MARPLE

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 15th March 2022, attended key local stakeholders from Marple. 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.

Table of Contents

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 ability of high streets, this report presents findings from Marple, 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 Marple 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 21 to January 22[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, Diversity measure, 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. Marple 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 Marple in 2019[5], overall, the centre has maintained a strong local identity and leisure offer; and remains a pleasant place with a variety of specialist shops and independents. There are two areas of concern. First is the relative lack of diversity of comparison goods (0.12 compared to the GB average of 0.15)[6]. 88 of the 111 units in Marple are retail, which potentially exposes the centre to the restructuring affecting the sector nationally. Second, other than the normal turnover of businesses, the Local Data Company data reports a decline of 7.1% in services businesses[7] in Marple which includes bank branches. That said, Marple still has a low vacancy rate figure (3.6% compared to 14.1% GB average in Q1 2022)[8].

Activity hours remain largely the same as in 2019, with most businesses closed by 5:00pm, which still leaves a mismatch between the retail and hospitality offer. There seems to be a gap in provision between 3 – 6pm, where few places are offering hot food to dine-in, whilst many shops have closed. That said, we identified new hospitality businesses that open later, strengthening the evening economy. Despite being a small and compact centre, the overall experience is still compromised by the high frequency of road traffic which continues to dominate, leaving the centre somewhat fragmented. The lack of regulated pedestrian crossings still hinders walkability. There is ample parking but limited outdoor seating in the centre, and no cycle lanes. Table 1 below summarises the strengths and weaknesses, with key changes highlighted in bold.

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[4] https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=168756
[5] See Appendix 2 for an explanation of the updated 25 Priorities
[6] Based on OXIRM measure on the LDC data
[7] See Appendix 3 for a summary of the LDC Data
[8] See BRC https://brc.org.uk/news/corporate-affairs/fewer-empty-shops-but-uncertainty-ahead/

Marple District Centre Strengths and Weaknesses	
Key Strengths	**Key Weaknesses**
3, 6 & 13. Vision & Strategy/Place Management/ Networks and Partnerships with Council - 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, with a mismatch between the retail and hospitality offer.
4. Experience - Rural, village feel, strong local identity - Natural landscape setting - Positive online reviews of local businesses and attraction	2. Retail offer - A3 and A4 uses appear underdeveloped given the size of the district centre
9, 15 & 18. Non-retail offer/Diversity/Recreational space - Appears diverse with range of choice in hospitality facilities - The only district centre where the evening offer extends beyond A3/A4 to include a cinema - Ample community events and festivals - Nearby recreational opportunities	***25. Innovation*** - No evidence of experimentation in the centre, other than the market. - Low vacancy restricts opportunities to establish new activity.
22. Liveable - The centre provides range of local community services	

Table 1: Key strengths and weaknesses

Viability Assessment

The Viability Assessment is a measure of High Street Viability[9]. 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 Marple is **highly economically viable** with a good score for technological viability meaning there is good access to affordable and sustainable transport and communication networks for everyone (see Figure 1 below).

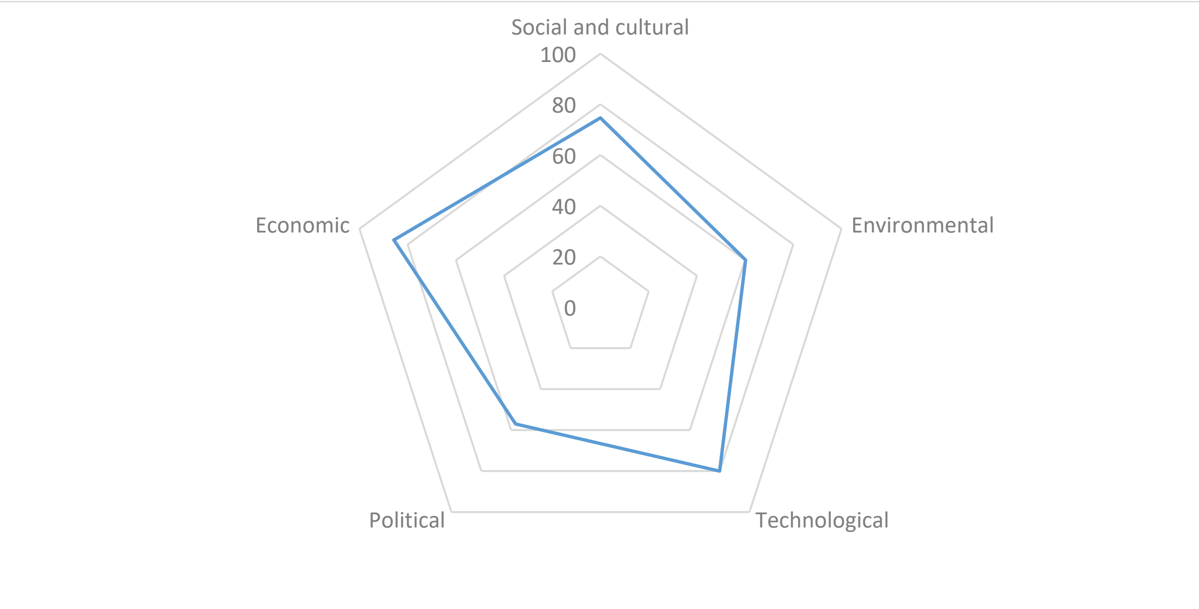

Figure 1: Viability Assessment

We posit that Marple fulfils the role of a residential centre, and despite its economic strengths there is perhaps finite growth potential in terms of its trading environment. The technological viability is likely to be driven by the convenient and frequent train service at the railway station, however, the narrow pavements along a busy road impact on the walkability from the station and into the district centre.

[9] See Appendix for an explanation of how the Viability Assessment is calculated.

Footfall Analysis

The annual footfall figure for Marple for the period of January 2021-2022 for the counter location was 1,780,681 suggesting Marple is correctly defined as a **district centre** based on the estimated activity level[10].

In summary, the average daily footfall count is 4993, December is the busiest month, Saturdays the busiest day, whereas Sundays are typically the quietest day. Various Christmas events significantly boost footfall in the district centre, and other events including the Make it Marple market produce a discernible increase in footfall.

Monthly Footfall Analysis

Monthly footfall calculated for the year 2021 suggests Marple has the profile of a **multifunctional centre,** offering a convenient mix of goods and services[11]. The relatively flat footfall profile suggests the centre mainly serves a local catchment (Figure 2 and Table 2). Although Marple has a relatively low volume of footfall through the year, it is accessible and locally connected, which necessitates focusing efforts on consolidating or enhancing convenience for people in the immediate area. Marple showcases a small December peak, which is consistent with bigger multifunctional centres that have an array of Christmas-related activities and merchandise offer.

Another consideration, which will require additional analysis, is the extent Marple 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 Marple Station[12] fell 84% from 512000 in 2018/19 to just over 82,000 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 Marple. 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.

[10] See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the hierarchy is derived.
[11] See Appendix 5 for an explanation of the different signature types.
[12] Office for Rail and Road

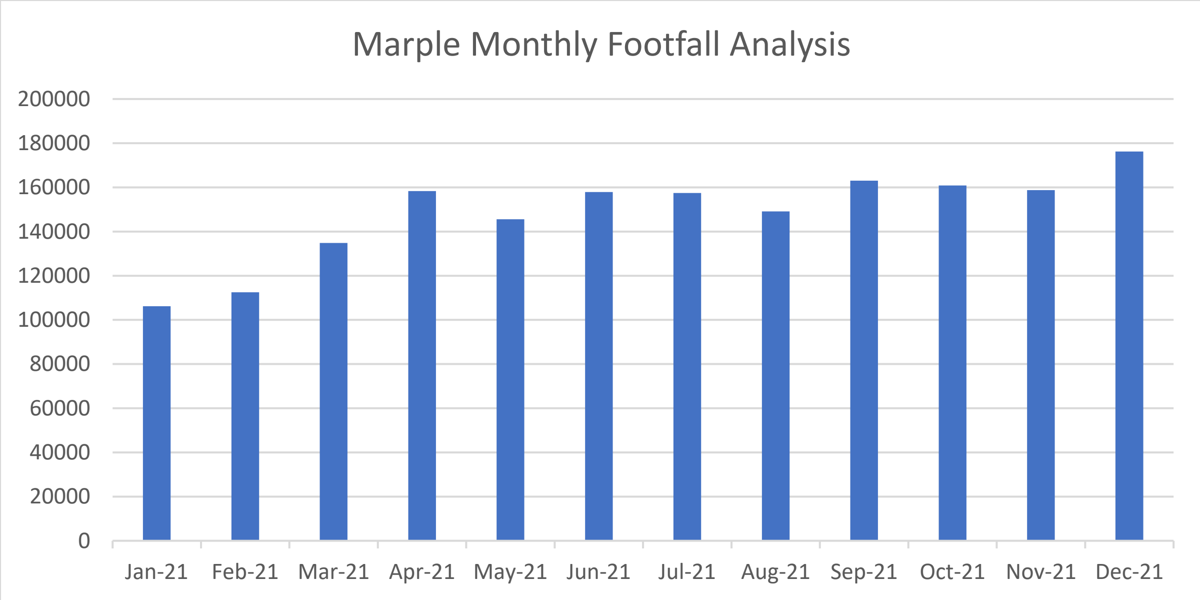

Figure 2: Monthly Footfall Data

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)[13] 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 a district centre such as Marple should have recovered both to its pre-pandemic levels of footfall and footfall signature.

Table 2 provides a monthly footfall count for Marple. It is estimated footfall during the first months of 2021 may have been hindered by the third COVID-19 national lockdown (which started 6th January). 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	Marple Monthly Data	Monthly Data as Percentage
January	106161	6.0
February	112490	6.3
March	134798	7.6
April	158313	8.9
May	145595	8.2
June	157869	8.9
July	157446	8.8
August	149083	8.4
September	163064	9.2
October	160845	9.0

[13] See High Streets Task Force Annual Footfall Review
https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/media/hr5jbfev/footfall-report-2021-exec-summary-final.pdf

November	158752	8.9
December	176265	9.9
Annual Footfall	1780681	100.0

Table 2: Monthly footfall count and percentage

Events and footfall

It is noticeable when events are taking place in Marple (Moovin Festival, Winter Wonderland), a modest uplift can be noted. The most successful synergies in terms of footfall increase were probably achieved due to the Marple Food and Drink Festival, as footfall was increased by almost 60% compared to a normal September Saturday.

Month			
September	Normal Saturday average footfall	Event Saturday	Multiplier Effect
	6522	10382	1.6

Table 3: Multiplier effect of events in Marple

Regardless of the importance of one-off big events, more regular patterns and gatherings also influence footfall. The Make it Marple market during 2021 seem to have generated increased footfall in all of five instances, creating synergies with other events (e.g., the food and drink festival). From these observations, we can attest that the market effect on footfall is clear and appears to be significant[14], however, more data need to be collected (e.g., sales data, dwell time, visitors' perceptions) 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
June	6181	9225
September	6522	10382
October	6488	8482
November	6602	8424
December	6403	11010
Overall	6439	9505

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

Weekly Footfall Analysis

Finally, the weekly footfall pattern for Marple was calculated (Figure 3). Previous research (Mumford et al., 2017) has shown centres like Marple will exhibit one of two distinct weekly patterns (a distinct Saturday peak or a Monday through Saturday peak) in footfall profiles. Marple 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 (and reflects Sunday trading hours).

[14] A two-sample t-test was performed to compare footfall count between market and no market Saturdays. There was a significant difference in footfall between market Saturday ($M = 9505$, $SD = 1154.1$) and no market Saturday ($M = 6439$, $SD = 161.1$); $t(8) = 2.131$, $p < .001$.

Marple's weekly signature may be influenced by the effects of the pandemic (e.g., hybrid working arrangements). Nevertheless, understanding how Marple functions on a weekly basis can help towards the development of strategies and initiatives that fit the centre's profile and catchment.

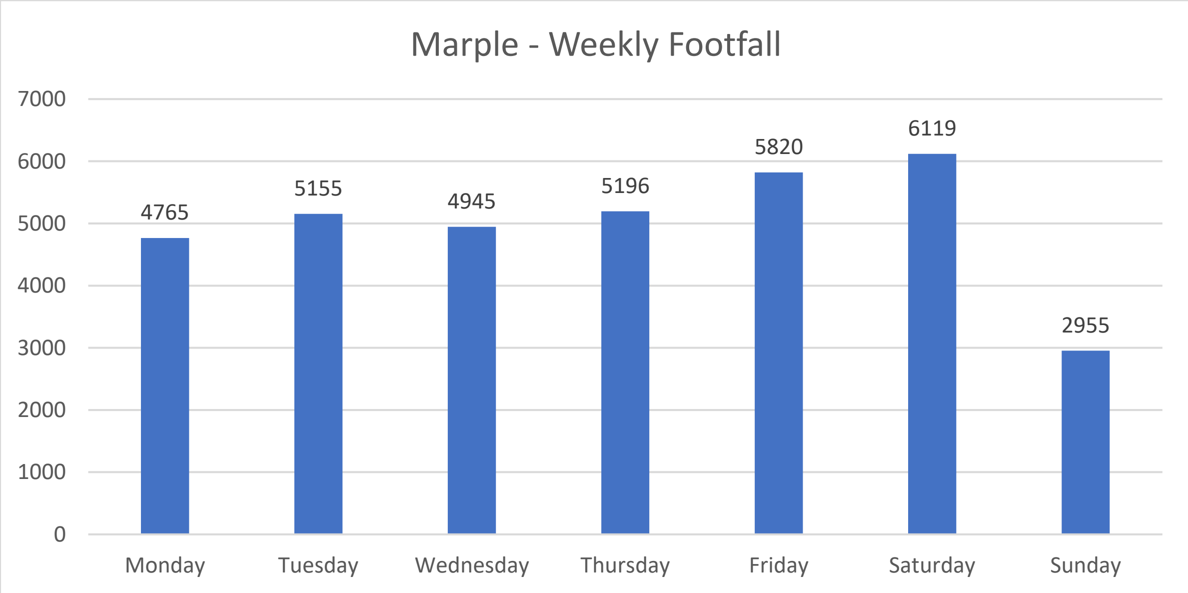

Figure 3: Weekly footfall pattern for Marple

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 summarizes the responses of the group.

Figure 4: Attractors word cloud

Three themes dominate the analysis: **Hospitality/Leisure** (non-retail offer), **Recreational space** (the parks and canals) and **Independent shops**. In the case of the latter, independent businesses particularly seem to play a great role in providing diversity and potentially contributing to the sense of a convenience offer in the centre. Participants also drew attention to the quality and range of the shops, as well as the good mix in offer in terms of the mix of retail and hospitality, although this Diversity Index above is quite low, with the centre dependent on retail. The cinema is a unique asset compared to many district centres.

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 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 a barrier or constraint that they believed was 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 by the whole group

The barriers identified by the workshop participants focus on traffic, with comments about Stockport Road causing fragmentation in the centre, which can be a barrier to **experience and walkability**. This may cause some challenges in the sense that some parts of the centre become underused which can lead to higher vacancy over time. Additionally, participants pointed to the lack of advertising to raise awareness of what is happening in the centre, although hopefully bringing people together at the workshop can potentially be the beginning of a more collaborative approach to **place marketing**, perhaps facilitated by the district centre manager. However, it may be important to manage expectations here, as the district centre manager can only do so much. The ongoing management of the centre, however, will require additional capacity through the formation of **networks and partnerships**.

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

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[15] to help you plan the 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.[16]

[15] https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/transformation-routemap-webinars/create-a-transformation-routemap-for-your-town/
[16] 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.

Marple is in a unique position in the sense a vision for the district centre has been previously created by local stakeholders. However, this was some time ago and before the pandemic. It is timely that local stakeholders working with the council review this vision. We would advise making use of the IPM's 25 Priorities to benchmark existing and any subsequent revised plans. Additionally, local stakeholders might construct their own Action Plan using the free tools and frameworks available through the High Streets Task Force, such as the Routemap to Transformation, which also uses the 4Rs framework. It might be useful to also review the Withington Village Regeneration Framework as a practical example of how the 4Rs have been applied in a district centre.

We would advise the vision reflects findings from the Place Quality Audit and view of local stakeholders in terms of their perception of the strengths and weaknesses of the district centre as demonstrated in this report. The vision does not necessarily need to involve radical change, but rather should be updated based on the centre's strengths, whilst tackling specific challenges which are outlined in this report. However, a long-term plan might be to consider whether the synergy between non-retail anchors such as the canals and local trade can be boosted, as it currently does not seem to drive footfall into the centre, together with the need to mitigate the impact of traffic in the centre. Looking more at the evidence is important. For example, stakeholders referred to Marple as a destination for walkers and ramblers utilising nearby access to the canal tow paths and hillside walking routes. However, if this was the case, we might expect significant uplift in footfall e.g., during the summer months, or on nicer days when more people feel inclined to go walking. This is not reflected in the footfall data we have, and we suspect either visitor numbers are lower than people think, or simply people using the walking routes do not come into the centre in any great number.

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 s 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.

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.

There are already several activities taking place in Marple to activate the centre. Whereas this may need some review, efforts need to be made to ensure the continuity of the existing events programme as they impact favourably on footfall. Local stakeholders might consider organising additional events, particularly at quieter times of the year, for example in the summer as these months seem to be quiet which impacts on local trade. Future events therefore might begin to introduce trials and experiments which can diversify what the centre has to offer, to prepare for future adaption as the local catchment changes. We stress this is important given the centre's reliance on its immediate local catchment. For example, the visit revealed that opening times are very traditional and that there is a gap in non-retail offer between 3 – 6pm. Therefore, opening times can be experimented with to boost vibrancy at quieter times in the centre and renew some of what the centre has to offer. The low vacancy rate in Marple can be a barrier to new entrants, however, there are mechanisms to tackle this through experimental place making e.g., flexible leases, markets, and pop-up interventions.

We would also advise placemaking interventions extend to incorporate some basic improvements to the overall appearance of the district centre. During the workshop, we referred to the example of the planter in the pedestrianised area of Marple, which required some maintenance. We understand community volunteers quickly acted to repair and replant the planter based on our comments. More activity like this is needed, where community groups are taking responsibility for planting, litter picking and perhaps some creative interventions. This might also include measures to improve signage and wayfaring to better connect the key anchors in and around the district centre. After that, it is incumbent on traders and property owners, including the cinema, to undertake some basic repairs and improvements to both shop shutters and facades. Local stakeholders might draw inspiration from nearby Withington, where the community has instigated a programme of small-scale and low-cost improvements. In terms of managing greenspaces on the high street local stakeholders might also draw inspiration from Incredible Edible, a scheme initiated in Todmorden.

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.

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, the overall reputation of Marple is largely positive, and it has a relatively strong digital footprint, via multiple social media channels, which are used to promote local events and businesses. The challenge will be to coordinate place marketing activities going forward and to ensure a collaborative approach and that any new activities and events are included in the branding. 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 the need for updating the vision, Marple lacks a strong over-arching place-brand and identity. Signage is an issue in the centre, with big road signs dominating the pavements. To send a clear message of what the centre has to offer such signage could be better used by articulating a clear place brand. Therefore, the reviewing and updating of the vision will have implications on Marple's rebranding exercise which should be based on evidence. Discussions from the workshop suggests local stakeholders might benefit from developing a shared understanding of what Marple has to offer and act more as ambassadors to further to promote a positive image of the high street. Existing communication channels could be used to strengthen a shared understanding of the visioning and strategies between local stakeholders. This should extend to include local businesses to generate frequent and high-volume social media messages.

Sometimes we encounter a disparity in places between the perceptions of a place held by local stakeholders and those of customers or visitors using the centre. It would be a useful exercise 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 linked trips within Marple, to establish the high street as a destination in which visitors might dwell for longer using local shops and services, attending events, and visiting local bars and restaurants.

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 recommendation provides a springboard to address this issue in proactive way.

Although there is an enthusiastic group of local stakeholders willing to get involved in the future of the centre and evidence of Marple having a partnership, it is unclear whether it is still active and how well it is operating, particularly in relation to the council. There is, for example, there is an historic regeneration partnership with a town centre action plan published online[17], which appears to exist in parallel to the Local Plan. Both plans need review and joining together, as both local stakeholders and the local authority needed to be working towards the same vision. However, discussions at the workshop, it was revealed there is a lack of co-ordination, for example, there were confusions around who was responsible for the planters in the centre. As such, the district centre manager needs to pull together the partnership and coordinate a more collaborative way of working to achieve long-term change. This might extend to the coordination of event organisers and volunteer groups willing to get involved in supporting activity including markets, festivals to litter picking and community planting and so on.

The overriding spatial challenge is relatively poor pedestrian and cycling environment due to the heavy traffic currently flowing through the centre. This limits opportunities to extend pavements, create cycle lanes and space for on-street trading – and is likely to negatively impact on dwell time, overall experience, and place reputation. We would suggest this creates a precedent on which to explore further or even permanent measures to reduce traffic levels, particularly the walkability from the station and into the centre. That said, Marple benefits from having a pedestrianised street already. The management and curation of activity on this strong will be important going forward to maintain, grow, and adapt the appeal of the centre. Again, an organising body is needed to activate this space with a regular programme of events. Overtime, the maintenance and upkeep of hard and soft-landscaping, lighting, street furniture, planting and general décor will require upgrade and modernisation, but in way which enhances or consolidates the image and identity of the town.

Although Marple is generally an attractive place in terms of appearance and built environment, there is some wear and tear which should be addressed. For example, the run-down exterior of buildings, however, this could easily be solved with some minor maintenance such as painting. There are a few examples of planning blight which can be addressed in the long term, such as repurposing side streets to enhance the public realm and give space to new entrants. Additionally, there are petrol stations in the centre, which we imagine will become redundant with the phasing out of petrol and diesel vehicles. A future vision might begin to imagine how these spaces could be repurposed to address the challenges we have identified above. For example, new and large retail formats, non-retail uses, civic and performance space, or simply greenery or places to hold events.

[17] http://www.marple-uk.com/mcrp/contacts.htm

Although there are perhaps several small-scale schemes which could be initiated quickly to improve the overall appearance of the district centre, large scale proposals such as the traffic scheme proposal need to be considered under Restructuring, as the outcomes are long term, and will require careful stakeholder engagement. We would also advise reviewing resources listed below in relation to street design and curbside management, including an example from Hackney, which includes guidance on managing relations with traders affected by schemes to manage traffic on the high street.

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.	Continue to track effectiveness of interventions in the centre through monitoring and interpreting footfall data (volume and pattern of activity), providing impact assessment of events etc.
Specifically evaluate further impact of markets and events on footfall, sales, dwell time, and visitor perceptions.	Specifically evaluate and refresh events programme to maximise trading opportunities.
District Centre Manager to review the vision. Revisit and update vision objectives.	Rewrite the vision based on the update. Construct a clear vision for Marple based on evidence, which addresses specific challenges, and is well-defined in spatial terms.
Analyse and understand the visitor market that derives from the non-retail anchors.	Integrate a longer-term strategy on how to attract visitors of non-retail anchors into the high street and align this with local trade.
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.

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

Reinventing	
QUICK WINS	**LONGER TERM**
Review range of place-based anchors (retail, employment, transport, green space, heritage, culture), everyday activity that significantly attracts footfall.	Ensure key place-based attractors are embedded in local plans and visions for the town centre and include in wider messaging. Specifically, and in addition to the Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan could be useful conduit for embedding the importance of key place-based attractors.
Review funding and resources of existing activities to ensure they are sustainable and can be delivered in a predictable way, with the support of the district centre manager.	Extend and diversify the events programme to grow footfall in the high street and diversify local offer.
Experiment with opening hours, especially to create synergy with non-retail anchors and boost activity during quieter hours.	Implement flexible leases, markets, and pop-up interventions to combat the barriers to entry.
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. Specific concerns in Marple relate to opportunities for planting, building facades in need of repair etc., signage/wayfaring., the quality of contract parking areas.	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. For example, the local authority to work with partner organisation to establish feasibility of providing traders with small planters or other measures to improve the appearance of the centre through additional greenery.
Work with local property owners to activate empty shops units, e.g., meanwhile use, pop-ups, community use.	Lower barriers to entry and generate more opportunities of innovation and non-retail function e.g., start-up scheme, flexible leasing, rents etc.

Supporting Resources

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

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

Specific Resources to Consider

Curbside Management Practitioners Guide

FaceLift: A transparent deep learning framework to beautify urban scenes

Grey to Green in Sheffield: creating the UK's largest inner city 'Green Street'

Incredible Edible

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

Pedestrianisation in Hackney Case Study

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

Streetscape Guidance

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

Traffic Calming Measures Fact Sheet

Withington District Centre Video Case Study

Rebranding	
QUICK WINS	**LONGER TERM**
Consolidate and sustain existing social media good practice.	Use existing comms to extend and build a network of place ambassadors, including key anchor institutions, stakeholders, and local business – to promote positive image in a sustainable way.
Undertake place sentiment analysis to build a clearer evidence-base on user experiences of Marple.	Adjust social media communications in alignment with these regular reviews.
Once the reviewing and updating of the vision 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 coproduced with the local community.	Construct a place brand to assist district centre development – to counter any negative place perceptions which may be detrimental to future investment.

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 group – e.g., facilitate workshops and regular meetings to coordinate responsibilities and enhance collaboration between stakeholders in the centre.	Establish a more formal leadership group to take on a more strategic plan, supported by subgroups with responsibility for specific areas of intervention (landlords, traders' groups, events, branding etc.) to build capacity for transformation.
Review existing community led Action Plan and the Local Plan and benchmark against IPM's 25 Priorities.	Undertake feasibility studies into specific projects which address the spatial challenges identified above.
Scope out responsibilities for basic care of the centre and carry out these maintenance activities i.e., paint buildings and upkeep of planters.	Repurposing side streets and underused space to enhance the public realm.
Create a process to address uncertainty regarding traffic scheme proposals.	

General 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)

Specific resources to consider for the district centre

Curbside Management Practitioners Guide

Pedestrianisation in Hackney Case Study

Streetscape Guidance

Traffic Calming Measures Fact Sheet

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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 x and table x).

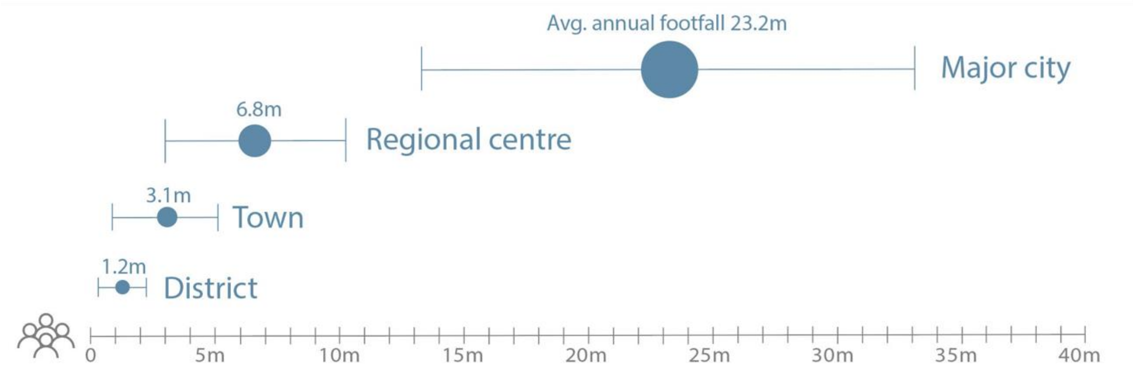

Figure x: Levels of activity hierarchy and average as well as standard deviation of annual footfall in each level of activity hierarchy

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

Appendix: 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 2: 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 x 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)

Appendix 3: Summary of LDC Data

Marple Location Report Highlights		
	Count	Percentage
Total Units	111	
Retail (shops)	88	79.3%
Leisure	23	20.7%
	Count	Percentage
Vacancy Rates	4	3.6%
Retail (Shops)	4	3.6%
Leisure	0	0.0%
Classification Mix	Count	Percentage
Comparison	34	29.8%
Convenience	18	15.8%
Service	39	34.2%
Leisure	23	20.2%
Net Change in Openings/Closures	Count	Difference in Classification (percentage)
Comparison	1	3.0%
Convenience	1	6%
Service	-3	-7.1%
Leisure	3	13%
Independent vs Multiple Mix	Count	Percentage
Independents	90	76.3%
Multiples	28	23.7%

Appendix 4: Footfall Signature Types

The following section presents the monthly data pattern in Marple. It 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.

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