ROMILEY

VITAL AND VIABLE STOCKPORT DISTRICT CENTRES

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About the Institute of Place Management
The Institute of Place Management (IPM) is the professional body for people involved in making, maintaining, and marketing places. As part of Manchester Metropolitan University, the IPM is dedicated to supporting people who serve places, providing them with unbiased research, continuing professional development, qualifications, conferences, events, and networking opportunities.

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Foreword

This report has been prepared following a workshop held on the 10th March 2022, attended by key local stakeholders from Romiley. Facilitated by the Institute of Place Management at the invitation of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, the event formed part a wider programme of work Stockport is undertaking to revitalise district centres in terms of post-pandemic recovery and long-term viability. This report builds, therefore, on findings collated by IPM to inform the council’s approaches to supporting Stockport’s district centres.

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1. Introduction

Many factors affect the vitality and viability of high streets and town centres. Some of the changes we see today are long-term processes, some stretching back decades. The global pandemic brought new and additional challenges, but also provided the spur to reimagine and redefine the high street, not only to manage recovery, but to also prepare and adapt for a more resilient future. To help local communities gain insight into these trends please see the High Street Change report[1]. Drawing on the IPM's extensive research and engagement with places across the UK and beyond in relation to the vitality and viability of high streets, this report presents findings from Romiley, before outlining an adaptable action plan based on the IPM's 4Rs Framework – Restructuring, Rebranding, Repositioning and Reinventing, which includes recommendations for quick wins and longer-term priorities[2].

The findings are based on several research and data methods. These include:

1. Updates on the independent Place Quality Audits first undertaken in Romiley in 2019.
2. Insights from the automated footfall counter located in the district centre installed by Springboard, which collected daily data over a 12-month cycle from the end of January 2021 to January 2022[3].
3. Local stakeholder workshop which took place in March 2022. During this 3-hour session, participants were tasked with identifying factors which they believed attracted people to the district centre, and barriers to change.
4. Insights from Local Data Company (LDC) data.
5. Application of IPM tools – including Activity Hierarchy and Viability Assessment.
6. Application of local evidence using the 4Rs frameworks.

[1] Available on request – contact the IPM
[2] For more detail see: https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/frameworks/4rs-regeneration-framework/
[3] This measures high street footfall at specific locations, to provide rapid access to anonymised data. The counter measures the physical presence of people and is not dependent upon any form of technology used by an individual (e.g., mobile data, WiFi data). The data can only provide a snapshot of activity in each location but nevertheless provides a robust indicator of activity.

2. Romiley Place Quality Update and Assessment

In 2019, the IPM team conducted an audit for all Stockport district centres, categorising the collected information based on the "Top 25 Priorities" that impact upon the performance of district centres, and which local place leaders should be focusing on. The outcomes of this audit can be seen in the Phase 1 report of the project[4].

Since we last visited Romiley in 2019[5], we noticed several new independent businesses had opened in the district centre. The centre has maintained a good image and appearance and has a burgeoning leisure and hospitality offer. There are a few areas of concern; the train station is a key anchor and footfall attractor, but the railway bridge also cuts the high street in two, with a visible difference between western and eastern ends of Stockport Road. In addition to being much quieter, the west side of the centre has narrower pavements and is less walkable in general. Regardless, the west side accommodates a good variety of shops, along with personal and commercial services. Additionally, the road intersecting the centre is very busy, hampering the overall experience. The Forum Theatre and The Precinct are key anchors for Romiley that help boosting footfall around the area. The Theatre is a unique footfall anchor with the power to serve not only the local community, but to also attract people from beyond the immediate catchment. The centre's main strength appears to be its independent offer, accounting for 89% of the total offer, with many family businesses giving the centre a unique character. There is perhaps an oversupply of services and leisure businesses (hairdressers, barbers, bars, beauty salons) according to Local Data Company data. That does not seem to influence Romiley's vitality as a centre though in terms of vacancy rates (2.9% compared to 14.1% GB average in Q1 2022 according to Local Data Company data but estimated to be around 6% at the time of the audit).

Activity hours remain largely the same as in 2019, with most businesses closed by 5:30pm. Many units are shutting down between 4:00-5:00pm, leading to a mismatch between retail and hospitality offer. This might be an issue for theatre goers looking for a more substantive meal before evening shows start. However, there are plenty of hospitality businesses that open later, strengthening the evening economy. The centre is very functional, but it would benefit from some basic improvements to the appearance, especially through more greening. Some parts of the centre are not particularly welcoming (e.g., the main car park behind the Precinct), this needs to be greatly improved with basic maintenance and possibly some links with the cultural offer and centre assets (e.g., murals about the Forum). Table 1 below summarises the strengths and weaknesses, with key changes highlighted in bold.

[4] https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=168756
[5] See Appendix 3 for an explanation of the updated 25 Priorities

Romiley District Centre Strengths and Weaknesses	
Key Strengths	**Key Weaknesses**
8. Anchors - Romiley Forum Theatre and Romiley station great assets that ensure steady footfall	3, 6 & 13. Vision & Strategy/Place Management/Networks and Partnerships - No vision or strategy for the district centre - Evidence of various partnerships but no joined-up approach/effort
9. Non-retail Offer - Ample range of services, leisure, and entertainment businesses - An established and recognised arts and cultural venue - Charities and support centre enhance community feel	***5. Appearance*** - Some units look outdated - Tired shop facades and lots of shuttered premises in presumably core activity hours
17. Markets - Presence of Romiley Village market, a great asset and generates interest	11. Walkability - Traffic and cars dominate the centre - Some pavements have obstacles/too narrow - Centre seems to be split in half (East-West) with Romiley station “separating” it
18. Recreational space - Civic space around the Forum complex - Romiley Park an asset to the centre	***24 & 25. Redevelopment Plans / Innovation*** - Not much opportunity for major physical projects given the structure and form of the centre - Limited opportunities for innovation due to low vacancy rates, however, opportunity to be creative around market and Forum with cultural placemaking

Table 1: Key strengths and weaknesses

Viability Assessment

The Viability Assessment is a measure of High Street Viability[6]. This is based on analysis of five key indicators with data derived from the Index for Multiple Deprivation and the Co-Op Well Being Index. The assessment indicates Romiley is **highly environmentally viable**, which is a measure informed by housing provision and greenspace, scoring in the least 20% deprived for barriers to housing and services[7]. Romiley also scores **well** for **social and cultural viability** and **economic viability**, however these score lower than environmental viability as Romiley is placed within the 20% most deprived for health and 30% most deprived for crime (informing social and cultural viability) and within the 40% most deprived for income and 30% most deprived for employment (informing economic viability) (see Figure 1 below).

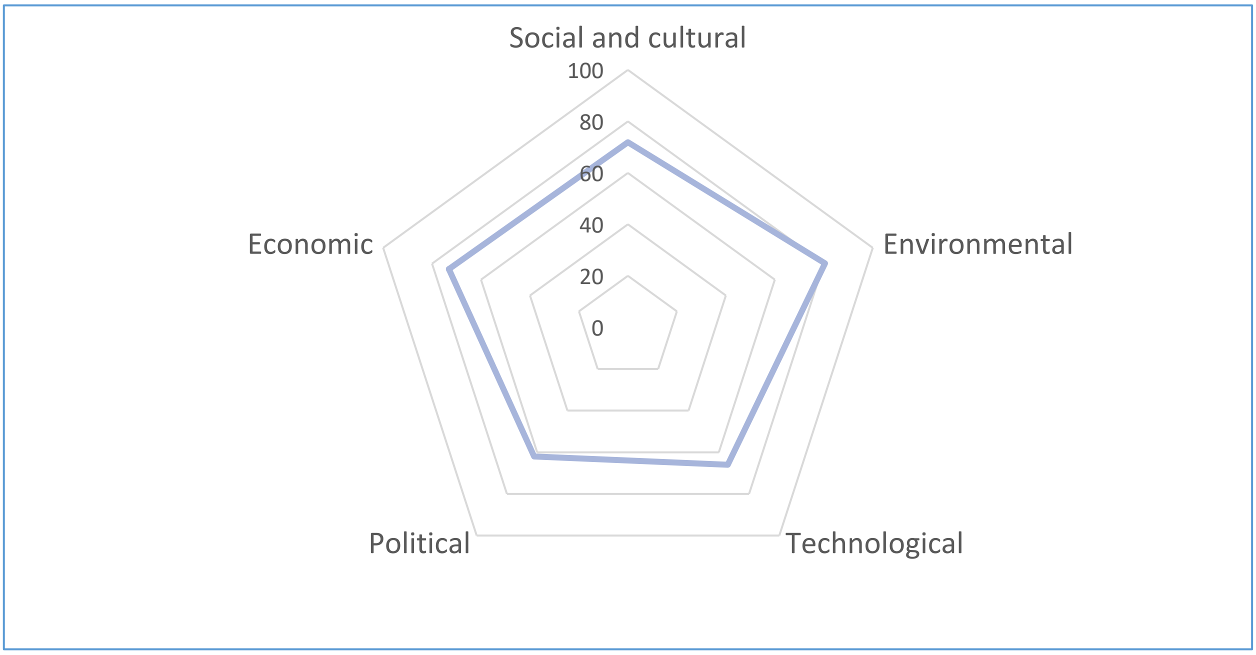

Figure 1: Viability assessment for Romiley

We posit that Romiley fulfils the role of a residential centre and has great environmental and sociocultural strengths that are essential to the wider community and the centre's appeal. The compact form of the centre and its lack of large store formats hinders potential conversions. However, the centre benefits from an excellent non-retail offer (theatre, community facilities, personal services, etc.), accessibility (train station an asset), and a retail anchor (The Precinct) that can attract people in the centre. Overall, the district is one of most liveable places in Stockport.

[6] See Appendix 2 for an explanation of how the Viability Assessment is calculated.
[7] Based on IMD data

Footfall Analysis

The annual footfall figure for Romiley for the period of January 2021-2022 for the counter location was 1,582,204 suggesting Romiley is correctly defined as a **district centre** based on the estimated activity level[8]. The average daily footfall count is 4383, July is the busiest month, Saturday is the busiest day, whereas Sunday is typically the quietest day. The Christmas lights event is important for driving footfall into Romiley.

Monthly Footfall Analysis

Monthly footfall was calculated for Romiley for the year 2021. The data demonstrate Romiley is exhibiting a flat footfall profile for most of the months, meaning it is mainly serving a local catchment (Figure 2 and Table 2). Romiley fits the profile of a **multifunctional centre** that offers a convenient mix of goods and services. Romiley showcases a slight summer peak, followed by stable footfall pattern between August and December, despite the Omicron variant interruption during the Christmas period.

Another consideration, which will require additional analysis, is the extent Romiley station has been affected by the drop in commuter levels. Whereas the strong local offer is likely to have sustained a reasonable level of activity throughout the pandemic, reported passenger numbers at Romiley Station[9] fell 81% from a recent high in 2018/19 of over 382,000 to just under 71,000 across 2020/21. The decline will have reduced the power of this transport anchor to drive footfall on the high street. It remains to be seen whether this will recover given the trends towards greater flexibility in terms of working at home. Early suggestions are commuter levels are slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels. These developments, however, expose a vulnerability in Romiley. Consequently, whereas the signature pattern is unlikely to have changed from multifunctional, there is concern about the extent commuting levels via the station are back to where they were before the pandemic which may impact on the overall volume of visitors.

[8] See Appendix 1 for an explanation of how the hierarchy is derived.
[9] Office for Rail and Road

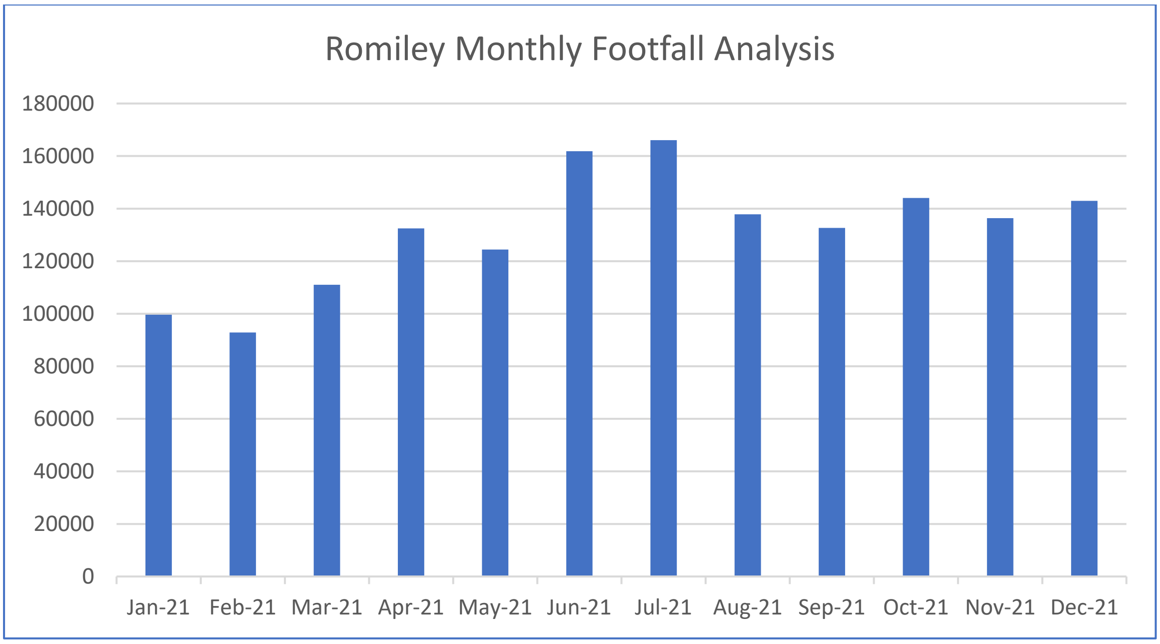

Figure 2: Monthly footfall data for Romiley

Although COVID-19 clearly impacted all centres from March 2020 to late 2021, recent analysis of over 180 high streets suggests the lifting of restrictions contributed to a significant bounce-back in the number of people visiting high streets, boosted further throughout 2021 with the rollout of the vaccination programme. The Annual Review of Footfall produced by the High Street Streets Task Force (2021)[10] suggests smaller local high streets across England recovered more quickly than larger cities and regional centres. With footfall recovery associated with settlement size, we can reasonably suggest that in a district centre such as Romiley, footfall should have recovered both to its pre-pandemic levels of footfall and footfall signature.

Table 2 provides a monthly footfall count for Romiley. It is estimated that footfall during the first months of 2021 may have been hindered by the third COVID-19 national lockdown (which started on January 6th). There is a slight increase in footfall after April, which coincided with the re-opening of non-essential shops and outdoor venues such as pubs and restaurants.

Month	Romiley Monthly Data	Monthly Data as Percentage
January	99603	6.3%
February	92863	5.9%
March	111031	7.0%
April	132475	8.4%
May	124406	7.9%
June	161878	10.2%
July	166032	10.5%
August	137853	8.7%
September	132629	8.4%

[10] See https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/media/hr5jbfev/footfall-report-2021-exec-summary-final.pdf

October	144082	9.1%
November	136381	8.6%
December	142971	9.0%
Annual Footfall	1582204	100.0%

Table 2: Monthly footfall count and percentage for Romiley

Events and Footfall

It is also noticeable when events are taking place in Romiley, a large footfall uplift can be noted. The Christmas Lights switch in Romiley attracted 13743 people, almost double the count as a normal November Saturday (Table 3).

Month			
November	Normal Saturday average footfall	Christmas Lights Switch	Multiplier Effect
	7027	13743	2.0

Table 3: Multiplier effect for Romiley Christmas lights switch-on

Regardless of the importance of one-off big events, more regular patterns and gatherings also influence footfall. The Romiley Village market seems to have generated increased footfall in four instances (Table 4). However, from these observations, we can attest that the market effect on footfall is not clear[11], and more data needs to be collected (e.g., sales data, dwell time, visitors' perceptions) in order to identify the full market effect. Research has shown that markets have direct and indirect multiplier effects in terms of extra spending to the local economy, as well as for promoting local traders and providing a sense of sociality. Close monitoring can provide more insights into the market's influence on the social and economic vitality of the district centre (Hallsworth et al., 2015).

Month	Saturday average	Market Saturday
May	4116	5432
June	6738	8174
July	7018	6136
August	5675	6155
September	6270	5859
October	6212	5502
November	7209	6664
		13743[12]
December	7035	3888
	6284	6839

Table 4: Comparison of footfall on market versus no market days in Romiley

[11] A two-sample t-test was performed to compare footfall count between market and no market Saturdays. There was not a significant difference in footfall between market Saturday ($M = 6839$, $SD = 2825.7$) and no market Saturday ($M = 6284$, $SD = 1017$); $t(10) = -0.551$, $p = .297$.

[12] There appears to have been two market days in November 2021.

Weekly Footfall Analysis

Finally, the weekly footfall pattern for Romiley was calculated (Figure 3). Previous research (Mumford et al., 2017) has shown that two distinct weekly patterns (a distinct Saturday peak and a Monday through Saturday peak) are evident in footfall profiles. Romiley exhibits a clear Saturday peak that slowly builds up from Thursday onwards. There is a noticeable drop on Sunday that is consistent with centres that have a busy Saturday. Romiley's weekly signature may be heavily influenced by the effects of the pandemic (e.g., hybrid working arrangements). Nevertheless, understanding how Romiley functions on a weekly basis can help towards the development of strategies and initiatives that fit the centre's profile and catchment.

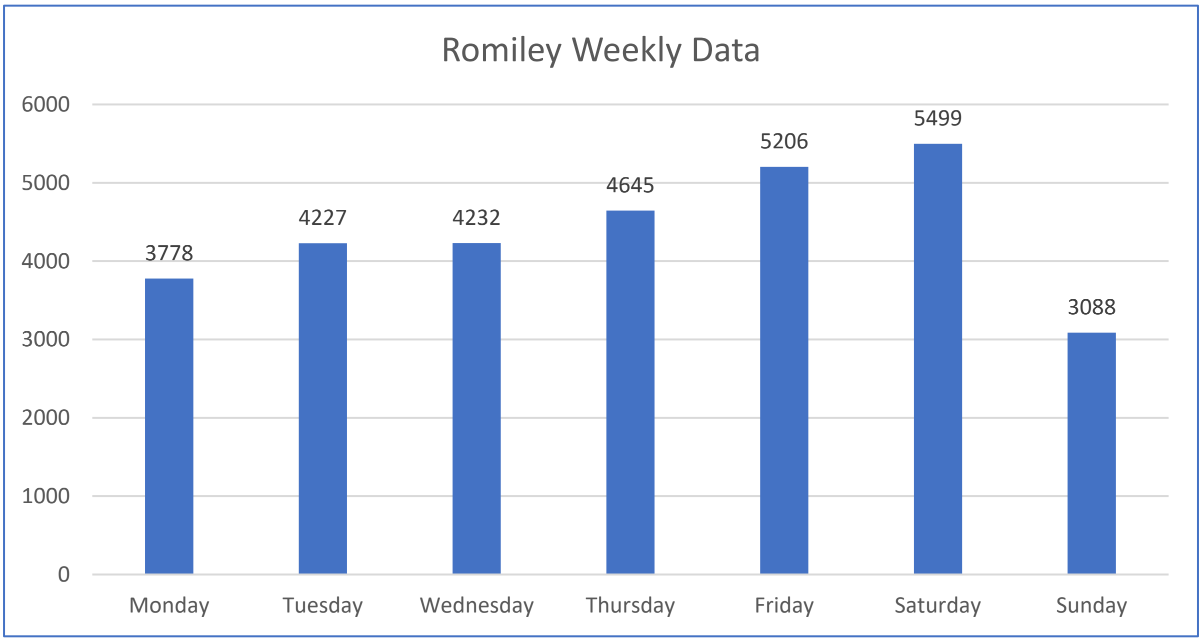

Figure 3: Weekly footfall pattern for Romiley

Attractors and Barriers

As part of the first interactive exercise, workshop participants were asked to write down three factors they personally believed attracted people to the local high street. Figure 4 below summarises the responses of the groups:

Figure 4: Attractors word cloud for Romiley

Three themes dominate the analysis: **Range of independent shops, Community feel, and Leisure and Hospitality offer**. Workshop participants recognise the significance of Romiley Forum as a cultural asset that attracts people from neighbouring districts, and also praised leisure and hospitality businesses for their commitment to the centre. As mentioned above, independent businesses account for 88.9% of units in the centre and are generally perceived as a unique characteristic of Romiley. Participants also highlighted that Romiley is perceived as a friendly and pleasant centre and highlighted how the community can become a real driving force in spearheading change where needed.

The second part of this exercise required individual participants to work together in sub-groups. Everyone was asked to identify and explain the importance of one of their three factors they identified to other members of the subgroup. Each sub-group then had to select their top three factors and place them in order of priority. The third part of the exercise required individuals to write down barriers or constraints they believe are holding back change in their local high street. The word cloud presented in Figure 5 below summarises all the barriers identified by the whole group:

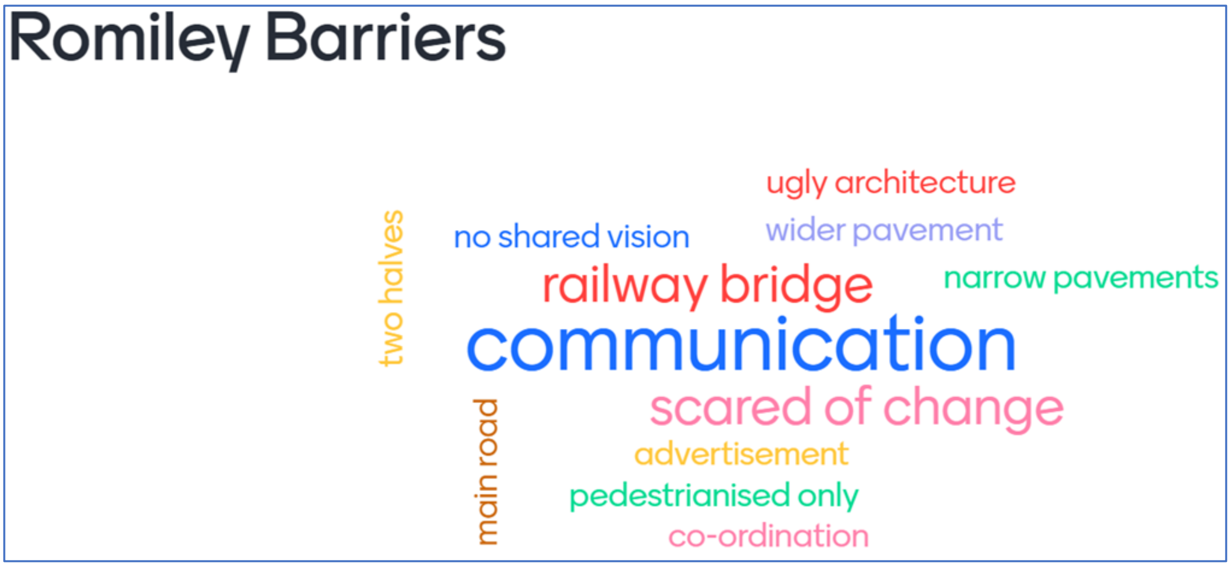

Figure 5: Barriers identified in Romiley

The top barrier identified by all sub-groups was the lack of **communication** and **coordination** regarding what needs to change within Romiley. Although most workshop participants are involved in community forums and partnerships, there seems to be a lack of appropriate mechanisms to further encourage local networks, collaboration and ideas sharing. Additionally, participants pointed to the reluctance of people to drive future transformation of Romiley, as well as the problems associated with the upgrade of the railway bridge that causes disconnection and loss of footfall in the west side of the centre. Although these barriers might be partly addressed through the appointment of a District Centre Manager by Stockport MBC, it is important to manage expectations here, as they can only do so much. The ongoing management of the centre will require additional capacity through the formation of networks and partnerships.

3. Applying the IPM's 4Rs Framework to Romiley

The 4Rs Framework provides a simple approach to developing a town centre action plan to create a vibrant centre for everyone that is fit for the future.

Figure 6: 4Rs Regeneration Framework

The framework distinguishes between the processes of analysis and decision making (*repositioning*), effecting change (*reinventing*), communication (*rebranding*) and governance/spatial planning and development (*restructuring*). An editable version of the transformation routemap with instructions can be downloaded[13] to help create a tailored Action Plan. Depending on where you start, this Route Map will take time to deliver but is a useful tool to plan out both short and long-term priorities. Actions under each R may happen simultaneously, consecutively, or repeatedly. Further detail on each of the 4Rs can be found in the supporting resources on the High Streets Task Force website.[14]

[13] https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/transformation-routemap-webinars/create-a-transformation-routemap-for-your-town/

[14] https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/frameworks/4rs-regeneration-framework/

Repositioning

Repositioning is a strategy that relates to clearly identifying and communicating a place's market position (Millington and Ntounis, 2017). In some locations, there is a poor understanding of the catchment, the challenges and trends impacting on the place as well as a lack of data on which to base decisions. In these instances, a strategy of repositioning is sensible. This entails taking time to collect and analyse data and information, as well as develop appropriate visions and strategies that can get widespread buy-in. Repositioning can also be used to counteract decline and enable a centre to identify potential competitive advantages.

A challenge for all district centres in Stockport is availability of reliable, longer term footfall data. Much of our analysis is based on analysis of just one year of data, whereas normally we would base our conclusions on two years of data. We suspect the insights we have drawn are reasonable assertions, but further analysis is recommended. Additionally, without access to hourly data we have been unable to perform more detailed analysis regarding peak times and the impact of specific events.

Developing greater knowledge and understanding of each centre is valuable for all local traders on the high street. Although historically retailers have been poorly supported in terms of national and European policy, there are emerging opportunities, such as the Shop Local Initiative, which can open access to business advice and support for both start-ups and established traders e.g., guidance on marketing or digital technology, recruitment, or even rising energy costs. District centre managers, therefore, could play a vital role in linking high street businesses to this support. It is important the needs of local traders connect to a wider vision or strategy. For example, as the pandemic revealed small traders who were able to flip their businesses from instore to home delivery and online have proved to be more resilient. Raising digital skills of all local traders, such as using social media promotion to drive footfall into stores is another activity that can underpin future resilience.

Romiley does not have a clear vision or strategy, but there are multiple community groups in place that can support the process of creating one. Local stakeholders are encouraged to construct a vision based on their perception of the strengths and weaknesses of the district centre. The vision does not necessarily need to involve radical change, but rather should focus on consolidating the centre's strengths, whilst tackling specific challenges, such as the disconnection between the east and west side, the gap in activity hours during peak times, and the centre's appearance. However, a long-term plan might be to consider how the impact of traffic will be mitigated to improve the overall experience and walkability of the centre, in addition to creating more sustainable structures to enable better partnership working between local stakeholders. It is important the vision is ambitious, but also viable and focused on tackling issues that can be strongly evidenced first.

Several businesses have raised concerns about Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). Sometimes there is mismatch between perceptions of crime and actual crime, therefore, it is important to establish an evidence base to underpin future decisions and potential investment in measures to tackle ASB. It maybe incumbent therefore to include crime monitoring statistics to establish both the scale and location of any problems and how it affects local business. This is an important issue, given safety/crime is one of the IPM's top 25 priority interventions[15].

Reinventing

Reinventing strategies relate to the activities undertaken to revitalise a place's identity and offer (Theodoridis, Ntounis, and Pal, 2017). Any place should understand and seek to meet the needs of its catchment and the visitors it may attract and be sensitive to these insights when making any changes within a centre. Sometimes places have the data they need and sensible plans for how the town or city needs to change to better serve its catchment communities, but nothing is happening there. A process of reinvention is needed. Transformation needs to start, and this might be through temporary interventions, events, pop-ups, or experimental place-making.

Romiley appears to have a great range of merchandise, services, and entertainment and leisure businesses that make the centre offer very appealing. There is an opportunity to experiment with different events such as a youth market or a street food market, as well as capitalise on cultural place-making opportunities that will enhance linked trips. Efforts need to be made to ensure the continuity of any existing events and closely monitoring their effectiveness against footfall and other data. Local stakeholders might consider organising additional events particularly at quieter times of the year such as February and August to enhance centre footfall and vibrancy (see Footfall Analysis). Given the strong hospitality offer in the centre a fitting event might be a food and drinks festival with local bars and restaurants working in collaboration to deliver it. Additionally, experimenting with temporary activity or 'meanwhile uses' within the existing vacant units to enhance the commercial offer and diversity within the centre may be appropriate. Closer work with landlords to explore the barriers to establishing new activity even on a temporary basis, is recommended.

It is also important local stakeholders identify several quick wins which will improve the appearance of the district centre. Measures might include improvements to public realm through regular litter picking, graffiti removal, planters and adding more greenery, especially to unkempt plots. Initiatives should also stretch to include private shop frontages with measures to undertake basic repairs, decoration, and shutters. Slightly more ambitious might be pocket parks and other physical projects which could be resourced on microbudgets. Stakeholders in Romiley might take inspiration from districts such as Withington, where the local community led regeneration partnership have led on delivering several low-cost placemaking interventions which have positively impacted on the appearance and reputation of the district centre.

Rebranding

Strategies of rebranding focus upon the application of branding, marketing communications, and public relations techniques to deliver a consistent place identity, which relates to the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions in the minds of potential consumers of a place (Ntounis and Kavaratzis, 2017). Successful place brand management can lead to positive word-of-mouth, and assist in the transformation of previously negative, or just as problematic, non-existent images.

[15] https://squidex.mkmapps.com/api/assets/ipm/safety-crime-evidence-on-a-page.pdf

Sometimes there are good plans, based on good evidence, and these are being brought to life. The place is both repositioning and reinventing – but catchment perceptions have not changed. People are still negative about the town or city centre. In this case, rebranding may be needed. Rebranding also includes stakeholder communications, not just marketing and PR activities. Ultimately, a strong place brand should be positive and consistent, and the product of local co-creation. It might be appropriate to establish a local sub-group to review and develop an appropriate participatory place branding process, which engages a wide range of local stakeholders. We would emphasise, this does not necessarily require professional branding assistance, and neither does the target audience need to be an external one. Rather, low-level, and low-cost social media communication across multiple platforms designed to engage and inform existing users of the town-centre, stakeholders and residents, about existing activities and the wider offer in the centre might prove just as effective.

In this respect, Romiley appears to have a good presence on social media accounts, and Romiley community group on Facebook has reached over 10,000 members. It is unclear whether regular promotions are happening though. There appears to be little engagement on Twitter as no distinct promotions regarding campaigns and regular events are happening. A low-cost and quick win, therefore, might be to create a #ShopInRomiley (or an equivalent) hashtag on all business windows to encourage greater circulation of positive messages about the centre online, and enhance place awareness and identity. There is scope to offer joint promotions for theatre goers, to drive them to use local businesses before and after theatre performances. Local stakeholders might draw inspiration from Bishopgate (York) where the community has developed both excellent online resources https://www.bishyroad.net together with creative maps promoting the local offer.

Perhaps connected to lack of vision, Romiley lacks a strong overarching place brand and identity. Discussions from the workshop suggests local stakeholders believe that independent businesses and the unique cultural offer are the centre's main strengths, which could therefore be further leveraged to inform a stronger place brand for both locals and potential visitors, for example through greater promotion of this offer on social media. Existing communication channels could be used to strengthen a shared understanding of the visioning and strategies of Romiley between local stakeholders. This should extend to include local businesses to generate more frequent social media messages and attain accurate and timely information about the offer.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to undertake place sentiment analysis on a regular basis including to review and evaluate user experiences e.g., TripAdvisor or Google reviews. This is important to ensure marketing and branding messages are consistent and appropriate for the catchment. There are opportunities in this process to promote synergies and extend the overall centre offer, which will be aligned with visitors' perceptions.

Restructuring

Sometimes places just seem to be stuck in a state of inertia around decision making or, when decisions are made and action taken, it does not have the impact that was expected. This can be tackled through a process of restructuring. Strengthening existing synergies perhaps involves more than simply improving communications between local stakeholders, and instead calls for greater collaboration and coordination of local stakeholders. This may involve refreshing existing networks. Sometimes wider town partnerships meet too infrequently or are simply too large to be effective. It might prove useful, therefore, to consider delegating specific tasks to sub-groups, which meet more often, who report back to a smaller executive group. It is not for the IPM, however, to determine how this operates - the various local partnerships and stakeholders, including local government, need to work out what works best. Consequently, there are not many easy wins here, but hopefully the IPM's recommendations provide a springboard to address these issues in a proactive way.

As indicated by workshop participants, there is a lack of communication between the main partnerships and community groups within Romiley, despite great interest to promote and improve the centre. There is certainly enthusiasm as evidenced during the workshop and impetus to make things happen and establishing a formal place management organisation such as a town-team or similar partnership is of paramount importance. We would advise that Romiley establishes a district centre partnership group or taskforce to manage both short and long-term change, coordinated by the District Centre Manager initially. Sub-groups could be formed to tackle some of the quick win recommendations together to gain some momentum (e.g., a place branding sub-group to conduct a place sentiment analysis), before addressing more strategic and longer-term challenges together. For inspiration, local stakeholders might review the Withington Village Regeneration Framework, the outcome of partnership working in the district centre which has fostered substantial community backing.

The overriding spatial challenge is the busy main road intersecting the centre which hinders the experience for pedestrians and cyclists, together with limitations regarding connectivity east and west of the Romiley train station. A future vision might begin to imagine how the centre will be unified in terms of walkability and linked trips. Although the shopping precinct is very active and helps to strengthen the retail and leisure offer, it shows signs of blight and recent evidence suggests centres like this are becoming less viable or coming towards end of life. There is opportunity here to capitalise on the existing residential and cultural uses and facilitate a long-term plan that will safeguard the viability of businesses in the Precinct.

4. Recommendations

Repositioning	
QUICK WINS	**LONGER TERM**
Ensure footfall data is widely available and can be accessed by local traders, event organisers and other place-based stakeholders to demonstrate success of delivery.	Regularly track effectiveness of interventions in the centre through monitoring and interpreting footfall data (volume and pattern of activity), providing impact assessment of any events. It is important to first agree on a reliable, consistent, and sustainable method for collecting footfall data in the district centre to enable this.
Hold a visioning workshop with local stakeholders, facilitated by the District Centre Manager.	Construct a clear vision for Romiley based on evidence, which addresses specific challenges and is co-created by local stakeholders.
Compare the modal opening times of businesses to the footfall data to identify any mismatches in activity hours.	Trial revised opening times and days to maximise trading opportunities based on footfall data. And apply any learnings in a vision for the centre. This we feel is especially important in relation to when theatre performances are happening.
Compare data and activity from businesses on the west and east side of the station to identify mismatches in terms of connectivity and flow. This could involve simple manual footfall counts, vacancy rates, business turnover/continuity.	Trial linked trips initiatives and maximise opportunities to create linkages within the centre.
Review crime data for the centre working with local police and / or using Neighbourhood Watch online mapping tool[16]. Establish a set of clear KPIs and baseline e.g., shoplifting.	Ensure continuing monitoring and reporting of crime data, sharing with local stakeholders and use this evidence to underpin Consider potential targeted interventions e.g., training for local traders in business crime reduction measures.
District centre manager to develop greater awareness of business support and available to local traders through a dedicated workshop.	Actively link local traders to specific initiatives which will help them develop or sustain their business – linking to the wider vision.

[16] https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/crime-prevention/crime-prevention/crime-map

Supporting resources

Developing place analysts

E-Learn - Repositioning your high street (4Rs) | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Paisley is open – A vision for Paisley Town Centre 2030 | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Repositioning: developing collaborative, inspiring visions that achieve change

Understanding Place Data | High Streets Task Force

Vision and Strategy - 25 'vital and viable' priorities | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Specific resources to consider

BID: Safe and Secure Report

Community Leadership: approach to tackling street crime

Reinventing	
QUICK WINS	**LONGER TERM**
Local stakeholders to come together, facilitated by the District Centre Manager, to map the existing events offer across the year and to identify any gaps in activity.	Extend and diversify the events programme to grow footfall in the high street and diversify local offer.
Local stakeholders to come together and develop alternative events that complement existing cultural and social assets within the centre.	Identify potential sources of funding to enhance the centre's placemaking and events offer with the District Centre Manager collaborating with local stakeholders to apply for any suitable funding bids.
Work with local property owners to activate empty units, e.g., meanwhile use, pop-ups, etc.	Generate more opportunities for innovation and non-retail function e.g., start-up scheme, flexible leasing, rents, more regular markets.
Undertake a district centre audit to compile a list of eyesores and unkempt sites, and opportunities to add greenery and floral displays e.g., planters outside traders.	Develop an action plan to identify specific projects which are then assigned to appropriate stakeholder groups. This might include resourcing plans e.g., accessing small grants, crowd-sourcing, stakeholder contributions etc.

Supporting Resources

E-Learn - Reinventing your high street (4Rs) | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Specific Resources to consider

Barriers to New Entrants - 25 'vital and viable' priorities | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Place investment and engaging landlords | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Open Doors: Pilot Programme Report | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Temporary Use as a Participatory Placemaking Tool | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Rebranding

QUICK WINS	LONGER TERM
Consolidate and sustain existing social media good practice through Romiley community group forums and via developing unique hashtags to further take advantage of social media platforms.	Use existing comms to extend and build a network of place ambassadors including key anchor institutions, stakeholders, and local businesses to promote a positive image of Romiley in a sustainable way.
District Centre Manager and local place stakeholders to undertake place sentiment analysis to build a clearer evidence-base on user experiences of Romiley.	Adjust social media communications in alignment with these regular reviews and put on customer service training workshops if the reviews of local businesses are negative to ensure a more consistent centre experience.
Once the visioning workshop is complete - the District Centre Manager could facilitate a place branding exercise designed to activate the vision. Important this a participatory process in which the place brand is co-produced with the local community.	Create a more extensive programme of events and activity around the place brand envisaged by local stakeholders within the visioning workshops to consolidate a stronger place identity (e.g., augment the cultural offer).
To address concerns about perceptions of safety, it may be apposite to undertake a survey of users either through street-level questionnaires or online tools to establish how Romiley is perceived.	Use evidence from the survey to inform wider messaging and promotion of the district centre and monitor change in perceptions e.g. using online sentiment analysis, or simple thematic analysis of online content/local media reports.

Supporting Resources

E-Learn - Rebranding your high street (4Rs) | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Understanding Place Sentiment | High Streets Task Force

Place Marketing - 25 'vital and viable' priorities | Resources | High Street Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk)

Restructuring	
QUICK WINS	**LONGER TERM**
District Centre Manager to strengthen existing stakeholder groups – e.g., facilitate regular meetings such as a visioning workshop.	Establish a more formal leadership group supported by sub-groups with responsibility for specific areas of intervention (e.g., landlords, traders' groups, events, branding).
Review the development of the new Local Plan and benchmark planning policies and proposals for new development relating to the district centre against IPM's 25 Priorities.	Create a district centre Action Plan or regeneration framework based on the 4Rs framework presented in this report.
Facilitated by the District Centre Manager, sub-groups of local stakeholders created to address specific areas of quick win recommendations from this report (e.g., an events sub-group, crime and anti-social behaviour working group), working with key local stakeholders.	Undertake feasibility studies which address the spatial challenges identified above (e.g., introducing more mixed-use activity in the precinct space or traffic calming measures).

Supporting resources

25 Vital and Viable Priorities

Diagnostic: capacity and structures for managing change (IPM)

E-Learn - Restructuring your high street (4Rs)

Principles of Town Planning in relation to High Streets and Town Centres (RTPI)

Town Centre Partnerships (URBED)

Additional resources to consider

Community approaches to tackling street crime

Withington Village Regeneration Framework

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Activity Hierarchy

The activity hierarchy is a classification of settlement size based upon the annual volume of footfall. It is particularly useful for planners and decision makers, as it can enable local authorities and interested parties to monitor the evolution of their centres in a more consistent fashion (Mumford et al., 2021). The activity hierarchy uses a standard order of settlement size (Major city, Regional Centre, Town, and District), and is established by comparing a place's annual footfall volume with the mean footfall volume for each classification and the standard deviation (a measure of how much footfall volume varies across centres in these groups - see Figure 7 and Table 5).

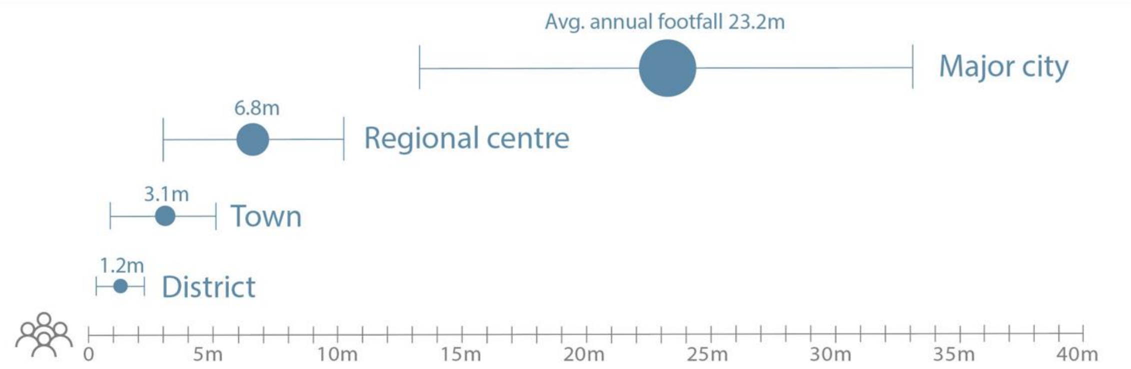

Figure 7: Levels of activity hierarchy and average as well as standard deviation of annual footfall in each level of activity hierarchy

Activity Hierarchy	Mean (million)	Standard Deviation (million)
District	1.2	0.9
Town	3.1	2.2
Regional Centre	6.8	3.7
Major City	23.2	9.9

Table 5. Mean and standard deviation (SD) in each level of the activity hierarchy

Appendix 2: Viability Assessment

Introduced below is an index of viability, which considers the multiple conditions that affect the overall viability of the High Street, and the interconnectedness between aspects of viability. This index - or tool to measure viability - has been shaped by academics and practitioners with an interest in the health of high streets and has been piloted with a series of towns in England. For this tool to be widely operationalised across high streets in England it uses data that is (1) pertinent to the conceptualisation of viability, (2) is easily available, and (3) enables a fine geographical granularity. The following indices and datasets are included in the tool:

1. Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 scores for the seven domains of deprivation.
2. Community Wellbeing Index (Co-op) for nine main areas that matter for community wellbeing.

Indices	**Viability**				
	Social and cultural	**Environmental**	**Technological**	**Political**	**Economic**
CDRC Geodem (IMD 2019)	IMD Crime IMD Health IMD Housing IMD Education	IMD Living Environment			IMD Income IMD Employment
Wellbeing Index People	Education and learning Health				Economy, Work and Employment
Wellbeing Index Place	Culture, heritage, and leisure	Housing, space, and environment	Transport, mobility, and connectivity		
Wellbeing Index Relationships	Relationships and trust Equality			Voice and decision-making	

Note: All five viability constructs are weighted equally - 20% each.

Appendix 3: Introduction to the updated 25 Priorities

In late 2019, the IPM team updated the list of "Top 25 Priorities" as part of the development of the High Streets Task Force, introducing new or amended priorities that correspond to the ongoing changes on the fabric of the high street. Table 6 provides the changes in the ranking of the 25 priorities. These amendments and new additions highlight the shift from traditional retail-oriented thinking into a more nuanced and multifunctional way of thinking about what constitutes a vital and viable centre. This is highlighted by the inclusion of "Non-retail Offer" as a separate priority in the 2019 update, the amendment of "Anchors" to include anything that is attracting a significant amount of people to a location (universities, hospitals, parks, train stations), the inclusion of "Markets" in their multiple forms (from collective retail to food halls), and the inclusion of "Redevelopment Plans", "Functionality", and "Innovation" as priorities that can influence centre transformation based on focused development, change in a centre's functions (e.g. from retail-dominant to multifunctional), and opportunities for community experimentation respectively.

Priority Rank	Priority (Original 2014 study)	Priority (2019 Update)
1	ACTIVITY HOURS (Opening hours; shopping hours; evening economy)	ACTIVITY* (Opening hours; footfall; shopping hours; evening economy)
2	APPEARANCE (Visual appearance; cleanliness)	RETAIL OFFER (Retailer offer; retailer representation)
3	RETAILERS (Retailer offer; retailer representation)	VISION & STRATEGY (Leadership; collaboration; area development strategies)
4	VISION&STRATEGY (Leadership; collaboration; area development strategies)	EXPERIENCE (Centre image; service quality; visitor satisfaction; familiarity; atmosphere)
5	EXPERIENCE (Service quality; visitor satisfaction; centre image; familiarity)	APPEARANCE (Visual appearance; cleanliness; ground floor frontages)
6	MANAGEMENT (Centre management; shopping centre management; Town Centre Management; place management)	PLACE MANAGEMENT (Centre management; shopping centre management; Town Centre Management (TCM); place management; Business Improvement Districts (BIDs))
7	MERCHANDISE (Range/quality of goods; assortments)	NECESSITIES (Car-parking; amenities; general facilities)
8	NECESSITIES (Car-parking; amenities; general facilities)	Anchors* - Presence of anchors - which give locations their basic character and signify importance
9	Anchor stores - Presence of anchor stores - which give locations their basic character and signify importance	NON-RETAIL OFFER (Attractions; entertainment; non-retail offer; leisure offer)
10	NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS WITH COUNCIL (Networking; partnerships; community leadership)	MERCHANDISE (Range/Quality of goods; assortments; merchandising)
11	DIVERSITY (Attractions; range/quality of shops; non-retail offer; tenant mix; tenant variety; retail diversity; availability of alternative formats)	WALKING (Walkability; pedestrianisation/flow; cross-shopping; linked trips; connectivity)
12	WALKING (Walkability; pedestrianisation/flow; cross-shopping; linked trips)	PLACE MARKETING (Centre marketing; marketing; orientation/flow)
13	ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE (Entertainment; leisure offer)	NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS WITH COUNCIL (Networking; partnerships; community leadership;

		retail/tenant trust; tenant/manager relations; strategic alliances; centre empowerment; stakeholder power; engagement)
14	ATTRACTIVENESS (Place attractiveness; attractiveness)	ACCESSIBLE (Convenience; accessibility)
15	PLACE ASSURANCE (Atmosphere; BIDs; retail/tenant trust; store characteristics)	DIVERSITY (Range/quality of shops; tenant mix; tenant variety; availability of alternative formats; store characteristics; comparison/convenience; chain vs independent; supermarket impact; retail diversity; retail choice)
16	ACCESSIBLE (Convenience; accessibility; public transport)	ATTRACTIVENESS (Sales/turnover; place attractiveness; vacancy rates; attractiveness; retail spend; customer/catchment views; Construction of out-of-town centre)
17	PLACE MARKETING (Centre marketing; marketing; tenant/manager relations; orientation/flow; merchandising; special offers)	MARKETS* (Traditional markets; street trading)
18	Comparison/convenience - The amount of comparison-shopping opportunities compared to convenience (usually in percentage terms)	RECREATIONAL SPACE (Recreational areas; public space; open space)
19	RECREATIONAL SPACE (Recreational areas; public space; open space)	BARRIERS TO NEW ENTRANTS (Barriers to entry; landlords)
20	Barriers to Entry - Refers to obstacles that make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the centre's/High Street's market	Safety/Crime - A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting
21	Chain vs independent - Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix of a centre/High Street	ADAPTABILITY (Retail flexibility; retail fragmentation; flexibility; store/centre design; retail unit size; store development; rents turnover)
22	Safety/crime - A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting	LIVEABLE (Multi/mono-functional; liveability; personal services; mixed use)
23	LIVEABLE (Multi/mono-functional; connectivity; liveability)	REDEVELOPMENT PLANS* (Planning blight; regeneration)
24	ADAPTABILITY (Retail flexibility; retail fragmentation; flexibility; mixed-use; engagement; functionality; store/centre design; retail unit size)	Functionality* - The degree to which a centre fulfils a role – e.g., service centre, employment centre, residential centre, tourist centre
25	Store development - The process of building, upgrading, remodelling, or renovating retail stores	INNOVATION* (Opportunities to experiment; retail Innovation)

Table 6. The updated 'Top 25 Priorities' for high street vitality and viability

Appendix 4: Summary of LDC Data

Romiley Location Report Highlights		
	Count	**Percentage**
Total Units	104	
Retail (shops)	73	70.2%
Leisure	31	29.8%
	Count	**Percentage**
Vacancy Rates	3	2.9%
Retail (Shops)	3	2.9%
Leisure	0	0.0%
Classification Mix	**Count**	**Percentage**
Comparison	27	24.3%
Convenience	9	8.1%
Service	37	33.3%
Leisure	32	28.8%
Net Change in Openings/Closures	**Count**	**Difference in Classification (percentage)**
Comparison	2	7.4%
Convenience	-2	-22.2%
Service	-2	-5.4%
Leisure	2	6.3%
Independent vs Multiple Mix	**Count**	**Percentage**
Independents	96	88.9%
Multiples	12	11.1%

Table 7. The LDC data for Romiley

Appendix 5: Footfall Signature Types

The section of the report presenting footfall patterns in Romiley is based on the findings of the Bringing Big Data to Small Users (BDSU) project, 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. Through the analysis of hourly footfall data provided for more than 150 locations over 10 years, the project identified four basic patterns that have profound significance in thinking about the future of traditional retail centres as seen in Table 8.

Footfall Patterns	Typical Characteristics
Comparison	People come here predominantly to shop Busiest in the run up to Christmas People travel a considerable distance to visit Wide range of retail choice, leisure, food, and beverage Strong retail anchor(s) Strong presence of multiples and international brands Depth and breadth of merchandising Large catchment area Accessible by choice of means of transport Organise themselves to compete with other comparison towns and channels
Holiday	People come here for a holiday or a 'day out' Busiest times are July and August People travel a considerable distance to visit Focus on offering a good experience to visitors during the summer peak Attractive to tourists but have a relatively weak comparison offer Organise themselves to increase and enhance their entertainment and leisure appeal
Speciality	People come here for the overall experience Footfall rises steadily from Easter to end of August - and peaks again around Christmas time. People stay longer here (increased dwell time). Anchor(s) not retail - offer something unique and special Attract visitors but serve local population Organise themselves to protect and promote identity and positioning
Multifunctional	People come for a mixture of everyday needs - shopping, accessing public transport, employment, education, services etc. Large multifunctional towns have higher footfall figures than small multifunctional towns. People travel further to access large multifunctional towns whilst small multifunctional towns just serve their local population Retail offer, opening times, events, services and other uses focused on local community and/or a well-defined hinterland Convenience anchor – work, public transport, food shopping, markets Accessible and locally connected Organise themselves to manage accessibility, concentration, reliability, and customer service

Table 8. The footfall signature types