

Appendix 1 – Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council



MID ULSTER Covid-19 TOWNS Recovery Plan

June 2020

Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan

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1. Context

In the context of helping our towns recover from the pandemic, Council's Economic Development staff have undertaken widespread discussions with businesses across our district and more specifically within our town centres.

We have thoroughly researched what other areas across Ireland, Great Britain and Europe are doing to aid the recovery of their towns and cities, in order to produce an informed Mid Ulster Covid19 Towns Recovery Plan.

This plan focuses primarily on Mid Ulster's 5 large towns; Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coalisland and Maghera, but could be extended to assist our villages, where Council is able to attract funding to do so.

There are a few key points to be mindful of: -

- The Plan for Recovery published by the NI Executive uses a phased approach for the reopening of businesses.
- Town centres may look different in future, and it is not yet known how they will evolve after the pandemic, being cognizant of potential increases in vacancy levels, more businesses extending their online reach and wanting to build on it, etc.
- Points of learning from other countries are;
 - Customer confidence is low; resulting in low footfall.
 - Businesses are vocal on the lack of government guidance/support.
 - Different sectors are entering the *Recovery Stage* at different times.
 - Need to promote the '*Support Local*', '*Spend Local*' message.

This document will need to be reviewed on a continual basis as Government guidance evolves.

2. Introduction

The unprecedented effects of Covid-19 have altered the face of our town centres. What was once unimaginable is now the 'new norm'. We are only too aware some businesses will not re-open, while some may re-open operating on reduced hours, having to adapt to new ways of working to take into account social distancing. These are challenging times for independent retailers and some customers, accustomed to e-retailing and e-socialising, may not return to town centres to pre-pandemic levels.

The NI Economy Minister on 7 May 2020 said "We have lived through downturns before but this is different. The usual remedy of encouraging people to go out and spend money to boost the economy is not possible or, indeed appropriate, right now."

The NI Executive published "Coronavirus: Executive Approach to Decision-Making" on 12 May 2020. This document sets out a 5 stage plan for decision making which will be led by science and not by calendar. It sets out a pathway to recovery based on sectors of work, retail, education, travel, family and community, sport, cultural and leisure activities.

The gradual easing of lockdown restrictions from 12 June 2020 allows the majority of town centre retailers to reopen however some sectors have not yet been given the 'green light' to return which means our towns are very different spaces to those we remember before the pandemic.

Nonetheless, we are now reclaiming our town centres, and Council seeks to support our businesses, wherever possible, and help them transit towards recovery.

The Town Centre Recovery Plan strives to put in place short term measures to support businesses and encourage customers to return to their local high street. The 'new normal' we face will be evidenced by closer linkages between family, friends and local businesses and as such we will have to adapt to this new ethos. Within our towns, it seems likely that open spaces will become more valued for the health benefits they bring, along with local access to fresh air and affordable exercise.

It is more important now more than ever, that our towns embrace the potential afforded by the 'digital high street' as online shopping continues to grow. In our town centres, some retailers understand the value and importance of embracing new technologies and providing an online offering, however many do not share these views and lack understanding and awareness of the benefits it can provide as a business tool.

Recently a study by the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) reported that Mid Ulster will endure the greatest economic impact of Covid-19 in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the report highlighted Mid Ulster as the only area locally to feature in the top 10 worst-impacted places within the UK's 382 local authority regions. The think tank estimates that GVA could temporarily fall by a staggering 45% in the short term, which presents an immense challenge for local companies and jobs. The extent of the anticipated decline is largely as a result of Mid Ulster's position as the centre of

manufacturing and engineering, where it accounts for 21% of the local economy, compared to 9% in the rest of Northern Ireland.

Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) ^[1] have recently revised their initial estimates on the economic impacts of Covid-19 in Northern Ireland.

In Mid Ulster the estimated % decline in GVA in 2020 is -16.3% which is the highest of all the 11 Council areas. This figure exceeds the huge fall in GVA seen in Mid Ulster (-15.6%) at the height of the last recession in 2008-09.

In Mid Ulster, the estimated number of employees furloughed & laid off is 22,900 which represents a percentage change of -38.5% on the total employees in Q4 2019. This makes Mid Ulster the most impacted by job furloughs and layoffs as a result of the lockdown.

This Plan instead looks at what short-term measures could be introduced to support our town centres and the businesses therein, subject to the availability of Government funding, to allow these urgent actions to be introduced with immediate effect.

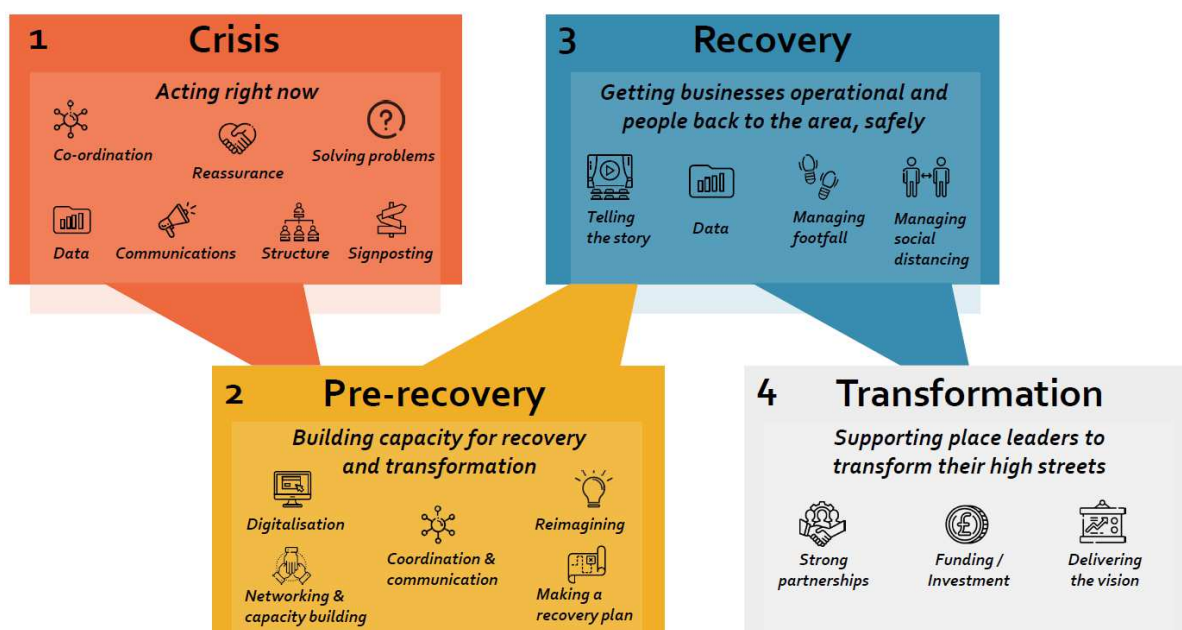
3. Using Research and Knowledge to Build a Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Action Plan

In preparation of this report, much research was carried out across Ireland, Great Britain and beyond to inform this paper from the learnings in other areas. The Best Practice Research is summarized in Section 4 and further elaborated upon within the Appendices at the end.

One excellent piece of work was published on 1 May 2020, by The Institute of Place Management, entitled “Covid-19 Recovery Framework”. The High Street Task Force has adopted it as their model for assisting towns and cities to support their transformation through the Coronavirus pandemic.

The framework is designed to help place leaders take the most effective action now in the immediate crisis, and to build the capacity for recovery and longer-term transformation.

The framework sets out a series of systematic preparedness, response and recovery measures, across four stages: Crisis, Pre- Recovery, Recovery and Transformation as highlighted in the graphic below. This framework is being widely used in the UK to assist towns to plan their recovery from the current pandemic.



This previous model has been used to shape the Town Centre Recovery Plan for Mid Ulster. At this time (June 2020), we are in the Recovery Phase, however, we have taken stock of how we have progressed to this stage and what other actions are needed to reach Transformation Phase.

3.1 Crisis Phase Actions

Acting Right Now: Co-ordination – Reassurance - Solving Problems – Data – Communications – Structure - Signposting

During crisis stage, Council has supported town centre businesses in the following ways:

- Repurposing Meadowbank Arena to support a local business make/supply visors to assist the health sector.
- Holding meetings with our Town Centre Forums and businesses to find out what help they needed
- Managing hundreds of phone calls from businesses across Mid Ulster.
- Gathering evidence and collating data from businesses to inform the production of a Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan
- Signposting to a variety of supports through a dedicated page on Council's website
- Weekly e-zines to businesses on Council's Business Directory to make them aware of all supports available to them.
- Communicating information relevant to town centre businesses through the town centre forums / partnerships and town centre databases
- Assisting Dept for the Economy conduct validity checks for their £10k business grants scheme.
- Providing information through webinars and a digital programme
- Sharing positive stories of business resilience through social media.
- Creating a sense of Civic Pride through lighting up civic buildings and feature lights.

3.2 Pre-Recovery Phase Actions

Building capacity for recovery and transformation: Digitalisation – Co-ordination and Communication – Reimagining – Networking and Capacity Building – Making a Recovery Plan

Many of Mid Ulster businesses are now emerging from Pre-Recovery Stage and moving into a Recovery Phase. This phased process over a period of time allowed different sectors to reopen at different stages, as set out within the “Coronavirus Executive Approach to Decision-Making” published on 12 May 2020 and updated through recent Executive decisions. As there has been a sequence of decisions regarding the exit from lockdown, so will there be a sequence of recoveries and it will be critical that recovery planning reflects this.

Retailers must ensure safe trading within their premises to ensure that their employees and their customers feel safe within the property.

Communication - People will be nervous about returning to the high street and indeed some may not be able to return for a considerable time i.e. older people, people with underlying health conditions. David Fitzsimmons, Retail Excellence Ireland stated *‘They expect pent up demand to be initially good but have concern that consumer spending will drop by up to 40% as seen in parts of Europe and Asia’*. Businesses must strive to attract and keep their customer base in the initial phases of reopening to ensure customer confidence and loyalty. ‘Shopping local’ has become the new norm and we need to build on this customer loyalty and seek to secure it in the future.

Outdoor Spaces - Council must ensure a co-ordinated approach with various stakeholders, including Department for Infrastructure Roads Division, to develop interventions for pedestrian space and movement, where appropriate, subject to legislation.

Town Centre Marketing - As each town emerges from the pandemic and enters recovery stage, the messaging for each of the town centres will be similar but the stories will be unique. The story will be built around local narratives using existing branding and will focus on local people connecting with local businesses. “Telling the human stories of our places will be key to bring people together.” Bill Addy, High Street Expert.

Digitisation of Our High Street - How people conduct their business has changed and we have to support retailers and the general public to this new normal and accept digital is going to play an even bigger part in our lives than ever before. This pandemic has forced more people down the digital route to obtain necessities during this pandemic.

3.3 Recovery Phase Actions

Getting businesses operational and people back to the area, safely. Telling the Story – Data – Managing Footfall – Managing Social Distancing

Mid Ulster Towns Recovery Team – With a volume of work underway to support our town centres at this critical time, Council has established a multi-disciplinary officer team which meets regularly to discuss and progress a range of issues pertinent to our towns centres.

This team is spearheaded by the Director of Business and Communities and the Head of Economic Development and contains membership as follows;

- Regeneration Managers supported by Project Officers who have extensive experience of delivering town centre regeneration projects including grant schemes.
- Technical Services Team who are responsible for delivery of Capital Schemes on Council's behalf.
- Planning and Building Control who provide advice and information about statutory requirements.
- Environmental Health Team who are dealing with "*The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020*", and *Pavement Café Legislation etc.*

In addition to Council's multi-disciplinary team, the economic development team works alongside the Town Centre Forums/Partnerships operating in each of our 5 main towns which contain a wide variety of stakeholders, including the public and private sectors.

This Recovery Phase focuses on getting businesses reopened after the lockdown measures are lifted and we start to see what the new normal is for our town centres. There won't be a one size fits all solution however a number of options are outlined below, some of which are subject to the availability of funding.

Repurposing Public Realm Spaces / Pavement Café Areas – There is a need to consider interventions to better utilize the public realm space in our town centres, working with our partners in the Department for Infrastructure and other town stakeholders.

Businesses, especially those in the hospitality sector require additional space to house their customers at their cafés, restaurants, bars, hotels, etc, in order to adhere to social distancing protocols. The Council is committed to supporting the hospitality sector move towards recovery and recognises the challenges that exist whilst acknowledging the opportunities which on-street seating areas could offer to help meet these requirements, as well as to create the kind of café culture which other towns, cities and villages enjoy. Council will work alongside local traders as flexibly as possible, both in terms of planning and the licensing requirements for pavement cafes. We will turnaround applications for a licence promptly and at no cost to the applicant. However, we are acutely aware that the 28 day period for representations which is stipulated in the legislation for the licensing of pavement cafés is restrictive and will adversely impact on the ability of the sector to respond agilely in the current circumstances. In addition, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations currently prohibit the creation of a pavement café. Mid Ulster District Council is now lobbying the Department for Health and the Department for Communities to relax the restrictive aspects of the legislation.

Additional Cleansing and Planting within our Towns – As our high streets emerge from the pandemic, Council continue to undertake a rigorous cleansing programme within our towns and villages. We would wish to explore if any additional external sources of funding is available to visually enrich the look and feel of our town centres, making them more inviting spaces to visit. This will create civic pride and develop public confidence, encouraging customers to return to our high streets and support their local traders.

Covid-19 Business Grant Scheme – Social distancing is likely to be in place for a considerable time and businesses need support to adapt their premises and protocols. Council has made applications to Department for Communities (DfC) and Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) seeking urgent financial assistance to be made available to Council to deliver a Business Grant Scheme to support urban and rural businesses to reopen and make adjustments to their premises and welcome customers back to a safe trading environment. Some examples of the types of initiatives we have sought funding for from Government Dept's are;

- Modifying the internal layout of the business premises to ensure compliance with Covid19 social distancing protocols (eg, flexi-panels at counters, building/remodelling works, etc).
- Internal/external Covid19 signage to promote awareness of social distancing measures in place.
- Professional cleansing of business premises.

- Purchase of Covid19 items of equipment to allow the business to operate safely and provide reassurance to customers, eg, PPE (hand sanitisers, masks, gloves, visors, high-visibility vests for staff, etc), free-standing hand sanitiser stations, etc.
- External modifications such as awnings to protect customers who may have to queue to enter business premises, covered tables and chairs, outdoor heaters, etc.
- Internal/external shopper collection points to avoid customers having to fully enter the business premises.
- Equipment to allow widening of footpaths to support social distancing and the safe movement of people through our town centres such as pedestrian safety barriers.
- Professional expertise for the business eg, health & safety audits/assessments, drawings/plans required to modify the business to ensure Covid19 compliance etc.

Town Centre Marketing – It is important to remind the public why the Retail Sector is important and that bricks and mortar really do matter. We need to weave stories of the people who own the shops; the customer service they provide, staff expertise, customer care to create feelings of belonging and reinforcing that our Town Centres are absolutely central to community and economic recovery. Expectations should be managed against the expected low footfall in the first few weeks – perhaps months – as lockdown measures are gradually relaxed. A number of short-term actions are being developed;

- **Open For Business Video Messages** – As traders return to the high streets, Council is inviting any business in Mid Ulster who wants to promote they're 'open for business' again to send us a 30 second video clip, telling us why they're glad to be back and any key message they want to communicate to their customers. For the video shy, we will also accept a photo of the business owner within their shop, along with a quote saying why they're glad to be back. The economic development team is happy to collate these messages and forward to Comms for onward publication on Council's social media channels. A free service offered to businesses during the 'Reopening Period'.
- **'Confidence Mark' Window Stickers** – Another initiative underway by the economic development team is geared towards boosting customer confidence to return to our towns and villages in the knowledge that businesses are taking positive steps to keep their customers safe. Examples of this could be businesses putting in place practices such as additional cleaning, hand sanitization stations, flexi plastic screens, in-store signage on social distancing etc. Any business with evidence of this will be awarded a #ReconnectWithConfidence window sticker. This is a simple, low cost but effective way to communicate the message to the Mid Ulster public to return to our towns and villages and support local traders.

- **Video to Promote the Reopening of Mid Ulster Towns and Businesses -**
The economic development team is working alongside the communications section to commission a professional short video to promote the 'Reopening of Mid Ulster Towns and Businesses' and encourage the public to support their local traders and shop local. The video will be pushed out on social media in early July to tie in with the next phase of businesses reopening.
- **Business Storytelling** – Building interest stories about local businesses/owners and why their town is important to them. The aim is to encourage public support/engagement with local traders through this professional video storytelling initiative. It is anticipated the public will respond positively to seeing well-known traders tell their story and thus serve to strengthen the message to 'shop local' to support local businesses.
- **Mid Ulster Online Retail Pack (Guidance and Posters Available)** – The economic development team has developed a useful online retail pack containing Government guidance for the retail sector as they return to work. The pack will also contain a range of social distancing posters which we've had specially designed for businesses to use. Businesses can either print off the posters themselves or send to a local printer to have made into signage boards. The online packs will be available on Council's website from 29 June 2020.

Online Retail Platform – Businesses have told us they would like a mechanism developed whereby they can promote their individual towns and the retail offer therein. The economic development team are exploring this initiative to determine if we can provide an 'online shop window' for our 5 main towns but also have an avenue to include our rural businesses. This platform would be able to support businesses wanting to promote key messages about their business such as when they are planning sales, putting on special offers or discounts, etc. We would like the platform to also provide the capability of providing links straight through to the individual business websites which would in essence drive virtual traffic to their door to generate more sales.

Digital Retail Programme - It is becoming increasingly apparent that our retailers require support to assist in the digitization of their business, whether that be the commencement or enhancement of digital platforms. The Covid-19 crisis has prompted a greater need and priority being given to digital activity. Online presence is needed for growth and there is an increasing need to adapt digital platforms, as this is a powerful way of communicating with people. There has been a step-change in the proportion of retail spending over the internet – estimated by McKinsey to be up from 25% to 35% in the last week of March 2020.

The temporary closure of the high street has “shaken people’s reality”, says retail analyst Richard Lim, adding that the situation has forced consumers to reassess how and what they buy: “Most people have no experience of this kind of disruption so it’s shaping their perception of what’s possible.”

Retailers must “redefine business models” and integrate more technology into their operations if they are to survive the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Global Data. The data and analytics company has warned that the crisis has accelerated the shift away from the already “outdated” bricks and mortar model, and that retailers must embrace new retail technology.

With no date in sight for when retail might return to ‘normal’, Global Data’s retail analyst Hrishabh Kashyap warned that we “will witness a large number of retail failures in the coming years, if retailers fail to accommodate new technologies in their businesses”.

It is recommended Council investigate and if possible, introduce a Mid Ulster Digital Retail Programme, to help traders embrace and develop their online presence.

Mid Ulster Gift Card –The development of a Mid Ulster Gift Card would provide the opportunity for businesses across the District to sign up to the gift card. The gift card is designed to ‘lock in’ spend for participating businesses, drive footfall, encourage advocacy and stimulate additional economic activity within Mid Ulster. It would be a useful mechanism especially at key retail periods, where the public would be encouraged to purchase the card (which has different £ values) as a gift for friends and family, or where large businesses could buy the gift card to provide to their employees at Christmas as a token of thanks for their work throughout the year, etc. The card encourages the public to spend local, and circulate monies in the local economy.

Improving Town Centre Aesthetics - As consumer confidence returns to our town centres, it is imperative we continue to improve their aesthetics to enhance civic pride. This could be done through renewal of marketing materials such as banners etc.

3.4 Transformation Phase Actions

Supporting place leaders to transform their high streets.

Strong Partnerships – Funding and Investment – Delivering the Vision

The Transformation phase should focus on supporting place leaders within our town centres to assist in transforming their high streets. The use of existing Town Centre Forums/Regeneration Partnerships that have been strengthened and reinforced through the previous phases are key to helping deliver the vision.

However, with household incomes being severely impacted by Covid-19, this will undoubtedly have a knock-on effect in terms of the availability of household spend in our town centres. The retail sector in general was struggling to survive before Covid-19 hit our high streets, and the titanic pressures the pandemic has placed on the sector is incalculable. It does not take a mathematician to work out that our towns are in need of huge support from Government, similar in nature to what has been provided in other parts of the UK. Our towns are in need of revitalization, renewal, and made befitting for the 21st century shopper. Instead, due to lack of funds, we continue to put 'sticking plasters' on old buildings to try and make them more attractive, whilst all the while we know, a root and branch review of these 'assets' (ie, our town centres), is long overdue, given the 'jewels' they could become, had they been afforded the proper investment to develop their full potential.

This short-term Mid Ulster Towns Recovery Plan will not address these huge strategic capital investment issues, but nonetheless, Members will be cognizant of the need to keep these issues to the forefront of their minds and lobby at every opportunity, for capital investment to support the redevelopment of our towns.

The wider revitalisation of our towns should consider the development of **Town Regeneration Masterplans** to strategically map out the regeneration our town centres. These should be ambitious, with strategic intervention to look at innovative and creative ways our town centres can be used in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and how they can be enjoyed by future generations.

The move from Recovery to Transformation stages, should also consider the development of a sustained **Town Centre Marketing Campaign** to support our 3 largest towns that have a strong brand identity already developed (ie, Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt). Such a campaign could be developed and rolled out over a 2 - 3 year period. This will require the appointment of a creative marketing agency to work alongside Council's economic development and communications teams.

4. Best Practice

Table 1 below highlights best practice from Ireland, Great Britain and beyond. Further details of the case studies are referenced in the appendices.

Table 1

Appendix	Location	Details
1	Loughborough	Love Loughborough have produced guidance for retailers to ensure traders are trading safely during the COVID-19 outbreak.
2	Denmark	Signage and demarcation has been utilized in Denmark on the footpaths to encourage social distancing.
3	Solihull	Blueprint for Resilience has been published and a Plan Ahead Team (PAT) has been formed to develop a plan for the town centre.
4	Liverpool	Liverpool BID Company, Liverpool Chamber, Professional Liverpool and Liverpool City Council Public Health have worked together to devise advice to help get your businesses, venues and workforces ready. The one-page guide focusses on the following 4 themes – <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review staff policies 2. Checking the venue/premises 3. Introduce physical distancing 4. Review surfaces & point of sale
5	Cork	Cork City Council Recovery Plan has been developed in two phases: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phase 1 was launched on the 18th May 2020, which entailed a deep clean undertaken in the city centre with the Marina area pedestrianised. - Phase 2 will see further pedestrianisation of city centre streets, provision of additional cycling facilities, the creation of 'cycle and walk' facilities and 'click and collect' set down areas and increased priority at pedestrian crossings are amongst a range of proposals

		being suggested. When agreed, these changes will be implemented in the short and medium term and aim to mirror the timing of the Government's roadmap for lifting COVID-19 restrictions:
6	Glasgow	Glasgow are leading the field in investigating on how best to recover economically from the Covid 19 pandemic utilising the expertise of local universities. In Glasgow the council are working with its partners to develop expert advice on how best the economy of Glasgow and the surrounding city-region can be renewed and rebuilt once it moves into the recovery phase.
7	Monster Hero Safari	MonsterHero Safari works by utilising contactless NFC technology and QR codes, without the need for players to download or sign up to anything. The safari consists of 10 vinyl window characters, monster superheroes this time, with embedded NFC tags that mostly independent and charity retailers, as well as cultural and public venues, will host.
8	Malmesbury Town Team	Malmesbury Town Team have prepared a "Time to Market Initiative" to support retailers with marketing their business during the pandemic.
9	Oxford City Council	Creating pedestrian free zones - increasing eco-friendly credentials whilst also developing outdoor spaces where social distancing is easier such as the outdoor markets or plazas.
10	Cambridge Western Australia	As part of their buy local campaign a town centre database has been created where each business details what it is currently offering - opened/ partially opened/ delivery or carry out/ allowing limited numbers in shop etc.
11	USA	Buy online, pick up kerbside options - especially for smaller shops - like a 'click and collect' for small independents
13	Sudbury	A page has been set up on Sudbury town council's website highlighting details of the businesses that are operating.

5. Funding for Delivery

Prior to the Covid-19 emergency, town centres were already experiencing an unprecedented period of decline and retrenchment. Since the beginning of this crisis, footfall and trade in town centres has all but collapsed causing huge damage to the economy. Town centres have been extensively impacted and the need for action is critical.

Many of the projects outlined in this report in Sections 3.3 (Recovery) and 3.4 (Transformation) will require funding beyond Council's resources, to allow them to progress. This reinforces the need for Government to provide direct intervention to support town centres and the retail sector during the Recovery and Transformation Stages, if we are to prevent their further demise.

Members should also be mindful of the recommendations within "Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan", approved by Council in May 2020, which was informed by extensive consultation and engagement with local businesses. Within this Recovery Plan, it too identified a range of **urgent strategic and significant funding needed for high streets and town centres** or they will struggle to recover and survive from the global pandemic. The Plan called upon Government to provide funding for the following key high-level interventions to support the retail sector:-

Reopening High Streets Safely Fund

A specific regional version of the above fund (similar to England) which is providing £50 million to councils to support the safe reopening of high streets and other commercial areas. Councils will also be able to use this money to develop local marketing campaigns to explain the changes to the public and reassure them that their high streets and other commercial areas are safe.

Such a fund would enable councils to deliver a range of practical measures aimed at achieving a safe, accessible, yet socially distant environment on our high streets for all users.

Future High Streets Fund

A regional version of the above fund (similar to England) to provide funding for Councils to transform and rejuvenate cities and towns through a range of capital infrastructure measures. These include investment in physical infrastructure, including improving public and other transport access, improving flow and circulation within a town / city centre, congestion-relieving infrastructure, and investment in land assembly and reconfiguring/redeveloping properties to unlock regeneration opportunities.

Moreover, in discussions with local town centre businesses, a number of other specific interventions were identified as necessary in supporting businesses through the recovery stage:-

- **Rates Holiday Extension**

We welcome the Executive's decision that retail, hospitality, tourism, leisure and childcare businesses will not have to pay rates this year.

- **Gaps in government support provision**

Provide support to retail businesses falling through the 'gaps' of current support e.g. commercial premises with a Total NAV > £51,000 and retailers with multiple premises.

- **Fixed costs**

Provide short-term financial support to businesses to assist with ongoing fixed costs during closure such as insurance and utility bills e.g. internet, electric, phones.

- **Rent Support**

Introduce a Rental Support Scheme for commercial rent premises by which government funds a percentage of the rental costs incurred.

- **Obsolete stock**

Provide capital funding support to address the issue of obsolete and time sensitive stock to enable payment to suppliers.

- **Implementing social distancing measures**

Provide funding assistance to support businesses with repurposing and modifying their premises post-crisis in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines (this is the focus of the DfC and DAERA applications)

- **Marketing Recovery Plan**

This document is a direct response to the need identified for a Marketing Recovery Plan aimed at reclaiming our Town Centres after the pandemic. Again, government support will be required to successfully implement the Plan.

It is imperative that the NI Executive is lobbied to provide a specific funding package to support the economic recovery and long term rejuvenation of our town centres and high streets. As we move from recovery stage into transformation stage, a new level of partnership between the NI Executive, Central Government and Councils will be required.

6. Conclusions

As lockdown restrictions ease in the retail sector, it is important we work in a co-ordinated fashion with our key stakeholders for implementation of the Town Centre Recovery Plan.

This Plan was written with input from our retail businesses and has been endorsed by town centre stakeholders, including our Town Centre Forums and Traders Associations. Where appropriate, we have drawn on best practice from other areas within Ireland, Great Britain and beyond.

6.1 Short-Term Recovery

The Short-Term Action Plan to assist the Recovery Phase, contained in Section 7 (overleaf), outlines a variety of priority projects under four thematic headings, as specified below;

- Capital Support
- Covid-19 Business Grant Programme
- Marketing and Communication
- Digitization

The actions identified are deliverable, provided Council is able to attract additional funding from the relevant Government Departments to support the delivery of such initiatives.

6.2 Medium/Long Term Transformation

Looking beyond the short-term and towards ‘transforming’ our towns and high streets to make them befitting for the 21st Century shopper, will require a significant funding package by Government, similar to the investment provided in England for example, through the Future High Streets Fund.

Only funding of this magnitude will make a difference in our towns and will help us move away from tinkering with minor schemes that provide a “sticking plaster approach” towards town centre development, when in fact properties need a major refit or in some cases raised to the ground and rebuilt as modern retail premises. Such sizable interventions would help breathe new life into our high streets by reconfiguring and re-imagining our town centre assets to make them attractive and fit for purpose today.

We can only do so, if Government provides a multi-million pound funding package to help us achieve this much desired aspiration for our towns in Mid Ulster, just like what was afforded to England.

It is incumbent upon us all to lobby Government, wherever possible, for such a strategic financial package to begin the process.

Aligned to this there is some preliminary work that could be done, if funding was available. This could start with work on a Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan along with a co-ordinated and ambitious marketing programme.

7. Short-Term Recovery Action Plan Recommendations

1. Capital Schemes

Actions

1.1 Repurposing Public Realm Spaces / Pavement Café Areas - Develop interventions in town centres focused on the Public Realm to enable better use of public spaces / pavement café areas.

1.2 Additional Cleansing and Planting within our Towns - Develop and seek new opportunities to secure funding for a cleansing and planting programme for Town Centres.

2. Covid-19 Business Grant Scheme

Actions

2.1 Covid-19 Business Grant Scheme - Develop a business support grant of up to £4,000 (*grant amount subject to change depending on funding received*) designed to support businesses to adapt to the new framework of Government guidelines in relation to Covid-19 which they must operate within. Outlined below are examples of works, where Council has sought funding from Government to assist businesses with;

- Modifying the internal layout of the business premises to ensure compliance with Covid19 social distancing protocols (eg, flexi-panels at counters, building/remodelling works, etc).
- Internal/external Covid19 signage to promote awareness of social distancing measures in place.
- Professional cleansing of business premises.

- Purchase of Covid19 items of equipment to allow the business to operate safely and provide reassurance to customers, eg, PPE (hand sanitisers, masks, gloves, visors, high-visibility vests for staff, etc), free-standing hand sanitiser stations, etc.
- External modifications such as awnings to protect customers who may have to queue to enter business premises, covered tables and chairs, outdoor heaters, etc.
- Internal/external shopper collection points to avoid customers having to fully enter the business premises.
- Equipment to allow widening of footpaths to support social distancing and the safe movement of people through our town centres such as pedestrian safety barriers.
- Professional expertise for the business eg, health & safety audits/assessments, drawings/plans required to modify the business to ensure Covid19 compliance etc.

3. Marketing and Communications

Actions

3.1 OpenForBusiness Video Messages – As traders return to the high streets, Council is inviting businesses to send us video messages to promote they're back in business and we will share these on our various social media channels – this is free service offered by Council during the 'Reopening Period' to encourage the public to 'shop local'.

3.2 'Confidence Mark' Window Stickers – Another initiative underway is providing a 'Confidence Mark' to businesses which have taken steps to keep their staff and customers safe. Businesses that show evidence of this (eg, erecting Covid-19 plastic screens, signage, hand sanitizing stations, etc) will be awarded a #ReconnectWithConfidence window sticker. This initiative is to build public confidence to return to our high streets to support local traders.

<p>3.3 Video to Promote the Reopening of Mid Ulster Towns and Businesses – A short professional video is being produced to promote the ‘Reopening of Mid Ulster Towns and Businesses’ and will be pushed out on social media in early July 2020 to tie in with the next phase of businesses reopening.</p>
<p>3.4 Business Storytelling – Through this professional video storytelling initiative, interest stories will be built around local businesses/owners and why their town is important to them to encourage the public to support them and ‘shop local’ as they return to the high street.</p>
<p>3.5 Mid Ulster Online Retail Pack - A useful online retail pack containing the latest government guidance for the retail sector and a suite of social distancing posters are available online for local traders to download and use.</p>
<p>3.6 Marketing Programme – As we progress through the Recovery Phase, there is a need to devise and develop a unique value marketing programme to position and support our town centres and produce updated collateral (eg, banners, promotional materials, etc).</p>
<p>4. Digitization</p>
<p>Actions</p>
<p>4.1 Online Retail Platform – Investigate and consider development of an online retail platform to provide a virtual ‘shop window’ for our 5 main towns and provide an avenue to promote rural businesses also.</p>
<p>4.2 Digital Retail Programme – Investigate and develop a support programme to enhance the digital skills for local retailers.</p>
<p>4.3 Mid Ulster Gift Card – Investigate the potential of designing and introducing a Mid Ulster District wide gift card to encourage the public to support local businesses by ‘spending local’ to keep money circulating within the district.</p>

8. Appendices

Best Practice Case Studies From Other Towns and Cities

Love Loughborough 6 Tips for Retailers for Safe Trading



6

TIPS for retailers for safe trading

Keep your customers safe while shopping in your store.

Here are some top tips from Love Loughborough to ensure you are trading safely during the COVID-19 outbreak.

- 

1 Outside the Store

Limit the number of entry / exit points to the store and reduce number of customers allowed in the store at any one time. Consider whether temporary barriers should be available to help manage queues with clear 2m markings. Place clear signage outside explaining social distancing measures. Encourage customers to shop alone.


- 

2 Inside the Store

Provide cleaning stations at the front of the store for customers to clean hands, trolleys and baskets. Identify regular clean key touch points e.g. fridge handles and disinfect regularly. Place signage inside the store to remind people about hygiene and social distancing.

Remember to regularly clean your point of sales systems in between employees.


- 

3 Social Distancing

Use floor markings inside to facilitate compliance with the social distancing advice of 2 metres. Place clear signage throughout the store reminding customers of the social distancing measures and asking them to follow these rules.



Consider one-way systems using floor markings and signage to highlight system and direction.





Staff Social Distancing

Erect physical barriers at till points using flexiplastic to provide a barrier for those working on the tills. These should be included in store cleaning programmes. Where till points are close together, consider closing every other till point.



Employees and customers should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently than normal.



Sickness

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.



PPE

Government advice is clear that PPE, including face-masks, is only necessary for those working in clinical situations. However some colleagues remain concerned and good practice is to supply masks or visors, and gloves to those who request them.



We can help you!

We can offer you:

- Social distancing floor vinyls on request
- Advice and support on trading safely
- Free promotion once able to trade
- Support managing outside space

Please email manager@loveloughborough.co.uk

For all official guidance on trading safely please go to [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

Love loughborough BID will help and support its member businesses to ensure that customers can safely visit Loughborough Town centre, ensuring that Government Guidelines are adhered to.

Appendix 2

Example of footpath signage and demarcation utilized in Denmark



Solihull Town Centre, England

Solihull Town Centre in England have released their blueprint for resilience for the “new” High street, utilising these very themes. A Plan Ahead Team (PAT) has been formed to develop the plan based on a series of questions - Where are we now? Where could we go? What is the preferred future? What will we do? When should we start and what are the latest government guidelines and what do they allow us to do? A visual has been created of what the new High street could look like –

THE NEW HIGH STREET 2020



Government policy towards social distancing in public places is creating the opportunity for a fresh look at the High Street.

More space for outdoor eating and pedestrians. Close parking on one side of the street and use the additional space to install outdoor seating with more planting. Green the old parking bays with artificial grass and bring back nature with temporary trees and planting.

Encourage walking and cycling

Install temporary cycle lanes using chalk road paint, sand filled cones and clear markings. Create walking trails with ground graphics showing time and distance (Leamington flowers).

Safe and welcoming

Install clear new signage with information towers. Install sanitisation points. Dress the streets to welcome people back. Use local designs to encourage social distancing. Create rainbow selfies to thank key workers and the NHS.



SAFE AND WELCOMING

Liverpool, England

Liverpool BID Company, Liverpool Chamber, Professional Liverpool and Liverpool City Council Public Health have worked together to devise advice to help get your businesses, venues and workforces ready. The one page guide focusses on the following 4 themes –

1. Review staff policies
2. Checking the venue/premises
3. Introduce physical distancing
4. Review surfaces & point of sale

The guide also highlights that communication is key for a smooth process in order to keep employees, customers and providers up to date with policies and measures in place to help provide reassurance, meet expectations, minimise anxiety and make a simple transition.

Getting your business ready

The essentials

Preparation is vital for a smooth transition from lockdown across the UK. Together, Liverpool BID Company, Liverpool Chamber, Professional Liverpool and Liverpool City Council Public Health have worked together to devise this advice to help you get your business, venues and workforce ready.

Key things to keep in mind:

The infection spreads by people and places
 Person to Person
 Person to Surface

3 elements to consider
 Physical distancing
 Surfaces
 Point of Sale

Communication is key for a smooth process in order to keep employees, customers and providers up to date with your policies and measures in place to help provide reassurance, meet expectations, minimise anxiety and make a simple transition.

Review your staff policies

*Staff and schedule plan
 Risk assessments
 Internal communications*

- Review safety processes and risk assessments in place for employees in line with national government guidance on COVID Secure business
- Create a staff plan to reflect working from home, return to work, fixed teams on shift patterns, flexible working and potential support to work from home
- Consider:
 - Prioritising working from home
 - Vulnerable staff
 - Safe commuting available
- Circulate new policies, health measures and timescales with staff and across the workplace
- Devise advice on safe commuting
- Order the necessary PPE for staff to undertake their work safely
- Check if your staff can apply to be tested. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

Check your venue

*Policies review
 SLA review
 Facility inspections*

Review:

- Internal policies to meet with landlord, managing agency and/or head office policies and guidance
- Heating, ventilation, air conditioning and mechanicals ahead of re-opening
- Fire/Life Safety systems
- SLA cleansing services and frequency
- Security measures for your office

Introduce physical distancing

*Health and safety checks
 Office traffic management
 Access points*

- Identify and control access points for staff, customers and providers, consider one way systems to allow for distancing
- Work with your local authority, BID and/or managing agency/landlord regarding support managing potential issues with queuing or access
- Display health and safety policies in place across the workspace
- Provide PPE as required by the risk assessment
- Encourage increasing the frequency of hand washing
- Limit face to face meetings and use alternative technology
- Apply social distancing on:
 - Office space
 - Separation panels, alternate seating spaces
 - Communal areas
 - Reduce maximum capacity allowed and introduce flexible time slot usage
 - Customer facing areas
 - Display social distancing spaces
 - Consider protective measures for employees where necessary

Review surfaces & point of sale

*Cleansing plan
 Sanitising availability
 Minimising risks*

- Review cleansing plan including potential new areas, hot spots, services, frequency and appropriate products recommended by [Public Health England](#)
- Disable touchscreens, consider low-touch or no-touch switches, doors, drawers and other fittings
- Remove high-touch shared tools such as whiteboard markers and remote controls
- Consider restocking with food/beverage single-serving items
- Provide sanitizer and cleansing products
- Implement a clean desk policy
- Identify safe storage areas for personal items
- If possible, designate a specific enclosed room to isolate any person identifying themselves with symptoms

This document is produced by: **PROFESSIONAL LIVERPOOL**

Please see current **UK Government's COVID-19 Secure Guidelines** available on [gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

[Shops](#) [Restaurants](#) [Offices](#) [Working from vehicles](#) [In other people's home](#) [Factories](#) [Construction and outdoor](#) [Labs](#)

Cork City, Ireland

Cork City Council Recovery Plan has been developed in two phases: -

- Phase 1 was launched on the 18th May 2020, which entailed a deep clean undertaken in the city centre with the Marina area pedestrianised.
 - Phase 2 will see further pedestrianisation of city centre streets, provision of additional cycling facilities, the creation of 'cycle and walk' facilities and 'click and collect' set down areas and increased priority at pedestrian crossings are amongst a range of proposals being suggested. When agreed, these changes will be implemented in the short and medium term and aim to mirror the timing of the Government's roadmap for lifting Covid-19 restrictions:
- Consideration is being given to creating a one- way pedestrian movement on certain streets in the City Centre.
 - The option of implementing and encouraging pedestrians to move on the right side of pedestrian bridges is being considered.
 - Individual requests to assign road space on streets and place structures on the street will be considered on receipt of the details.
 - New bike stands are to be located at 43 new locations around the city to encourage people to consider cycling.
 - Key cycling routes into the city are being reviewed to identify any improvement measures to cycling infrastructure that could be implemented.
 - Opportunities to convert sites to 'Park & Walk' facilities are being investigated. Any sites identified and deemed suitable, will have to be regularised and funded.
 - Provision of set down or 'click and collect' areas to facilitate businesses are being considered on an area by area basis. Factors to be considered in the assessment include current availability of set down or parking spaces, availability of space to either provide new or reallocate existing parking to set down/click & collect, the demand for these type of spaces, other users' needs including loading, disabled drivers etc.
 - The timings at pedestrian crossings on the city centre island have been altered to give increased priority to pedestrian movements at these locations, thus reducing waiting times and limiting the potential for queues to form.

Glasgow, Scotland

Glasgow is leading the field in investigating on how best to recover economically from the Covid 19 pandemic utilising the expertise of local universities. In Glasgow the Council is working with its partners to develop expert advice on how best the economy of Glasgow and the surrounding city-region can be renewed and rebuilt once it moves into the recovery phase.

The emergency COVID-19 Recovery Group is made up of members of the Glasgow Economic Leadership, the Glasgow Partnership for Economic Growth, the Glasgow Economic Commission, and some external advisors. Members include representatives from the public sector, academia, voluntary sector, tourism, retail, financial services and energy.

As part of the work for this recovery planning, the group will consider data on the potential economic impact of the pandemic; and what this impact will mean when taking action on issues such as investment, business support and employment.

At the end of this process, a report containing recommendations on the actions that will guide the economic recovery of the city and city region will be published.

MonsterHero Safari

MonsterHero Safari works by utilising contactless NFC technology and QR codes, without the need for players to download or sign up to anything. The safari consists of 10 vinyl window characters, monster superheroes this time, with embedded NFC tags that mostly independent and charity retailers, as well as cultural and public venues, will host. Families will be able to start the safari by tapping or scanning any of the characters and paying a nominal cost, with at least 50% of it going to NHS Charities Together.

For families on the safari they will be able engage with the experience by tapping each character's belly and learning their names, stories and powers. Younger children will delight in spotting the cute and colourful characters in window corners and older (and grown-up children) will engage by learning more about them. After spotting all 10 "MonsterHeroes", families will be rewarded with a free e-book about the characters first team-up adventure.

<https://monsterherosafari.com/>

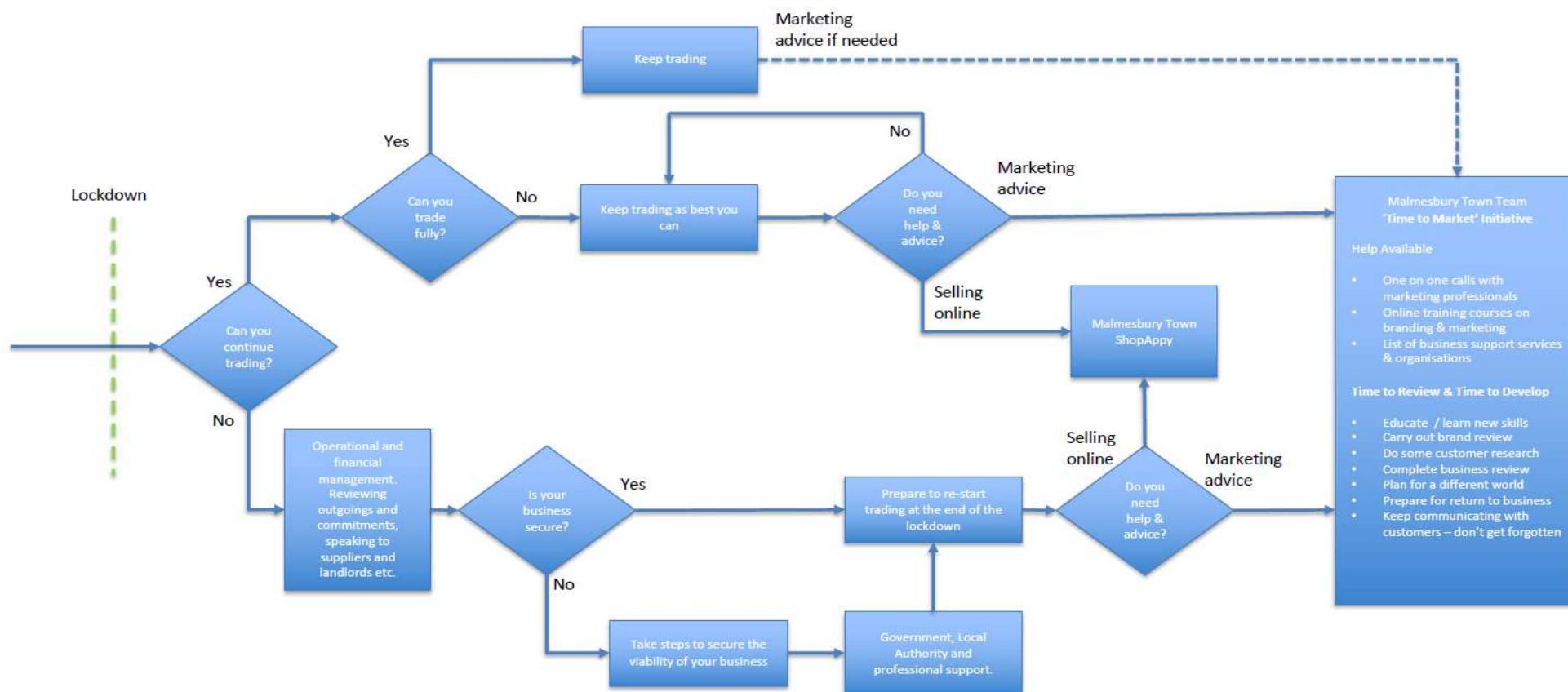


Appendix 8

Malmesbury, Wiltshire, England

Malmesbury Town Team

Time to Market Initiative



Oxford, England

Oxford City Council is considering a package of improvements to support social distancing. Roads could be closed, pavements widened, new one-way restrictions imposed and streets pedestrianised in a bold package of improvements.

The authority is exploring the opportunity to make what it calls “once in a generation” improvements to transport and public space in the city centre as part of measures to help Oxford recover from the **coronavirus** lockdown, and to better protect public health.

It hopes the measures will help kick start the city centre economy, encouraging people back in as the lockdown is progressively lifted. While some measures may be temporary, others could be retained, transforming the city centre, cutting traffic, improving air quality and making better use of public space.

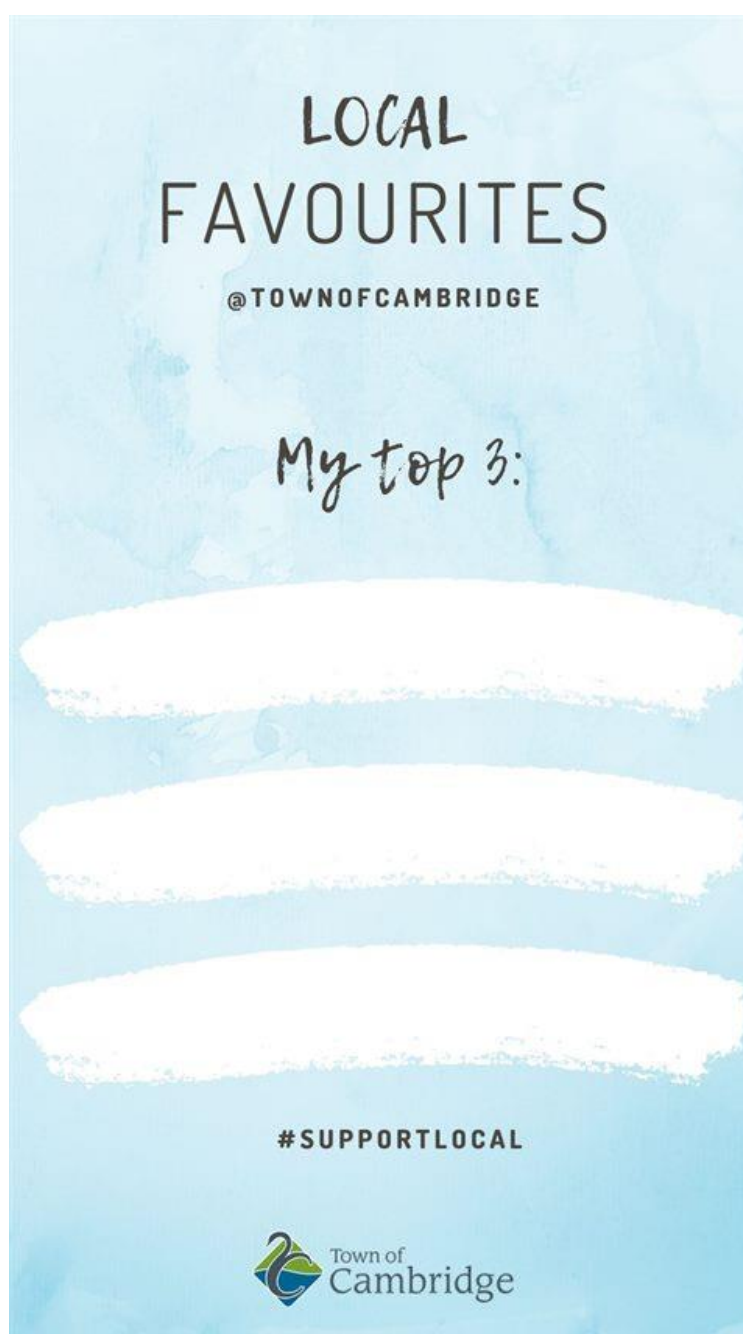
Ideas being explored include:

- Pedestrianising Broad Street with the removal of on-street parking bays, new seating and space for market stalls for displaced street traders and businesses limited by social distancing in their own shops.
- Plans for an outdoor café culture, with temporary tables and seating areas outside restaurants and takeaways to maintain capacity, while adhering to social distancing and more space for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Temporarily re-allocating road space through road closures, traffic light controlled one-way streets, and wider pavements, to allow people to walk and cycle safely into and around Oxford.
- Supporting and improving cycling for commuting and daily journeys through the creation of a segregated network of cycle routes, improved cycling infrastructure and more on-street cycle parking.
- Re-organising bus routes to create additional road space for pedestrians and cyclists
- Suspending all loading bays during business hours to increase space for pedestrians and cyclists.

Cambridge, Western Australia

Cambridge in Western Australia are encouraging people to **buy local first**.

A real-time local business directory has been developed to let everyone know what businesses are open in the Town to enable residents to support their local business community.



After COVID-19, is curbside delivery here to stay?

Appendix 11

The need for contactless fulfillment is spurring retailers of all sizes and categories to pursue new pickup options that could last.



Permission granted by Roadie, Heather Hughes

By [Caroline Jansen @jansen_caroline](#) Published 14 May 2020

After temporarily shutting their doors for months, many nonessential retailers have devised plans mapping out how they'll reopen. For some, this means a phased approach, which includes reducing store hours, limiting store traffic, implementing additional cleaning procedures and utilizing fulfillment services like curbside pickup. Though the latter has been around for years, the pandemic has created a surge in demand, from both retailers and consumers alike.

In [a report from July 2019](#), Coresight Research said mass merchants were among the most popular retailers to offer buy online, pickup in-store services. Of the consumers surveyed that were already using BOPIS, about 50% said they did so at Walmart in the past year and 34% said Target. Consumers at the time said they used the service to avoid shipping costs (64%), get their goods faster (37%) or to access promotional offers or discounts (36%).

But with the onset of COVID-19, many consumers and retailers are using it to avoid contact within stores, or where mandates have forced nonessential businesses to temporarily shutter, to serve as a fulfillment option for online orders.

Bed Bath & Beyond has [accelerated the rollout of BOPIS](#) and contactless, curbside delivery. The home retailer said in April that it converted around 25% of its stores in the U.S. and Canada into regional fulfillment centers "almost doubling its digital fulfillment capacity" to support a rise in online sales, with plans to expand the service to at least 200 additional stores. Bed Bath & Beyond newly introduced curbside pickup at its Harmon banner during the pandemic.

Players like Dick's Sporting Goods and Hudson's Bay are also leaning into the service now more than ever, but retail giants aren't the only ones touting the option. Smaller companies like b8ta and Casper have launched curbside pickup this month as they transition to opening their stores gradually.

The integration of the service is answering a need from consumers. Adobe Analytics recently found that buy online, pickup in-store orders surged 208% in April from the year-ago period. A Commerce Hub report emailed to Retail Dive also found that 59% of consumers are more likely to use curbside pickup following the coronavirus outbreak. And even when the pandemic subsides, 75% of consumers that subscribed to multiple delivery services, like Amazon Prime, said they would likely continue to opt for curbside delivery.

The discussion forum on Retail Wire asked its Brain Trust panel of retail experts the following questions:

- Has curbside pickup become a bigger opportunity amid the pandemic or do you see it as a temporary solution for most retailers?
- What hurdles may the expansion of curbside pickup face?

Here are seven of the most insightful comments from the discussion. Comments have been edited by Retail Dive for length and clarity.

A win-win for retailers and consumers, alike

Neil Saunders, Managing Director, Global Data: This is undoubtedly one of the trends that will stick post-virus. It is a win-win for consumers and retailers. From the shopper point of view, it is convenient and quick; from the retailer point of view, it is more cost-effective than delivering to home.

Target already had great success with its drive-up proposition before the crisis hit. More retailers now see those same benefits and will develop their own permanent propositions.

There is a hurdle of managing the volume at peak times, something even Target sometimes struggles with. You also need to have a suitable area for pickup to happen – preferably not right in front of the store entrance where customers are going in and out. Walmart has created separate areas for pickup which works well.

Curbside creates a higher level of convenience for shoppers

Ken Morris, Industry Thought Leader: Buy online and pickup at curb (BOPAC) is something consumers have fully embraced and will expect in the future. The service provides a higher level of convenience to the customer, the transaction can remain contactless; adding a level of safety many customers will expect and require. Retailers need to streamline the process with the use of beacons or license plate recognition, the customer experience can be streamlined to improve efficiency and eliminate customer wait times for BOPIS and BOPAC. Perhaps the store of the future is really an automated pick, pack and pickup facility leveraging micro-fulfillment instead of traditional point of sale.

The service is now a 'must have'

Lee Peterson, EVP Thought Leadership, Marketing, WD Partners: We did a study five years ago on BOPIS and we were shocked at the strength of the results. You can just multiply that by 10 now. It's no longer a "nice to have." Pickup at store (where the retailer puts the goods in the trunk, by the way) is now a "must have."

The service is here to stay after COVID-19 subsidies

Camille Schuster, President, Global Collaborations, Inc.: Curbside pickup is much more convenient for the consumer than having to go into the store for pickup, especially if there are a number of bags. For those who like shopping online or are really short on time, curbside pickup is a very desirable option. It is not for everyone because some consumers still want to shop in the store and some will want delivery to their home. However, curbside pickup is even more desirable for those fearing theft of packages left at the door. I say the option of curbside pickup is here to stay.

The pandemic accelerated what was likely already going to happen

Gene Detroyer, Professor, International Business, Guizhou University of Finance & Economics; Executive Director, Global Commerce Education: Curbside pickup has always been a big opportunity. The difference is that the opportunity was going to evolve slowly. Perhaps maximizing in the next five to 10 years.

The pandemic situation has accelerated that quickly. While there will be a drop-off after the pandemic slows, the levels will stay very high. It will not surprise me if the post-pandemic levels are double that of the pre-pandemic levels.

As people are forced to try new things that they never imagined trying, they discover the positives in many of these new behaviors. In this case, the positives are large and focus on trends that customers value most these days — time and convenience.

Potential drop off in impulse purchases

Kevin Graff, President, Graff Retail: Retailers should be careful about "pushing" curbside pickup as an option. Some customers may like it, but the drop off in impulse sales makes this likely just another part of the race to the bottom. The brand experience, discovery, personal connection and more all disappear. Curbside pickup turns the store into just a warehouse. It may be a bedfellow retailers need to live with ... but don't cozy up to it too much

Sudbury, England

The COVID-19 crisis, and the measures implemented to protect us all, have had an unprecedented impact on our communities and businesses.

Sudbury Town Council have set up a dedicated page on their website encouraging people “to shop small and support our local independent businesses - which has never been more important.

From high teas in a box, 'isolation packs' delivered to your door, to live online sale rails, our independent shops are offering some brilliantly inventive ways to bring the high street to you.”