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The Grimsey Review: Covid-19 Supplement for
Town Centres Summary
June 2020

Grimsey Review – a summary



- The Grimsey Review: Covid-19 Supplement for Town Centres (June 2020)
- This follows two previous Grimsey Reviews on high streets and town centres (2013 and 2018)

<http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Grimsey-Covid-19-Supplement-June-2020.pdf>

An overview

For town centres and high streets to thrive post-Covid-19 and rediscover their community purpose, we need to see...

1- Localism

A massive shift in power away from central government to local communities and a renewed focus on localism. Local people must be empowered to redesign their own high streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it, with increased CPO powers if necessary

2- Leadership

Local leaders valued and recognised in the same way that powerful mayors are viewed in other countries. Candidates for leadership roles should be selected for having a broad range of dynamic and collaborative skills in order to get the best out of their communities. They must embrace change in order to build back better

3- Fewer cars, more green space

Fewer streets and a huge expansion of green space, parks and town squares.

Our towns and cities must no longer be designed solely around the car as people learn to appreciate the benefit of open spaces

“COVID-19 has introduced us all to a different way of life. As the world stopped and smog filled skies began to clear, the nation took time to reflect. And surveys show we want to build back better and not return to business as usual.”

Bill Grimsey June 2020

The data

- Covid-19 has accelerated the demise of highstreets and town centres as shopping destinations
- 47% retailers (67% with assets of £25k or under) and 59% pubs and club operators at 'significant risk of failure' – partly due to structural issues (private equity ownership)
- 6.1m people employed in retail and hospitality – many will lose their jobs, majority are young and female
- From 2014-18 retail property investment fell by 42% and shopping centre investment fell by 78% (Radius Data Exchange)
- 12% high street vacancy rate nationally. Almost half owned by people with no connection to the community
- KPMG predict retail space to shrink 25% by 2022/3 (was 2025 pre-Covid)
- Online sales to account for 50% retail sales by 2025 (KPMG)

Fleet BID Consumer Survey April/May 2020

Q2: Thinking about when restrictions are eased / lifted are you more or less likely to do the following than before coronavirus?

People said they are more likely to:

- Be more conscious of the impact of the environment when they make purchases: 72%
- Shop locally 70% and visit Fleet High Street more (61%)
- Eat out in Fleet 57%
- However, in April / May people were expecting to spend less money than before
- People also thought it less likely that they would set up their own business.

Thinking about when restrictions are eased / lifted are you more or less likely to do the following than before coronavirus?					
	More likely		Less likely		
Shop with businesses in Fleet high street	69.72%		7.98%		
Shop online from businesses in Fleet	35.25%		23.50%		
Shop online from businesses NOT in Fleet	31.40%		32.61%		
Eat out in restaurants in Fleet High Street	56.90%		19.52%		
Order takeaways	39.00%		33.01%		
Be more conscious of the impact on the environment when I purchase	71.77%		7.42%		
Get more involved in community activities	49.76%		11.35%		
Work from home more often	49.26%		26.98%		
Set up my own business	10.47%		59.60%		
Attend more events in Fleet	51.21%		16.18%		
Visit Fleet High Street more	60.90%		14.22%		
Spend more money than before	16.23%		51.31%		

Building a sustainable future

- 72% millennials (aged 24-38) would rather spend money on an experience rather than buying things (Harris Group)
- Young adults especially want businesses to be “accountable for the wellbeing of its people and communities”
- Generation Zs (aged 5 - 23) are socially focused with their opinions on companies formed by their ethics, practices and social impact
- “Whether it’s shopping centres banning hoodies or town centres banning skateboarding, the message is clear; young people are not welcome.”
- 60% of older people are worried about the lack of seating that is provided in shopping areas for them to rest (Anchor). The closure of public toilets, poorly lit areas and inadequate access to transport also contribute to an unwelcoming environment that’s at odds with the idea of age friendly neighbourhoods

Giving communities a bigger role

“People friendly transport policies, reimagined civic space, increased greenery and local food hubs can begin to redefine high streets through the lens of community.”

Having a grown up debate

“I remember being confronted by the public on more than one occasion and needing to have tough conversations... Many hark back to a golden age of high streets and this still exerts a powerful nostalgic pull. But we can't live in the past and you have to level with people and try to explain the future. I found people respected this. They listened and tended to agree. Most of them admitted they did a lot of shopping online and could understand the challenges we faced. It will take time, but one day I hope we'll stop judging high streets solely against retail criteria. The 'has it got a Waitrose or a Next' checklist isn't helpful. **Leaders have got to encourage people to stop measuring everything against the past and think differently. Instead of asking what brands are on your high street, I want people to ask what great experiences can you have there and how strong is the community?**”

Planning

- Planning policy can take 2 years to work through the system
- Residential growth needs to be matched with amenity space – garden squares, small parks, pedestrian routes, landscaped areas
- The paper recommends a public database of commercial property ownership

“It is time for planning policy to experience a radical shift to reflect the need for economic and social resilience. Surgical intervention to tackle empty buildings using CPOs and other regulation powers will be required. There should be serious consideration of relocating public assets to the town centre and for the high street becoming an enterprise zone.”

Property ownership – unlocking spaces

“In a post-COVID and post-retail world, we need to think of property as a platform to enable meaningful work, local trade, wellbeing, belonging and so on. Community trusts and local authorities could be well-placed to provide this platform – if they can:

- a) ensure unused properties come onto the market in the first place
- b) access suitable capital to buy them and
- c) ensure properties are used for local benefit, rather than for purely revenue-generating purposes.”

“To truly support local economies to build back better post-COVID, local authorities need to ensure properties are used primarily for local benefit. Commercial leases should arguably be replaced with long-term Collaboration Agreements, where both council and space occupier work together to meet predefined local needs.”

- The report includes many examples of community ownership projects

Recommendations

- Transfer power locally to communities
- Local leadership: needs to be strong and respected
- Reform business rates
- Develop skills for post-retail world
- Property – fair rent, discourage vacancies
- Planning – CPOs for empty premises, deregulate and speed planning
- Transport – plan for towns without the car – ‘20- minute neighbourhood’

“People friendly transport policies, reimagined civic space, increased greenery and local food hubs can begin to redefine high streets through the lens of community.”

Case Studies

View the Grimsey report for many examples of projects in town centres and how they are adapting to the changing nature of the high street.

The example from Camberley has been used here to demonstrate the vision in a nearby town.

The UK's first 5G shopping centre Surrey Heath Borough Council

In 2016, Surrey Heath Borough Council bought a significant portion of Camberley town centre to deliver regeneration and take the difficult decisions that the private sector could not. Alongside delivering housing and diversifying away from retail, including shrinking the overall retail offer, the Council has been interested in how technology could help tie a new era of retail into a modern town centre.

Led by the Council, a partnership was formed which, over the coming months, will deliver the UK's first 5G shopping centre. The collaborators alongside the Council include the University of Surrey, Huawei, Alibaba, Deloitte, Story Futures at Royal Holloway University of London, Montagu Evans and the Department for International Trade.

It will become a test bed for retail-based technologists to explore how ultra-fast connectivity in a real life environment could provide a blueprint to how modern towns might function.

Early experiments being considered will look at aggregating local tastes to provide relevant stock, testing emotional reactions to goods and brand experiences and could expand to link the internet of things and, potentially, driverless cars. The picture below illustrates part of the proposed redevelopment of the town centre.

Camberley regeneration

