, and a big positive in terms of diversification of use in the centre, and a particular positive for the evening economy in the centre.

Table 3 – Vacancy rates by Centre 2012-2019

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2019 (inc. C3)	2019 (excl. C3)	Average per centre from 2012-2019	Change 2012-2019
BRAMHALL		4.6 (-)	7.8 (+3.2)	9.9 (+2.1)	5.3 (-4.6)	6.7 (+1.4)	9.0 (+2.3)	*9.0*	7.2	Plus 4.4
EDGELEY	8.2	10.7 (+2.5)	8.7 (-2)	8.7 (-)	8 (-0.7)	8 (-)	11 (+3)	*11.0*	8.8	Plus 2.8
HAZEL GROVE	12.6	11.8 (-0.8)	12.4 (+0.6)	12.3 (-0.1)	8.8 (-3.5)	12.1 (+3.3)	13.0 (+0.9)	*14.0*	11.9	Plus 0.4
CHEADLE	9.8	8.7 (-1.1)	8.2 (-0.5)	8.9 (-0.7)	4.6 (-4.3)	5.7 (+1.1)	6.0 (+0.3)	*6.0*	7.4	Minus 3.8
CHEADLE HULME		8.5 (-)	6.3 (-2.2)	6.5 (+0.2)	8.0 (+1.5)	13.5 (+5.5)	10.0 (-3.5)	*10.0*	8.8	Plus 1.5
MARPLE		8.6 (-)	7.1 (-1.5)	6.4 (-0.7)	4.8 (-1.6)	4.0 (-0.8)	10.0 (+6)	*12.0*	6.8	Plus 1.4
REDDISH	14.3	8.3 (-6)	6.0 (-2.3)	4.8 (-1.2)	6.0 (+1.2)	16.5 (+10.5)	4.0 (-6.5)	*5.0*	8.6	Minus 10.3
ROMILEY	9.2	7.4 (-1.8)	7.4 (-)	5.7 (-1.7)	6.6 (+0.9)	7.4 (+0.8)	8.0 (+0.6)	*10.0*	7.4	Minus 1.2
Average	10.8	8.6 (-2.2)	8.0 (-0.6)	7.9 (-0.1)	6.5 (-1.4)	9.2 (+2.7)	8.9 (-0.3)	*9.6*	8.6	Plus 0.71

Figure 1 – Vacancy Rates by Centre 2012-2019



Stockport BC's historical data is calculated including C3 provision, therefore our figures have been calculated accordingly, though we show the vacancy rate excluding C3 for comparison. When we look at vacancy, we can see that the average across all centres stands at 9% (this is below the national average of 11.5%, and indicates that broadly speaking, the centres are performing to an acceptable standard). Centres which are experiencing a higher than average level of vacancy, for example Hazel Grove (13%) and Edgeley (11%), are also lacking in D2 provision, indicating a potential link between narrowing of offer in particular use classes resulting in a lack of custom/retail vacancy. Whilst this cannot be proven, at least in the absence of footfall data to support the theory, it would appear that vacancy results from centres which fail to serve their communities effectively, and therefore fail to attract visitors. Conversely, centres which possess a broader offer, with a good diversification of use, are likely to experience lower vacancy (we can see, for example, Reddish doing particularly well in this respect).

Looking at the historical data, we can see that all centres have experienced fluctuations in vacancy over the past seven years, however it would appear that the past two/three years have been particularly challenging. Between 2017 and 2019, all centres except for Cheadle (-3.5%) and Reddish (-6.5%) have experienced an increase in vacancy averaging 2.2%. However, given the national average of 11.5%, the centres in general are holding up fairly well, and whilst it is clearly a concern that centres have struggled over the past two years, the previous fluctuations illustrate that decline isn't terminal, and that vacancy will fluctuate over time. To exemplify this further, the Council have provided data for 2001 and 2007, which is shown in the table below.

Table 4 – Historical vacancy rates – 2001 and 2007

	2001	2007
BRAMHALL	6.0	4.3
EDGELEY	20.0	23.7
HAZEL GROVE	15.0	12.0
CHEADLE	9.0	8.0
CHEADLE HULME	7.0	4.2
MARPLE	4.0	6.5
REDDISH	3.0	5.0
ROMILEY	10.0	9.9
Average	**9.3**	**9.2**

We can see that the average vacancy across all centres in both years was almost identical to what it is now (9%). Most significantly, we can see that vacancy in Edgeley reached 23.7% in 2007. So whilst a current rate of 14% leaves much room for improvement, this historical data serves to show that change can be implemented. As such, the interventions which are initiated in these centres have the potential to create real change, and their impact should not be underestimated.

In order to ascertain whether the change in vacancy rates in specific centres is reflected in how they are being used, footfall data would facilitate this (see Appendix 1). Measuring footfall over a prolonged period would allow us to cross-reference vacancy with the amount of people using the centre. Interventions could then be introduced accordingly. The footfall data would also assist in the subsequent period, by allowing us to track the impact of any interventionary measures introduced.

6.2. Audit of the centres

Factor 1. Activity Hours

Do the opening hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment? Is there an evening economy?

Modal / Key Retail Anchor Opening and Closing times

District Centre	Open (mode)	Close (mode)	Key anchor	Open	Close
BRAMHALL	9am	5.30pm	Sainsbury's Local	7am	10pm
CHEADLE	9am	5.30pm	Tesco Express	6am	11pm
CHEADLE HULME	9am	5.30pm	Asda/ Waitrose	7am 7am	11pm 9pm
EDGELEY	9am	5pm	Co-Op	7am	10pm
HAZEL GROVE	9am	5pm	Asda Sainsbury's	7am 7am	11pm 10pm
MARPLE	9am	5pm	Asda	7am	11pm
REDDISH	9am	5pm	Morrison's	7am	10pm
ROMILEY	9am	5pm	Sainsbury's	7am	11pm

Most businesses in each centre have traditional opening times, between 9am and 5/5.30pm. Each centre is also served by at least one major retail anchor with extended opening times. Pubs, bars, and restaurants are key drivers of the evening offer, together with takeaways, which typically open later in the day and close later. However, there are variations, for example, in the A3 usages. For example, Reddish possess many cafes, but most close by early evening.

Number and Percentage of A3, A4 and A5 uses

District Centre	A3 (no)	A3 (%)	A4 (no.)	A4 (%)	A5 (no.)	A5 (%)	Score
BRAMHALL	13	10.7	5	4.2	4	3.4	3
CHEADLE	22	13.6	6	3.7	7	4.3	4
CHEADLE HULME	11	10.6	5	4.8	8	7.7	3
EDGELEY	5	3.9	5	3.9	16	12.6	2
HAZEL GROVE	15	7.9	12	6.9	15	8.6	3
MARPLE	10	5.1	6	3.0	16	9.6	4
REDDISH	8	8.9	1	1.3	8	10.0	1
ROMILEY	10	8.5	6	5.8	7	6.7	3
AVERAGE	*12*	*9.0*	*6*	*4.1*	*10*	*7.9*	

Factor 2. Appearance

How clean is the centre? What is the quality of the public realm? Are the shops well maintained? Are there any litter issues?

Bramhall (Score: 4/5)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Strengths</th><th>Weaknesses</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Clean centre with no noticeable litter issues
Series of planters and trees throughout the centre
Shops frontages generally clean and well-maintained, with some especially attractive (see above).</td><td>The main entrance to the Village Square from the car park not overly welcoming nor attractive.</td></tr>
</table>

Cheadle (Score: 4/5)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Strengths</th><th>Weaknesses</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>
</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Clean centre with no noticeable litter issues
Some attractive Mock Tudor architecture, and most shop frontages well-maintained
A range of planters, trees, and some attractive greenspace nearby.</td><td>The rain cover over some of the units on the main shopping street is poorly maintained and outdated.</td></tr>
</table>

Cheadle Hulme (Score: 3/5)

Strengths		*Weaknesses*		
				
• Oak Meadow Park is well-kept by volunteers and attractive • There are a number of well-maintained units in the centre providing a sense of character, such as the John Millington pub.		• The shopping centre on the whole looks dated and unwelcoming • There were some temporary roadworks along the busy main road at the time of the audit visit (March 2019), which looks untidy in places.		

Edgeley (Score: 2/5)

Strengths	*Weaknesses*		
			
• The church area is pleasant; however, it is disconnected from the centre of Edgeley.	• The shop frontages in general are dated and poorly maintained • Some littering issues within the centre leading to it feeling untidy and dirty in places.		

Hazel Grove (Score: 2/5)

Strengths	*Weaknesses*		
			
• The memorial garden is attractive and well-maintained.	• There are a lot of poorly-maintained and vacant units make it look untidy • The centre is dominated by the A6 which leads to air quality issues • There are some littering issues.		

Marple (Score: 4/5)

Strengths			*Weaknesses*
			
• There is an abundance of attractive greenspace surrounding Marple • A clean centre with no noticeable litter issues • Traditional buildings such as the Regent theatre, local vernacular, and stone walls provide an attractive rural village character.			• Quite a few vacant units leading to some minor appearance issues.

Reddish (Score: 2.5/5)

Strengths		*Weaknesses*		
				
• There is some attractive Victorian architecture, with the working men's' club and church area particularly attractive. More could be done to connect this Victorian heritage further to the main centre.		• A number of dishevelled shop frontages in the centre • Some household appliances left outside of shops leading to an untidy appearance • Not much attractive greenspace • The square could better reflect Reddish's Victorian heritage.		

Romiley (Score: 3/5)

Strengths		*Weaknesses*
		
• The shopping precinct has well-maintained public realm with attractive flower beds • No noticeable litter issues • The nearby park provides some attractive and inviting greenspace.		• Some of the units in general look outdated • The residential above some of the shops looks untidy in places (see above).

Factor 3. Retailers

Do the retailers in the centre meet the needs of the local catchment? What retailers are represented (this includes retailers of products and services)?

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	Comments	Score
BRAMHALL	Good	Average	Good	Average	Poor	Good retail provision. Particularly strong in café/restaurants.	2.5
CHEADLE	Good	Good	Excellent	Average	Poor	Very strong in café/restaurants. Lack of takeaways.	3
CHEADLE HULME	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Consistent performance in all categories.	3.5
EDGELEY	Good	Poor	Poor	Average	Excellent	Very strong in takeaways. Poor in service businesses and restaurant/eateries.	2.5
HAZEL GROVE	Good	Average	Average	Good	Good	Strong in bar/pubs and takeaways. Likely to be strong evening economy.	3
MARPLE	Good	Poor	Poor	Poor	Good	Lack of café/restaurants and bars/pubs. Surprising given number of units in centre.	2.5
REDDISH	Good	Average	Poor	Poor	Good	Poor range of cafes/restaurants and bars/pubs.	2.5
ROMILEY	Good	Poor	Poor	Good	Average	Poor in service provision and cafés/restaurants.	2.5

The retail assessment focuses on A class land use, from general retail (A1), through to services (A2), Cafes/restaurants (A3), Bars/pubs (A4), and takeaways (A5). In terms of A1 provision, all centres are performing well, with a good range of retailers. Disparity comes in other areas, particularly A3. Centres such as Cheadle possess a strong range of cafes/restaurants, whilst other centres struggle in this regard. In terms of general range of retail/service offer in relation to size of centre (by unit), Cheadle Hulme is performing best, the other centres – when considered holistically – are broadly operating at a similar level.

A more detailed land use assessment can be found in section 6.1.

Factor 4: Vision and Strategy, 6. Management, and 10. Networks and Partnerships

Having a common vision and some leadership is important in centres. Do the high street stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans? Is the vision adopted in stakeholders' plans?

Collectively District Centres strategy falls within the 2011 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Local Development Framework. The strategic objective is as follows:

> *A vibrant Town Centre complemented by individual District Centres, which are well used by residents and served by retail, leisure and cultural facilities*

The main detail concerning district centres falls within under Core Policy C5 – Access to Services. Main features of the plan remain relevant. However, since this document was published the restructuring of the retail sector and change in consumer behaviour brings into question targets and deliverables regarding A1 retail. In terms of specific districts, only Marple has a clear vision.

Active local collaboration across the 8 district centres appears to be patchy and piecemeal. Collaboration in Cheadle Hulme and Edgeley appears to have been stronger in the past, but has since diminished. Marple is most advanced, with an established structure to foster local collaboration and delivery plan, whereas Edgeley and Reddish appear to have very low existing capacity.

District Centre	Vision / Strategy	Networks/ Partnerships	Assessment of local capacity	Score
BRAMHALL	No	Yes	Strengthen stakeholder group	3
CHEADLE	No	No	Establish a stakeholder group	1
CHEADLE HULME	No	No	Establish a stakeholder group	2
EDGELEY	No	No	Establish a stakeholder group	1
HAZEL GROVE	No	No	Establish a stakeholder group	2
MARPLE	Yes	Yes	Ensure existing stakeholder group is working effectively	4
REDDISH	No	No	Establish a stakeholder group	1
ROMILEY	No	No	Establish a stakeholder group	2

5. Experience

The quality of the experience within the centre. What is the overall image? What is the atmosphere like? How are customer service levels perceived? What are people's overall satisfaction levels?

District centre	Audit observations	Online observations *	Score
BRAMHALL	-Community atmosphere and service -Good perceptions of safety -Lacking a busy and vibrant feel in daytime -Busy and loud road intersecting centre negatively impacting overall experience.	-A lot of engagement on Twitter hashtag #Bramhall; but primarily in terms of local business promotion rather than customer perceptions of service-levels/the place itself -Less engagement with #ExploreBramhall -Generally positive Trip Advisor reviews of local restaurants (e.g. Pix Pizza, Juniper, Romulus, and Bramhall Deli).	3.5/5
CHEADLE	-Has a community atmosphere -Good perceptions of safety -Vibrant and busy feel during audit visit -Makers Market also imaginably enhances the overall visitor experience each month.	-Limited engagement on the #Cheadle Twitter hashtag by both businesses and visitors -A number of Twitter comments about crime -Generally positive Trip Advisor reviews of local restaurants (e.g. Istanbul Grill, Indian Tiffin Room, and La Cueva).	3.5/5
CHEADLE HULME	-Relatively vibrant and busy centre -Busy and loud main road intersecting centre making it feel unsafe at times -Lack of community feel in the main centre, although Oak Meadows Park provides a place for people to socialise.	-Good Twitter engagement on hashtag #Cheadlehulme; however, mainly discussing properties and local schools, rather than visitor discussions of the place itself -Generally positive Trip Advisor reviews of local restaurants (e.g. Gusto, The Chiverton Tap, and The Board), with some negative comments about the service-levels at Costa.	3/5
EDGELEY	-Relatively busy and well-used centre -Poor perceptions of safety -Generally feels tired and dated.	-Low digital footprint, as only one business from the centre on Trip Advisor (Olive Café), although this has very positive reviews -Very limited use of #Edgeley on Twitter.	2/5
HAZEL GROVE	-Loud and busy A6 road dominating, with narrow pavements making it feel unsafe -Quite a tense and stressful atmosphere -Memorial Garden only real place to escape the noise, relax, and dwell.	-Good Twitter engagement on #Hazelgrove by local businesses (e.g. CockaDoodleMoo and Famous Henrys), although also some mention of crime and pollution levels -Mixed Trip Advisor reviews suggesting inconsistent service, with some reviewed positively (e.g. Pasha, Bun and Bones, and Topkapi Palace), whereas others more mixed (e.g. Telve, McDonald's, KFC, and Fiveways).	1.5/5
MARPLE	-Community feel and service provided -Rural village atmosphere with very attractive greenspace and waterways -Busy around the ASDA area but more relaxed elsewhere in the centre -Good perceptions of safety.	-Good engagement on Twitter #Marple with a series of posts about enjoying recreational walks in Marple's surrounding greenspace -Very positive Trip Advisor reviews of Marple Locks walks, as well as the Regent Cinema and local restaurants (e.g. Marple Spice, The Crown, Chaat Cart, and La Dolce Vita).	4/5
REDDISH	-Lacking energy and vibrancy in general -Low perceptions of safety due to aggressive interactions observed -More of a community-feel around the church and working men's club area, and welcoming service at A Tavola restaurant.	-Limited engagement by visitors on Twitter hashtag #Reddish, with no real discussions of Reddish as a place, and only new pizza restaurant 'I Knead Pizza' posting regularly -Limited Trip Advisor engagement by visitors to Reddish, although A Tavola restaurant notably has very positive reviews.	2/5

ROMILEY	-Lacking energy and vibrancy in general, although this is imaginably much better on market days (footfall data to confirm) -Busy road intersecting the centre negatively impacting overall experience -Community-feel customer service at the independents like Victoria Sandwich.	-A number of Twitter posts on #Romiley and #LoveRomiley hashtags about people enjoying the greenspace surrounding Romiley -Generally positive Trip Advisor reviews of local businesses (e.g. No29 Coffee House, Il Pepe Nero, and The Forum Theatre).	2.5/5

**Audit observations are based on our first-hand experiences of the atmosphere and service-levels of each district centre during audit visits. Whereas, online observations are based on an exploratory analysis of 2019 online comments about the places on Trip Advisor and relevant Twitter hashtags (e.g. #ExploreBramhall).*

7. Merchandise and 18. Comparison/Convenience

Does the merchandise on offer in the centre meet the needs of the local catchment? What is the range and quality of goods on offer? What comparison shopping opportunities are available in the centre? What convenience shopping is on offer in the centre?

	Essentials/ convenience	Comparison/ non-essential	Comments	Score
BRAMHALL	Good	Good	Strong essentials provision. Good range of comparison, particularly clothing. Merchandise generally of a higher than average quality.	4
CHEADLE	Good	Average	Strong essentials provision. Some comparison but limited offer. Merchandise generally of a good quality.	3
CHEADLE HULME	Good	Good	Strong range of essentials and stronger than average comparison offer (though affected by closures in precinct). Merchandise generally of a higher than average quality.	4
EDGELEY	Good	Poor	Strong essentials provision. Lacking in comparison (Stockport in close proximity caters for this function).	2.5
HAZEL GROVE	Good	Average	Strong essentials provision. Average comparison offer (some clothing, jewellery).	3
MARPLE	Good	Average	Strong range of essentials, Average comparison offer (some clothing, homewares).	3
REDDISH	Good	Poor	Strong range of essentials, little by way of comparison offer.	2.5
ROMILEY	Good	Poor	Strong range of essentials, little by way of comparison offer.	2.5

All of the centres provide a strong convenience/essentials offer (goods that people need to purchase, such as food, drink, and typical household items). Bramhall and Cheadle Hulme provide a greater non-essential offer than the other centres, with a stronger offering in terms of clothing, jewellery and homewares. Whilst broadly the merchandise available in each centre is similar, there are some differences in the quality of offer in some centres that is likely linked to the typical socio-demographic profile of consumers in the respective centres. As such, in Bramhall, Cheadle and Cheadle Hulme, the quality of goods on offer is generally higher than centres like Edgeley or Reddish (the difference in quality is reflected in a difference in price).

8. Necessities

A centre should ensure that basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking, toilets, and places for people to sit down in the centre? Can people easily access cash?

District centre	Car parking	Toilets	Benches/seating	Cash points	Score
BRAMHALL	Good	Excellent	Good	Good	4/5
CHEADLE	Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent	4.5/5
CHEADLE HULME	Good	Good	Good	Average	3.5/5
EDGELEY	Good	Good	Good	Good	3.5/5
HAZEL GROVE	Excellent	Good	Poor	Good	3.5/5
MARPLE	Average	Excellent	Good	Good	3.5/5
REDDISH	Good	Excellent	Average	Good	3.5/5
ROMILEY	Average	Good	Good	Good	3.5/5

Parking considers the quantity of designated parking space within each centre and the cost of parking for a full weekday. **Toilets** refers to whether visitors have access to any public toilets in the centre, and if so, whether these are well-maintained. **Benches/seating** considers whether visitors have anywhere to sit down for free within the centre, the frequency of this provision, and how well-maintained this is. Finally, **cash points** refer to the quantity of cash points found within the centre and how easily accessible these are.

All of the district centres in Stockport provide well for the basic needs of the local catchment, in line with their community/convenience function. In terms of toilets, for example, all of the centres benefit from Stockport's Community Toilets Scheme (Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, 2019); however, locals might conceivably be more aware of this scheme than visitors to the centres. The centres also generally provide at least one cash point, as well as somewhere for people to sit down for free, such as benches found in precincts and squares - although Hazel Grove is notably lacking in this due to the busy A6 road intersecting the centre, coupled with narrow pavements.

9. Anchors and 14. Attractiveness

Is there an anchor in the centre which has pulling power and drives footfall into the area?
What is there in the centre which might make it a visitor attraction?

District centre	Key anchors/attractions	Pulling power	Comments	Score
BRAMHALL	-Sainsbury's Local -Bars and restaurants	Average	Has one key retail anchor and a number of bars/restaurants to drive football into the centre; yet it primarily serves the needs of the local catchment, and lacks an entertainment/cultural attraction to pull visitors from further afield.	2.5/5
CHEADLE	-Tesco Express/Sainsbury's Local -Bars and restaurants -Makers Market -Alexandra Hospital	Good	Two key retail anchors, a range of bars and restaurants, and also a vital employment anchor in the form of Alexandra Hospital. The monthly Makers Market imaginably helps to drive more visitors into the centre.	3.5/5
CHEADLE HULME	-ASDA/Shopping Centre/Waitrose -Oak Meadow Park -Monthly market	Good	Key retail anchors at both ends of the centre. Oak Meadow park is also a pleasant attraction. However, it primarily serves the basic needs of the local catchment, rather than having an entertainment/cultural attraction to pull in visitors from afar.	3/5
EDGELEY	-Co-Op	Poor	Very little in the way of anchors and attractions to drive footfall and visitors into the centre, offering basic goods/services for local residents.	1/5
HAZEL GROVE	-ASDA/Sainsbury's/M&S/ALDI -Memorial Garden -Pubs/clubs -O'Neil Patient Solicitors	Excellent	A number of key retail anchors in the centre, as well as having a range of pubs and clubs to drive footfall into the centre at night. O'Neil Patient Solicitors also functions as an important employment anchor.	4/5
MARPLE	-ASDA -Chaat Cart restaurant -Greenspace/canals -Regent Cinema	Good	Benefits from attractive greenspace and canals surrounding Marple. ASDA functions as a key retail anchor, as well as the well-regarded Chaat Cart restaurant and traditional cinema driving visitors into the centre.	3.5/5
REDDISH	-Morrison's -Houldsworth Working Men's Club	Poor	Very little in the way of anchors to drive footfall into the centre, other than Morrison's, mainly providing convenience goods and basic services for the local catchment. However, there is potential to make more of its Victorian heritage in the future to further attract visitors.	2/5
ROMILEY	-Sainsbury's -The Forum Theatre -Market	Average	Sainsbury's functions as a key retail anchor, and the Forum Theatre might also help to drive footfall into the centre. However, Romiley primarily serves the basic grocery and services requirements of the local catchment.	2.5/5

Factor 12: Walkability

Are linked trips between areas possible, or are the distances too great? Are there other obstacles that stop people walking through and around the centre (e.g. potholes, bollards, cars etc.)? How easy is the space to navigate with pushchairs/wheelchairs etc.?

Centre	Linked Trips	Obstacles in the centre	Mobility access	Score
BRAMHALL	Excellent	Average	Good	3
CHEADLE	Average	Average	Good	2.5
CHEADLE HULME	Average	Average	Average	2
EDGELEY	Excellent	Average	Average	2.5
HAZEL GROVE	Poor	Poor	Poor	1
MARPLE	Good	Good	Good	3
REDDISH	Average	Average	Average	2
ROMILEY	Average	Average	Average	2

BRAMHALL

Compact district centre, with all main services within walking distance. The busy roundabout compromises access across the centre. Pavement space is limited. There appears to be no major obstacles to mobility.

CHEADLE

Cheadle is a relatively large centre orientated along a strip, but linked trips are possible. Traffic is the primary constraint on access across the centre. No major obstacles to mobility.

CHEADLE HULME

The district centre is relatively compact, with all the main services within walking distance. However, services such as the post-office and library are relatively disconnected and located uphill. Traffic dominates the centre, however, pavement space is good. The topography of the centre may compromise access for visitors with mobility impairment. At the time of the audit, ongoing roadworks also compromised access.

EDGELEY

A majority of the main services are located on a semi-pedestrianised strip, in close proximity to the main car park. The quality of the pavement space is variable, clearly ample where pedestrianised, but very narrow on the non-pedestrianised parts, where parked vehicles hamper mobility.

HAZEL GROVE
The centre is spread along the A6, for over half mile. There is a 15 min walk from the southerly endpoint of the district centre to the main retail anchor. Traffic dominates the centre, compromising further the potential for linked trips and internal mobility. Pavement space is mainly narrow. Main obstacle to mobility is the distances required to access all services in the centre.

MARPLE
The centre is relatively compact, given the scale of services within the centre. There are no significant obstacles to internal walkability, other than the road. Pavements are relatively wide, with few restrictions to mobility.

REDDISH
The centre is spread on several roads, centred on Houldsworth Square. Pedestrian access to the main retail anchor is poor. Traffic dominates the centre, and pedestrian crossing in the south of the centre (Reddish Road) is poor. Pavements are generally narrow, with the exception of Houldsworth Square. However, the monument that dominates the square does not have step free access.

ROMILEY
The centre is spread along a linear trip, but remains walkable. Pavement access is comprised in parts by bollards and commercial advertising hoardings. No other major issues to mobility were noted.

Factor 13: Events and Leisure and 11. Diversity

What is the entertainment and leisure offer provided in the centre? How diverse is the non-retail offer? Does this appeal to the local catchment? Are there any festivals, fairs, and events held in the centre? (for retail diversity, see 3. Retailers, and 21. Chain/Independents).

	Active community and family activities	Festivals/ events/ markets	Venues/ cultural offer/live music	A3/A4 offer	Leisure	Score
BRAMHALL	Excellent	Good	Poor	Good	Average	3
CHEADLE	Good	Good	Poor	Excellent	Average	3
CHEADLE HULME	Good	Good	Average	Good	Average	3
EDGELEY	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	1
HAZEL GROVE	Average	Average	Average	Average	Poor	2
MARPLE	Good	Good	Good	Average	Good	4
REDDISH	Average	Average	Poor	Average	Poor	2
ROMILEY	Good	Good	Good	Average	Average	3.5

Bramhall
Family events orientated around holidays e.g. Easter Egg hunt. Drinking establishments in the centre offer occasional live music. The church is active in terms of organising events and

social activities. Annual Christmas lights switch-on. Bramhall Hall is a near nearby significant venue but not located in the district centre. There is a monthly Worker Bee Market, but this is hosted outside the district centre. There is a good choice of bars and eateries within walking distance of one another.

Cheadle
The district centre hosts a wide variety of places to eat and drink. Local pubs also host occasional live music. Cheadle hosts a number of community events including a monthly Makers Market and the annual Cheadle Carnival. A gym is located adjacent to the district centre.

Cheadle Hulme
There is evidence of school and community activities. The district centre benefits from the Chad’s Theatre, a venue for youth and amateur dramatics. Local pubs host occasional live music and a monthly artisan market takes place in the precinct. Oak Meadow provides green open space in the district centre. A major music festival, CheshireFest takes place nearby, but not within walking distance of the centre. There is a gym in the district centre, but the area’s main leisure and fitness centres are located beyond walking distance.

Edgeley
The centre possesses a reasonable number of traditional style pubs, but little diversity. Restaurant offer is limited. The centre offers little diversity, dominated by A1 retail and takeaways. Stockport County and Edgeley Park are located within walking distance, both places host numerous annual events and festivals, and occasional major music events. There doesn’t appear to be any markets hosted in the centre. Edgeley Park is located nearby, but the centre lacks leisure, recreational and fitness facilities, other than Diamonds, which offers a small, women-only gym.

Hazel Grove
The centre possesses a large number of drinking establishments, including a nightclub and venue, which host occasional live music. Hazel Grove Community provides seasonal events such as a Christmas market. An annual carnival and parade also takes place in the centre. Hazel Grove hosts a long-standing music festival but it is not clear how this affects the district centre. Hazel Grove Civic Hall hosts a number of local events and societies. Hazel Grove War Memorial offers the only open space in the centre.

Marple
The village hosts numerous monthly community events and activities. There is an annual carnival and other seasonal events. Nearby Carver Theatre has a regular programme of performances. The centre accommodates temporary Christmas markets and occasional Make It Marple markets. The centre uniquely benefits from having a cinema. Local drinking establishments host small live music events. The centre also benefits from Chaat Cart, a well-respected Indian street food restaurant. A gym and swimming pool are located in the centre. It is possible to access the Trans-Pennine trail from the centre.

Reddish

The centre possesses just one traditional pub, although there are other pubs/social clubs within walking distance. The pub hosts occasional live music. Restaurants are limited, but they offer Sicilian and authentic Italian pizza. The church organises small-scale community events. Houldsworth Square is used to host annual events such as Reddfest and the Christmas lights switch-on. Houldsworth Working Men's club bowling green a short distance from the district centre. Reddish Vale Country Park is located close by.

Romiley
Romiley Traders organise a pop-up food market, monthly Romiley Village Markets and Christmas markets and there is also an annual Christmas Lights switch on event, and the annual Romiley Village Carnival and Street Parade. The centre benefits from having an established venue: Romiley Forum. Local pubs host occasional live music. There are numerous community clubs and societies. There are two bowling greens attached to local pubs. It is possible to access the scenic pathway to Peak Forest Canal from the district centre.

15. Place assurance

Does the centre offer a basic level of customer service? Is it consistent? Is the centre getting the basics right for its local community?

District centre	Service levels	The basics	Perceptions of safety	Score
BRAMHALL	Good	Excellent	Good	4/5
CHEADLE	Good	Excellent	Good	4/5
CHEADLE HULME	Average	Excellent	Average	3/5
EDGELEY	Average	Good	Poor	2/5
HAZEL GROVE	Average	Good	Average	2.5/5
MARPLE	Good	Excellent	Good	4/5
REDDISH	Average	Average	Average	2.5/5
ROMILEY	Good	Good	Good	3/5

The above table is comprised by drawing insights from Factor 5. Experience, Factor 8. Necessities, Factor 22. Safety/Crime, and Factor 23. Liveability; and hence from both primary audit observations and secondary research in the form of Trip Advisor comments and online exploration of local services. As we can see, Bramhall, Cheadle, and Marple score highly in terms of place assurance due to generally positive online reviews of local businesses, particularly restaurants, each having good perceptions of safety due to good appearance levels, and offering a wide range of basic services for the local catchment, such as healthcare and local schools. Whereas, Edgeley, Reddish, and Hazel Grove score worse on place assurance due to on the whole more negative or mixed perceptions of service levels, alongside some issues around perceptions of safety, whether due to generally poor appearance levels and/or busy roads. All of the district centres in Stockport, however, typically provide the basics (i.e. services, groceries, cash points, toilets, benches etc.) for the local catchment well, in line with their convenience/community function.

Factor 16: Accessibility

How convenient is the centre to access? What modes of transport are available to access the centre? Are there any cycle lanes? What car parking options are available? Are there clear pathways to walk?

Centre	Road	Rail	Bus	Cycling	Parking	Pathways	Score
BRAMHALL	Average	Good	Poor	Average	Good	Good	2
CHEADLE	Good	Poor	Average	Average	Good	Average	2
CHEADLE HULME	Average	Excellent	Average	Average	Good	Average	2.5
EDGELEY	Excellent	Average	Good	Average	Good	Good	2.5
HAZEL GROVE	Good	Good	Good	Poor	Excellent	Poor	2.5
MARPLE	Average	Excellent	Average	Good	Average	Good	2.5
REDDISH	Good	Poor	Good	Average	Good	Average	2.5
ROMILEY	Good	Average	Average	Average	Average	Average	2

This assessment considered quality of direct access to three key destinations (Manchester city centre, Stockport town centre and Manchester Airport). Road access is measured in terms of normal drive time. Rail access considers distance to nearest station, journey time, normal service frequency, and a range of additional direct services to major destinations. Bus access considers journey times and a range of additional local destinations. Parking considers the quantity of designated parking space within each centre and the cost of parking for a full weekday. Cycling is based on a qualitative assessment of cycling conditions in each district centre and access to dedicated cycling infrastructure, and cycling storage at local stations. Pathways considers a qualitative assessment of pavements and pedestrian experience in each centre.

Road

In general, Stockport is well connected to major trunk roads and the motorway exit. The new A555 has improved East-West access, bringing the airport much closer to most of the district centres. However, traffic levels and congestion are an issue. Other than the largely pedestrianised Edgeley, traffic dominates, and in the case of Hazel Grove, is perhaps the single biggest constraint on the revitalisation of the centre.

Rail

Stockport benefits from being one of the best-connected authorities in Greater Manchester. Stations at Cheadle Hulme and Hazel Grove are currently ranked in the top 30% busiest stations nationally, and passenger growth at Bramhall and Cheadle Hulme far exceeds national growth over the last 5 years. Cheadle and South Reddish perhaps present opportunities to improve access to these district centres. Edgeley might benefit from close proximity to Stockport's main station.

Bus

In general, all the district centres possess a regular bus service during normal trading hours. Bramhall suffers from its geography, and relatively long journey time to Stockport.

Cycling

In general Stockport benefits from connections to national cycle trails, however, the quality of cycling experience and dedicated infrastructure largely needs improvement.

Parking

Designated parking provision in each district centre appears ample and relatively low cost. Uniform parking costs across the borough's public parking, however, need to consider the offer. Lower parking costs might benefit Edgeley; would people pay more in Marple? Quality of car parks also requires improvement.

Pathways

The dominance of traffic in each centre (other than Edgeley), together with narrow pathways is detrimental to the quality of experience. Improving walkability between each district centre and their immediate residential neighbourhoods can drive the restoration of footfall, as IPM research has shown in other district centres in the UK.

Factor 17. Place Marketing

How does the centre market and promote itself? Do enough stakeholders communicate in a way that builds a coherent place brand image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow with signage and guides?

District centre	Place Marketing Channels	Audience	Comments	Score
BRAMHALL	- I Love Bramhall, business directory, news outlet and community resource (webpage/FB/Twitter/Instagram) - Bramhall Together Trust, voluntary group that organise 3 key events a year in Bramhall; Bramhall Festival, Light Up Bramhall & Bramhall's Got Talent (FB) - #ExploreBramhall, indie business collaboration, hashtag on Twitter and FB group - Bramhall Village Square, info about shops, events, and customer services on their website	I Love Bramhall: 8000 visitors per month, 5,8k followers on Twitter, almost 11k likes on FB, 1,7k followers on Instagram Bramhall Together Trust: 1,5k likes on FB Explore Bramhall: 104 likes	Explore Bramhall hashtag was spotted in shop fronts, I Love Bramhall does rigorous business and events promotion throughout the town. The Trust posts news and updates about the Festival at the time of the report. Whereas events and other activities in Bramall Hall are promoted through all channels, there seems to be no link of these to the district centre.	4.5/5
CHEADLE	- #Cheadle and #LoveCheadle hashtags do exist, but have been sparingly used in the past - The Makers Market in Cheadle is promoted via the traders' website and social media but not directly	No evidence of followers, likes on Cheadle as a place in general, only individual businesses have followers	Little visibility on social media and online sources, apart from individual businesses. May be a case that Cheadle is subsumed by the stronger brand image of Cheadle Hulme	1.5/5
CHEADLE HULME	- I love Cheadle Hulme, business directory, news outlet and community resource (webpage/FB/Twitter/Instagram) - #ilovecheadlehulme is used to promote businesses and events - Cheadle Hulme Shopping Centre, info on events, stores, and amenities on their website	I Love Cheadle Hulme: 3700 visitors per month, 2,2k followers on Twitter, 8,8k likes on FB, 1,4k followers on Instagram	I Love Cheadle Hulme (which is run by the same person as I Love Bramhall) does rigorous business and events promotion throughout the town. No visible signs of place marketing activity in the area.	3.5/5

EDGELEY	- No online social media activity could be traced, apart from sparing use of the #Edgeley hashtag - St Matthew's Parish of Edgeley and Cheadle Heath website promotes community events but not linked to the commercial centre - https://www.everythingedgeley.com a hub for Edgeley but looks inactive	No evidence of followers, likes on Edgeley as a place in general, only individual businesses have followers	Little visibility on social media apart from individual businesses. One suggestion would be to link the heritage signage that exists in certain areas (Library, St Matthew's Church) with the commercial centre and promote a heritage trail	1.5/5
HAZEL GROVE	- My Hazel Grove: Website and FB for website for the Hazel Grove community, source for local news, events, information - We Love Hazel Grove: Traders' association with presence on FB and online - Hazel Grove Web: Community Website	We love Hazel Grove: 1,2k likes on FB My Hazel Grove: 131 likes on FM	Promotion of local businesses and events, mostly from the community. Quite disjointed online promotion, needs to be focused and consistent	3/5
MARPLE	- Our Marple Plan: is a neighbourhood team that is sporting the "Wonderful Marple" slogan - The Marple Website: Community FB page that provides useful information for local people and potential visitors and aims to contribute to the fantastic community spirit of the place - Marple Community Forum: Forum about the community that also promotes events and offers and recommends pubs, restaurants, businesses	The Forum has 1,6k members, whereas the Marple Website group has 1,3k likes, Our Marple Plan has 62 likes	Promotion of local businesses and recommendations, there seems a be a more bottom-up approach to place marketing from the online activity of Marple's residents	3.5/5
REDDISH	- Love Reddish: news about community events but last post was in September 2018, only a FB page available - Reddish News: Blog, FB and Twitter page with community updates and business promotions. FB page is active, unlike the other two	Love Reddish has 333 likes, Reddish News have close to 2k likes on Facebook and more than 600 followers on Twitter	There is a bit of promotion on local businesses via Facebook, but nothing evident on the ground. Would probably benefit from linking historic buildings such as the Houldsworth Working Men's Club and the Houldsworth Mill to a heritage-based place marketing strategy	2.5/5

ROMILEY	- The Village… Romiley: Community FB page with more than 6000 members, "a friendly place to promote business" - iLoveRomiley: The I Love Romiley initiative is for the residents and businesses of Romiley Village, Stockport, sharing news, events and information about Romiley (FB/Twitter/Webpage) - Romiley Village Markets: Volunteer run markets in Romiley showcasing local produce and handmade crafts (FB/Twitter/Webpage) - Romiley Food on Friday: Trial evening event dedicated to ready to eat food washed down with a beer or a G&T (FB/Twitter) - Romiley Traders' Association: The traders aim to promote the village as a whole and make it a better place to live and shop. Twitter account not very active (FB/Twitter/Website)	The Village…Romiley has 6k members on FB I Love Romiley FB page has 1,2k likes, Twitter has 1,1k followers Romiley Village Market FB page has 1,3k likes, Twitter has 1,3k followers Romiley Food on Friday FB page has 1,3k likes and Twitter has 313 followers Romiley Traders' Association FB page has 200 likes, Twitter account has 1,1k followers	Romiley has a lot going on and the people involved in the consistent promotion of the place product seem to do it in a consistent manner by using a multitude of platforms. It seems that Romiley is starting to form its own place brand and image based on the variety of events available	4.5/5

Factor 19: Recreational Space

Are there areas in the centre where people can enjoy spending time without spending money (e.g. parks)? What is the quality of the recreational areas and public space/open space in the centre?

Centre	Quality of green space in the centre	Quality of civic space/ squares	Distance of nearest public green/recreational space	Score
BRAMHALL	Poor	Poor	Average	2
CHEADLE	Average	Poor	Good	2.5
CHEADLE HULME	Average	Poor	Good	2.5
EDGELEY	Poor	Average	Good	2.5
HAZEL GROVE	Poor	Poor	Good	2
MARPLE	Good	Average	Good	3.5
REDDISH	Poor	Average	Good	2.5
ROMILEY	Average	Average	Good	3

BRAMHALL
The centre lacks quality green space, other than the greenery around the community centre. The only significant public square is a small space within the shopping precinct, currently used as a children's play area. The library is located in the district centre. There are no significant sites for events/markets. Within walking distance, significant green space includes the football pitches at Bramhall Village Club and north to Benja Fold. Bramhall Hall and grounds are a significant regional attraction, but this is located 35 mins walk from the centre.

CHEADLE
St Mary's Parish Church grounds provides some green open space in the district. The centre lacks a clearly defined civic square or public space capable of holding events/markets. Abney Hall Park is located on the edge of the district centre. Other significant green space within 15 mins walk of the centres includes Kingsway Sports Club grounds, open around around Micker Brook, Brookfields Park, and Grand Park Road Playing Fields.

CHEADLE HULME
Hesketh Park, Oak Meadow, and Mellor Green provide small green open space in or close to the district centre. The centre lacks a clearly defined civic square. The library is located within the district centre. Within walking distance there is also Ladybridge Sports and Social Club, open space around Lady Brook, and Marple Avenue Park.

EDGELEY
The centre lacks quality green space. The pedestrianisation scheme has created ample public space in the district centre, although the functional quality of the public realm does not appear to encourage dwell or linger time. Other than Stockport County Football Ground, the district centre is located within walking distance of the facilities at Alexandra Park (where the library is located), and Hollywood Park.

HAZEL GROVE
Memorial Gardens is the only green space in the district centre. The centre lacks any significant public space or clearly defined civic square. The library is located within walking distance. Torkington Park and Norbury Churchyard are located on the edge of the district centre. Green Lane Park and Mirrlees Fields are located within walking distance of the northern stretch of the district centre. There are also two allotments within walking distance of the district centre.

MARPLE
Whereas there is little green space in the district centre, the town is surrounded by good quality landscape. There is a small public square in the shopping precinct. Marple Library is located within walking distance. Marple Memorial Park is located on the edge of the district centre. The Peak Forest Canal runs close to the centre.

REDDISH
The district centre lacks significant green space, other than a small sports ground on Gorton Road. Houldsworth Square is a clearly defined civic square, although it is dominated by a monument. The library is located close to, but outside of, the main district centre.

Houldsworth Golf, Harrogate Road Allotments, North Reddish Park and Vale Common are all located within walking distance. Reddish Vale Country Park is located within 20 mins walk, and Highfield Country Park within 30 mins.

ROMILEY
Apart from Romiley Park, St Chads churchyard, and two bowling greens, the centre lacks significant green space. The centre possesses a clearly defined civic square. Access to the Peak Forest canal walk is nearby. Tangshutt Fields/allotments and Romiley Cricket Club are located in walking distance.

Factor 20: Barriers to entry

What obstacles are there which make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the local market? What is the location doing to make it easier for new businesses to enter the centre (if anything)?

Centre	Centre size	Vacant opportunities	Attractiveness	Appearance	Perceptions of Safety	Score
BRAMHALL	Average	Average	Average	Excellent	Good	3.5
CHEADLE	Good	Average	Good	Excellent	Good	4
CHEADLE HULME	Poor	Average	Good	Good	Average	3
EDGELEY	Average	Good	Poor	Poor	Poor	2
HAZEL GROVE	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Poor	Average	3.5
MARPLE	Excellent	Average	Good	Excellent	Good	4
REDDISH	Poor	Poor	Poor	Average	Average	1.5
ROMILEY	Average	Average	Average	Good	Average	2.5

The IPM would need to investigate local perceptions of control through stakeholder engagement.

Vacancies not always a reliable indicator of a centre’s performance, due to sticky leases, where local landlords might already have lease arrangements with businesses who have ceased trading, and sometimes with national retailers who might take up empty space to block rivals from establishing a presence in the centre.

Low vacancy can be a barrier to new activity that might enhance the offer in the centre, whereas high vacancy presents an opportunity to attract new activity, which might diversify or enhance the offer in the centre. Further research is required to assess the viability of the vacant units for new retail or change of use, such as residential mixed-use, co-working space, or flexible space for new start-ups.

Adaptability of vacant units needs to be explored in more depth – what potential might there be for flexible, mixed-uses, sub-division etc.

Potential investor confidence will also be affected by the attractiveness, appearance and perceptions of safety in the centre.

A key factor will be footfall. As the IPM has demonstrated in Manchester, footfall can reveal surprising patterns regarding the volume and pattern of activity which can challenge expectations and might encourage investment in district centres.

BRAMHALL
Bramhall is a relatively small centre with few vacant units, or opportunities to expand. The centre lacks a strong anchor, but is well-maintained and safe. The lack of substantial public space limits opportunities for pop-up business.

CHEADLE
Cheadle is a relatively large centre, with vacant opportunities to expand or diversify the centre offer. The centre has strong local anchors, is well-maintained and safe.

CHEADLE HULME
Cheadle Hulme is a relatively small centre; however, vacant units provide an opportunity to enhance the offer of the centre.

EDGELEY
Although a relatively small centre, with a high number of vacancies, under-used public realm and sites adjacent to the centre, Edgeley perhaps presents the best opportunities to attract new business and development. However, lack of anchors, poor appearance and place reputation are barriers.

HAZEL GROVE
Hazel Grove is a large centre, with a high number of vacancies. The centre is well connected, accessible and possesses strong anchors. However, a combination of poor appearance, lack of space for new development, a lack of public realm, and the dominance of traffic present major barriers to new business development.

MARPLE
Marple is a large district centre which currently has 20 vacant units, which offer potential to enhance and strengthen the offer. Marple is an attractive and safe centre, well connected to the rail network, located in an attractive landscape, which draws parallels to places like Hebden Bridge/New Mills and Todmorden, where arts, creative industries and festivals have been important drivers of local regeneration.

REDDISH
Reddish suffers from a combination of being a relatively small centre with a low number of vacant units. Two key vacancies however are co-located around Houldsworth Square, including a historic bank building, where sensitive conversion might enhance the centre

offer. The centre possesses a strong anchor in the form of Morrison's. Clearly the attractiveness of the centre would be greatly enhanced through restored rail service. However, centre appearance and reputation are weak.

ROMILEY
Romiley is a relatively small centre with an average number of vacant units, which might be repurposed to enhance the offer of the centre.

21. Chain vs Independent

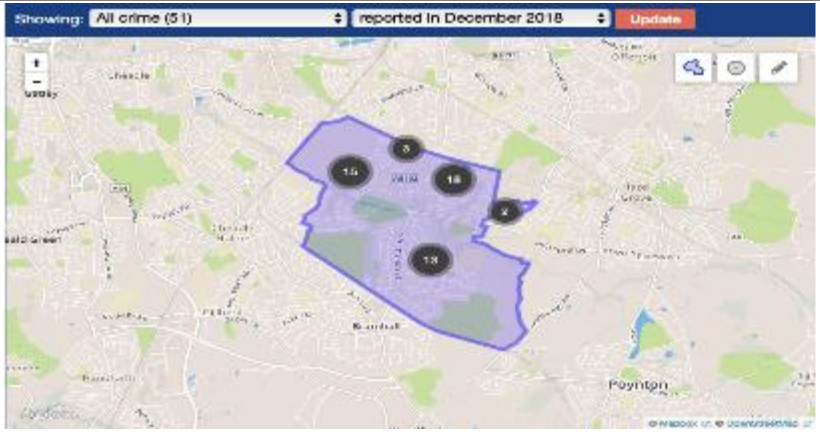
What chains are on offer in the centre? What independent stores are there in the centre? Is this suitably balanced, and does this provision meet the needs of the local community?

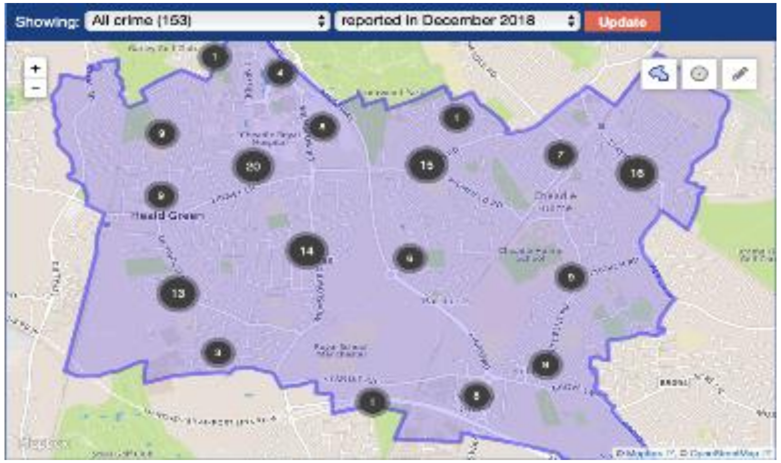
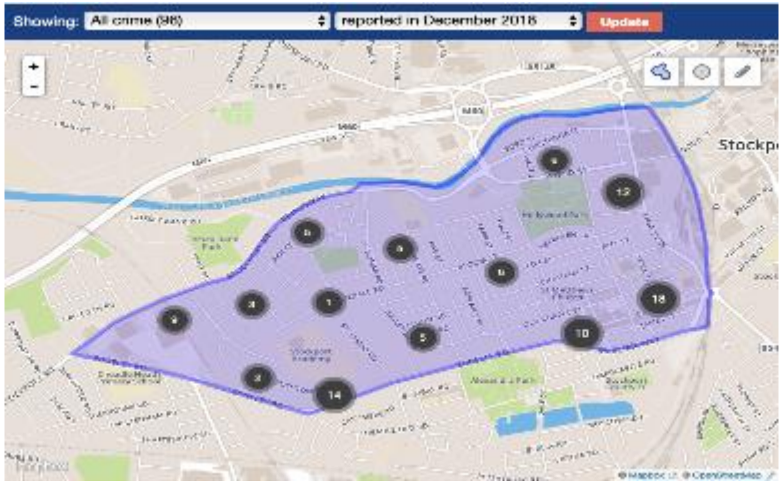
	Comments	Chains/ Multiples score	Independents score	Score
BRAMHALL	Good multiple presence, particulary A3 café/restaurants (Costa, Pizza Express, Chilli Banana) combined with good range of independent retailers.	4	4	4
CHEADLE	Good range of small chain A3 operators (Bezo Lounge, Istanbul Grill) and larger operators (Boots, Costas, Pizza Express). Strong supermarkets presence (Tesco Express, Sainsbury's Local, Iceland). Good range of independents.	4	4	4
CHEADLE HULME	Waitrose and Asda primary multiples. Gusto restaurants, Costa Coffee. Supplemented through independents such as the John Millington pub/restaurant.	4	3	3.5
EDGELEY	Boots/Co-Op/Home Bargains present. Average range of independents.	2	3	2.5
HAZEL GROVE	Strong supermarket multiple presence (Asda, Sainsbury's, M&S Food, Aldi). McDonald's restaurant. However, largely limited in multiple retail mix. Strong number of independents.	4	3	3.5
MARPLE	Strong range of independent retailers dominate (Chaat Cart being the standout A3 offer). Some comparison chains (M and Co). Independent cinema present.	2	4	3
REDDISH	Limited range of chains/multiples. Stronger on independents.	2	3	2.5
ROMILEY	Sainsbury's Local primary multiple. Stronger independent offer.	2	4	3

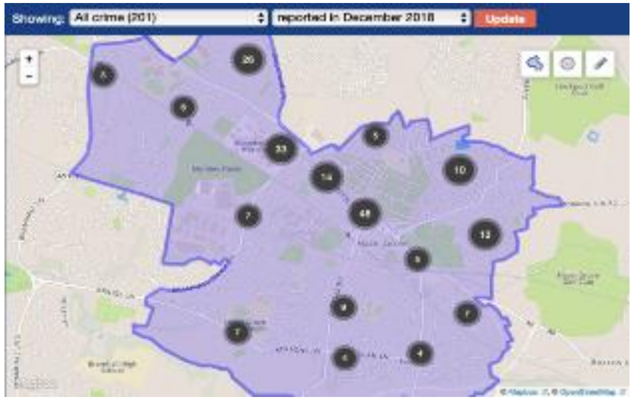
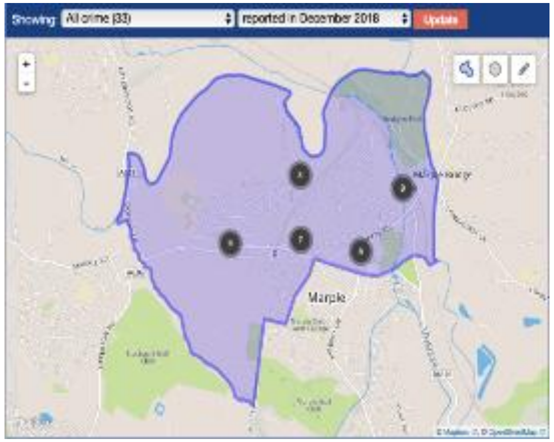
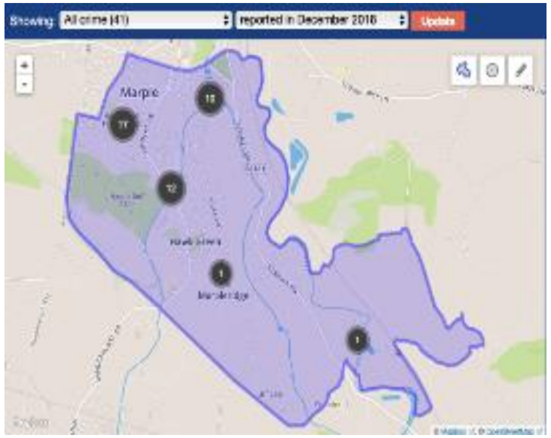
Each of the centres possess a multiple/chain retailer presence, and each is supplemented through independent retailers. The proportion of each varies by centre. Some centres, such as Bramhall, Hazel Grove, Cheadle and Cheadle Hulme, have a strong multiple/chain presence. These are primarily supermarkets, though there are also a number of multiple A3 food retailers present in these centres. Centres which perform strongly in terms of independents include Bramhall, Cheadle and Marple (whose offer is perhaps the most independent-oriented). Whilst this is admirable, and certainly provides a point of differentiation from other centres, it is likely that the pulling power of the major chains/multiples is a positive for centres where they are more prevalent. So, whilst Marple has a great range of independents, it is centres that can balance this with a strong chain/multiple presence that are likely to be more successful moving forward. As such, there is a need for balance in this regard.

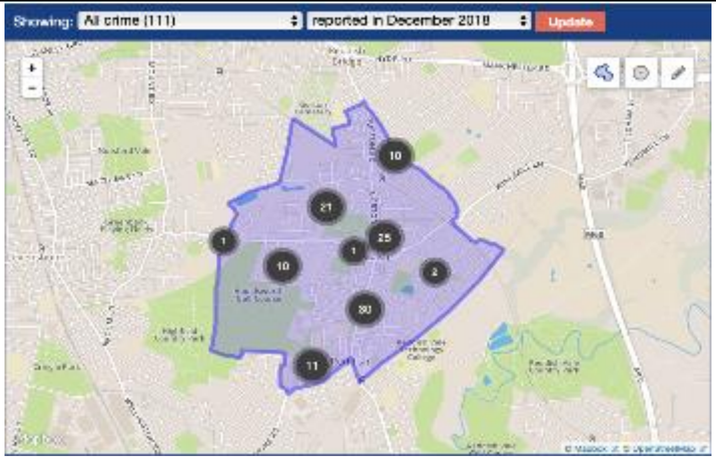
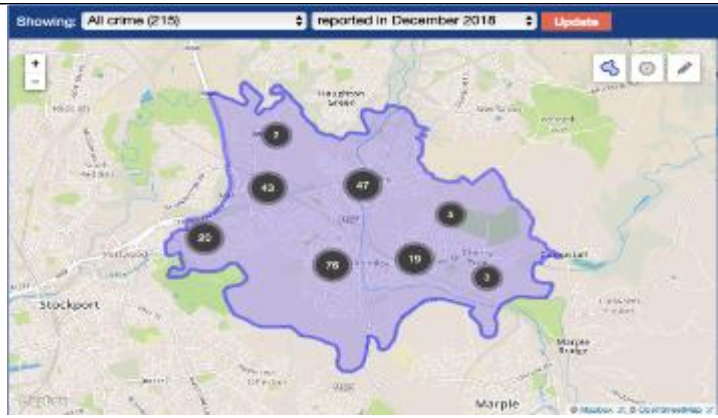
Factor 22. Safety/crime

What are the actual reported crime figures (Perceptions of safety ratings can be found on Factor 15. Place Assurance).

District centre	December 2018 reported crimes	Crime map	Score
BRAMHALL	81	 *(Bramhall North)*	4/5
CHEADLE	58		4/5

District centre	December 2018 reported crimes	Crime map	Score
CHEADLE HULME	116	 *(Cheadle Hulme and Heald Green)*	2.5/5
EDGELEY	96		2.5/5

District centre	December 2018 reported crimes	Crime map	Score
HAZEL GROVE	119	 *(Hazel Grove and Stepping Hill)*	2/5
MARPLE	74	  *(Marple North)* *(Marple South)*	4/5

District centre	December 2018 reported crimes	Crime map	Score
REDDISH	200	 *(Reddish North)*	2/5
ROMILEY	100	 *(Romiley and Wernith)*	3/5

(Sources: UK Crime Stats, 2019; Police UK, 2019)

Factor 23. Liveability

Does the centre offer the services that meet the needs of the local community (e.g. doctors, schools, playgrounds etc.?).

District centre	Key services	Score
BRAMHALL	-A range of key services for the local community, including 3 pharmacies, 2 dentists, 3 opticians, a doctors, funeral directors, learning centre, and a church. -Bramhall Park Medical Centre is nearby. -Bramhall High School and Ladybrook Primary Schools nearby. -Playground in the Village Square.	4/5
CHEADLE	- A range of key services for the local community, including 3 opticians, dentists, doctors, funeral directors, osteopathy clinic, acupuncturist, church, and a library. -Alexandra Hospital is a key nearby employment anchor. -A number of schools nearby, such as Cheadle Primary School, Meadowbank Primary School, and The Kingsway School.	4/5
CHEADLE HULME	-A range of key services for the local community, including 2 opticians, pharmacy, dentists, physiotherapist, chiropodist, church, learning centre, funeral directors, and a library. -The Priory Hospital and Bridge House Medical Centre nearby. -A range of schools nearby, including Cheadle Hulme High School and Cheadle Hulme Primary School.	4/5
EDGELEY	-A number of services for the local community, including opticians, dentists, pharmacy, funeral directors, and 2 community centres. -A number of schools nearby, including Hollywood Park Nursery, St Matthew's Primary, and Lark Hill Primary School.	3/5
HAZEL GROVE	-A number of key services for the local community, including 2 opticians, doctors, dentist, learning centre, funeral directors, church, and civic hall. -Hazel Grove Primary School and High School nearby. -Stepping Hill Hospital nearby.	3/5
MARPLE	-A range of key services for the local community, including 4 pharmacies, 2 opticians, 2 dentists, doctors, funeral directors, and a well-being centre. -Stepping Hill Hospital and Marple Clinic nearby. -A range of nearby schools, including All Saints C of E Primary School, Brabyns Prep School, and Rose Hill Primary School.	4/5
REDDISH	-A narrow range of key services for the local community, including an opticians, pharmacy, funeral directors, and church. - S. Reddish Medical Centre and Reddish Family Practice nearby. -A range of nearby schools, including St Elisabeth's C of E Primary School, St Joseph's Primary, and Reddish Hall School.	2.5/5
ROMILEY	-A number of key services for the local community, including 2 opticians, pharmacy, chiropodist, church, community centre. -Priory Hospital Romiley and Romiley Dental Practice nearby. -A number of nearby schools, including Romiley Primary School, Greave Primary School, and Werneth School.	3/5

Factor 24: Adaptability and Factor 25: Store Development

How flexible is the space/units in a centre for new development opportunities? Are there any inflexible and outdated units that are unlikely to be re-let or re-purposed?

BRAMHALL: Score 2
Bramhall is a relatively compact and dense centre, with little space for new development. The centre is dominated by the low rise Village Square precinct. Currently the precinct is well-used and maintained, but such structures can be difficult to adapt. With 11 vacancies, however, the focus of short-term development in Bramhall might need to consider how these units can be brought into effective use, which will strengthen or complement the existing offer.
CHEADLE: Score 2.5
There are currently 9 vacant units in Cheadle, which might provide opportunities for new developments complementing or extending the existing offer. Most of the units in the centre are well-maintained; yet, there is the potential to re-develop the unattractive rain cover over some of the units on the main shopping street to reinforce the architectural heritage of the centre.
CHEADLE HULME: Score 2
There are currently 10 vacant units in Cheadle Hulme, which might provide opportunities for new developments complementing or extending the existing offer. Yet, there is not much public realm available for developments, and the busy road running through might pose further challenges.
EDGELEY: Score 4
There are currently 14 vacant units in the district centre, and space either side of Castle Street, which might provide opportunities for new development. There is evidence of existing store adaption, where businesses have expanded into adjacent units. The centre is low rise at the moment with potential to build upwards and become densified.
HAZEL GROVE: Score 2
In the short-term, there is the potential for re-purposing of the 24 vacant units in the centre, complementing or extending the existing offer. However, in the longer-term, Hazel Grove faces challenges due to the busy A6 road running through the centre and lack of public realm, as it reduces, for example, the potential to develop a café culture and pavement use.
MARPLE: Score 3
With 20 units currently vacant in Marple, there are many opportunities for future development to complement or extend the existing offer. With attractive greenspace and waterways surrounding the centre, there is an abundance of public realm available, with the potential to offer further events and festivals (e.g. markets) around here to further connect such assets to the district centre itself.
REDDISH: 2
There are currently only 4 vacant units in Reddish, providing limited opportunities for future developments. Furthermore, vacant buildings with heritage value might prove difficult to convert. Elsewhere in the centre, however, there are a few single storey buildings which could be redeveloped to densify the centre through residential mixed use.
ROMILEY: 2.5
There are currently 10 vacant units in Romiley, as well as public realm in the form of the precinct, providing opportunities for future developments to complement or extend the existing offer. However, there is currently residential above many of the shops on the main shopping street, thus making it more difficult to densify within the centre, and some of the units also look quite outdated suggesting there are no concerted efforts to coordinate store development activities.

7. Strengths, Weaknesses and Quick Wins

Based on the '25 Factors' analysis presented above, we were able to identify each centre's key strengths and weaknesses, in addition to providing recommendations as to how each centre can enhance its vitality and viability going forwards, to now be presented.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Bramhall – multifunctional centre</th></tr>
<tr><td>Key strengths</td><td>Key weaknesses</td></tr>
<tr><td>2: Appearance

• In general, well maintained frontages
• Clean, little evidence of litter
• Elements of greenery incorporated into the centre e.g. planters, foliage, trees</td><td>4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership

• No vision or strategy for the district centre
• Limited mechanism for stakeholders to collaborate.</td></tr>
<tr><td>7: Merchandise

• Strong essentials provision
• Good range of comparison offers e.g. clothing
• Higher quality offer</td><td>Factor 19: recreational space

• There is limited recreational space within the confines of the district centre</td></tr>
<tr><td>17: Place Marketing

• Strong digital footprint
• Multi-channel marketing
• Rigorous business and events promotion</td><td>24:25: Adaptability/Store Development

• Little space for new development
• Existing precinct difficult to adapt</td></tr>
<tr><td>15/22: Place assurance; Crime/Safety

• Positive online service reviews
• Good perceptions of safety
• Low reported crime</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Quick wins

1. Establish a stakeholder group to generate a joined up and collective approach to centre management. Capitalise on already engaged stakeholders, such as Bramhall Together Trust, Bramhall Business Club, I Love Bramhall, and shopping precinct owners (Himor).

2. Focus on extending and developing the district centre offer and experience through re-use of vacant units using pop-up activities, events, and craft markets.

3. Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity) e.g. effect of temporary activity on visitor attraction.</td></tr>
</table>

Cheadle - multifunctional centre	
Key strengths	Key weaknesses
1. Activity Hours • Evidence centre remains active outside traditional trading hours driven by strong A3 offer	4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership • No vision or strategy for the district centre • Limited mechanism for stakeholders to collaborate.
2. Appearance • Clean centre, no noticeable litter • Architectural heritage • Attractive green space	17. Place Marketing • Limited digital footprint • Inactive social media • No evidence of collective centre promotion • Lack of place distinction
15. Place Assurance • Positive online service reviews • Good perceptions of safety • Low reported crime	
21. Chain/independent • Good range of small chain A3 operators • National multiples supplemented by good range of independents	
Quick wins 1. Identify and establish a stakeholder group to generate a joined up and collective approach to centre management. 2. Low cost digital place marketing to communicate the existing centre offer to local catchment 3. Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity) e.g. the effectiveness of online marketing	

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Cheadle Hulme – multifunctional centre</th></tr>
<tr><td>Key strengths</td><td>Key weaknesses</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. Retailers
Good representation of products and services</td><td>4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership
No vision or strategy for the district centre
Limited mechanism for stakeholders to collaborate.
Previous attempts at partnership working appear to have folded</td></tr>
<tr><td>11. & 13. Events/Leisure and Diversity
Diverse range of community events and markets
Green open space in district centre</td><td>12. Walkability
Post-office and library disconnected from district centre
Traffic dominates the centre</td></tr>
<tr><td>7. & 18. Merchandise/Comparison-convenience
Strong range of essentials
Stronger than average comparison offer</td><td>24. & 25. Adaptability/store development
Other than vacant units, limited range of sites for new development</td></tr>
<tr><td>21. Chain/Independent
Good balance between national multiples and independent businesses</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Quick wins
Establish a stakeholder group to generate a joined up and collective approach to centre management. Capitalise on existing active groups, or potential stakeholders, which might form the basis for collective action, such as, I love Cheadle, SK8 business network, and shopping precinct owners (Orbit Developments)
Conversion of vacant units from A1 to alternative uses.
Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity).</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Edgeley – a multifunctional centre</th></tr>
<tr><td>Key strengths</td><td>Key weaknesses</td></tr>
<tr><td>8. Necessities
• Ample parking
• Ample benches
• Cash machines</td><td>4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership
• No vision or strategy for the district centre
• Limited mechanism for stakeholders to collaborate.
• Traders Association no longer active</td></tr>
<tr><td>23. Liveability
• Good range of services e.g. health
• Two community centres in the district centre
• Local schools in walking distance.</td><td>9. Anchors/Attractiveness
• Other than the Co-Op, few other major anchors located in the district centre</td></tr>
<tr><td>24/25. Adaptability/store development
• Space within and around the centre to provide opportunities for new development and densification</td><td>13. Entertainment and leisure
• Little evidence of evening economy
• Lack of diversity
• Centre lacks leisure and recreational services</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>2. Appearance
• The centre in general feels a bit dated and run-down, with an unkempt appearance of many of the shop frontages.
• There are also some littering issues in and around the centre, including service areas to the rear and side of several premises.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Quick wins

1. Establish a stakeholder group to generate a joined up and collective approach to centre management. Given Edgeley’s proximity to both Stockport town centre and main rail station, any future vision for the district centre will need to be considered in relation to the Town Centre West Residential Strategy and Rail Station Master Plan. However, local capacity for effective centre collaboration appears to be low.

2. Basic improvements to the appearance of the district centre e.g. planting, shop fronts.

3. Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity) e.g. effect of interventions to improve appearance.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Hazel Grove – a multifunctional centre</th></tr>
<tr><td>Key strengths</td><td>Key weaknesses</td></tr>
<tr><td>8. Necessities

• Substantial parking opportunities
• Provides basics, cash points, toilets</td><td>4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership

• No vision or strategy for the district centre
• Limited mechanism for stakeholders to collaborate.</td></tr>
<tr><td>9. Anchors and 14. Attractiveness

• 4 national retail grocery anchors
• Employment (solicitors)</td><td>5. Experience

• Mixed online customer reviews
• Domination of road traffic and narrow pavements generates a poor quality experience</td></tr>
<tr><td>18. Comparison/Convenience

• Reasonable essentials and comparison offer</td><td>12. Walkability

• Poor opportunity for linked trip
• Limited opportunities to cross the road
• Poor quality pavement environment</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Quick wins

1. Establish a stakeholder group to generate a joined up and collective approach to centre management. Capitalise on engaged local stakeholders e.g. traders association – We Love Hazel Grove.

2. Low cost digital marketing to counter poor online place reputation. In the short term, this could focus on opportunities involving the evening economy – to engage users in the centre at times when traffic is calmer.

3. Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity).</td></tr>
</table>

Marple – a multifunctional centre	
Key strengths	Key weaknesses
4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership • Marple's vision is set out in Our Marple Neighbourhood Plan. • Active community forum – Our Marple, which has over 100 members and 23 affiliated groups, plus Marple Business Forum and Marple Civic Society. • The group is organised into sub-groups with a named lead for Town Centre and Retail.	1. Activity Hours • Many local businesses operate within traditional opening and closing times
5. Experience • Rural, village feel, strong local identity • Natural landscape setting • Positive online reviews of local businesses and attraction	3. Retailers • A3 and A4 uses appear underdeveloped given the size of the district centre
13. Entertainment and leisure • The only district centre where the evening offer extends beyond A3/A4 to include a cinema • Ample community events and festivals • Nearby recreational opportunities	
23. Liveability • The centre provides range of local community services	
Quick wins 1. Capitalise on already engaged stakeholders. 2. Enhance the capacity of local stakeholder e.g. through benchmarking the Action Plan against IPM 25 priority interventions and 4Rs framework. 3. Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity) e.g. extended opening hours.	

Reddish – a multifunctional centre	
Key strengths	Key weaknesses
8. Necessities • Ample parking for a centre of this size • The centre benefits from cashpoint and involvement Stockport MBC community toilet scheme	4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership • No existing vision, strategy or partnership • Local capacity appears limited
16. Accessibility • Despite the issues regarding South Reddish Station, the centre is accessible to the local catchment via walking, regular bus servies and opportunities for parking	20. Barriers to entry • Relatively small district centre with few vacant units • Centre appearance and place reputation is weak

Quick wins

1. Identify and establish a stakeholder group to generate a joined up and collective approach to centre management.

2. Low cost digital marketing to communicate the existing offer and amplify positive messages about activity in the district centre, to counter negative place reputation.

3. Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity) e.g. digital place marketing to reposition Reddish as a community centre.

Romiley – a multifunctional centre	
Key strengths	Key weaknesses
17. Place marketing • Strong and consistent online multichannel place communication	4, 6, 10: vision & strategy/management/ networks and partnership • No existing vision, strategy or partnership
11. Diversity and 13. Entertainment and leisure • Amble range of community events • The only district centre with an established and recognised arts and cultural venue • Access to recreational space with walking distance	12. Walkability • Restricted opportunities for linked trips • Pavement obstacles
Quick wins 1. Establish a stakeholder group to generate a joined up and collective approach to centre management. Capitalise on active Traders Association, which has established I love Romiley to promote the centre. 2. Increase volume of temporary events and activities on the high streets to boost vibrancy 3. Track the effectiveness of interventions against the footfall data (volume, distribution of activity) e.g. impact of extended temporary activities such as the market	

8. Recommendations

The analysis of Stockport's district centres set out in this report identifies a range of general issues alongside issues specific to individual centres. It should be emphasised that this analysis is a first phase of the work the Institute for Place Management is undertaking with the Council. It will need to be tested further and broader input will be required to refine the first phase recommendations set out above. Subject to endorsement from the Council's Scrutiny Review panel, the proposed next steps for the district centres project are:

Review the analysis of each place contained in this report and test it with elected Members (and other local stakeholders where possible)

- Convene a workshop (or series of workshops) with Members and local stakeholders to test the first phase analysis and add local insight, knowledge, and experience

Refine the first phase analysis and recommendations in light of stakeholder feedback

- Progress the installation of footfall counters in each district centre to enhance our understanding of activity and vitality in each centre and to provide benchmarking information against which to measure the impact of future interventions
- Review the recommended interventions in this first phase report and refine / add to them with further proposed interventions

Respond to the analysis by testing the interventions in the revised first phase report and identifying further interventions for the next phase of the project

- Assess the deliverability and potential impact of the first phase recommended interventions for each district centre
- Use the early footfall data and stakeholder feedback to devise a further range of interventions to be monitored throughout the next phase of the project

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Appendix 1 - The Need for Footfall

Stockport's existing approach to supporting District Centres focuses on "safe-guarding and enhancing" the vitality and viability of each centre. The plan draws on an implicit hierarchy, differentiating between the main town centre, and the district and local centres. However, footfall analysis undertaken by the IPM challenges this traditional understanding of the retail hierarchy model.

Major disruption to the retail sector and significant change in consumer behaviour, for example, present major challenges to perceived wisdom regarding the function of all UK centres. Footfall analysis reveals not only the importance of monitoring the volume of footfall in centres, but also demonstrates the value of understanding cycles of activity (annually, monthly, weekly, daily, and hourly) in the development of effective action plans. For example, slight adjustments to activity hours in a centre, to align with changing working and leisure patterns, might be as effective in restoring vitality and viability, when compared to major investment in a development, which is inappropriate for that location.

The decline of A1 retail and disappearance of many other traditional high street services will require many centres to find a new purpose. Footfall analysis by the IPM, for instance, reveals how 40% of UK centres are Multifunctional, centres that have a relatively flat footfall profile over an annual cycle.

District centres will typically have this profile, generated by everyday users comprising local residents, people working in the centre, and in some cases by nearby footfall anchors, which attract a large volume of employees or daily visitors (e.g. hospitals, educational campuses, offices, visitor attractions, etc.). However, without understanding how these catchment groups interact with the local centre, it is not safe to make assumptions. For example, some major city centres are now multifunctional. The functionality of places is also dynamic, changing quite dramatically over a short time. Establishing how places function through footfall analysis, and monitoring how places change, is essential. Unlike a planning classification, activity data demonstrates exactly how people are using a centre, and what its main function is (i.e. comparison shopping, speciality, holiday, or convenience/community). It also enables the development trajectory and management plan for a centre to be responsive to changes in consumer behaviour and other developments.

Automated footfall monitoring provides data on the volume of customers in a centre, and is critical for practitioners in the evaluation of whether strategies and initiatives to drive increases in footfall are effective. The dynamic nature of footfall means that this data delivers the most immediate response to any initiative, and so enables practitioners to be able to readily identify the impact of initiatives on the success of the centre.

In addition, recording footfall in this way removes the reliance on secondary or associated indicators such as public transport or car parking usage, which often are limited in their effectiveness due to paucity of data or a less than direct correlation to customer activity. Footfall monitoring has a number of key applications and supports a centre by:

- **Demonstrating its success in attracting customers** into the centre
- **Providing an objective measure of performance**, lessening reliance on anecdotal evidence as a measure of success
- **Detecting early warning signs of change**, so that relevant strategies can be implemented
- **Evaluating the success of marketing and promotion** by identifying the additional footfall generated during an event or as a result of a promotion
- **Attracting event sponsorship** by having clear evidence of the success in attracting more visitors to the centre
- **Establishing the contribution of development and public realm improvements** in increasing visitor numbers, both in the short and longer term
- **Providing data required to attract new occupiers and investors** into the centre
- **Providing data to existing businesses** in order to support business retention in the centre
- **Providing data to deliver efficiencies in resource allocation**, e.g. cleaning, policing, ambassadors
- **Identifying over or under-performance** by benchmarking against national and regional averages and peer groups to establish whether increases or decreases in footfall are in-line with general trends.

In order for the evaluation of Stockport’s district centres to move to the next stage, we recommend that footfall counters are installed in each of the eight centres. The value this will provide in terms of measuring performance and tracking the success of interventions will be invaluable, and will assist in developing further measures to safe-guard and enhance the vitality and viability of these centres into the future.

Appendix 2 – Graph Showing How Much Control a Panel of HSUK2020 Experts Believe a Centre has Over the 25 Factors.