

6: Resilient towns and town centres

The function of many high streets and towns is changing. We must create a new functionality looking at the totality of activity in these areas, not just retail.

The challenge

Leisure, shopping, more demanding shoppers, the growing importance of the internet, and the continuing rise of out of town shopping destinations all pose significant challenges to traditional high streets and towns centres. However, our high streets, towns and city centres provide vitally important functions, such as being a focal point for local communities, a hub for economic activity and job creation and retention, being nodal transport hubs, spaces for leisure and increasingly as places to live.

A number of local centres need to redefine or broaden their functions. Not everywhere can be a retail centre that draws people with national brands and so a more balanced view is required to encourage leisure use and office space alongside retail functions, as well as focusing on local community needs.

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What needs to be done?

A new 'network of networks' approach to town management

A broad range of constituents are required to address the challenges and opportunities in towns, creating a strong partnership between the commercial, public and social sectors. Local communities must be seen as a way of harnessing the energy of local traders, leaders and residents to enliven our town centres.

Recognising the need for a strong social economy

The social sector will be increasingly important for prosperity and success and making the connections between the towns and the wider community is increasingly important. The social sector is underdeveloped in many towns and public sector engagement has often not been as cohesive, joined up and as targeted as it could have been. As a starting point, understanding the relative strengths of community organisations within a place and their potential for collaboration is important.

Developing social-commercial relationships

These are underdeveloped in all towns and this reflects a wider challenge across the country. It is crucial to develop this relationship because as public sector resources are reduced these

sectors will need to enhance their roles if we are to create resilient towns. This is particularly important for

town centres, which in future will comprise a mix of commercial and social activity.

There is also the issue of the nature of the relationships between the commercial and social. The commercial sector currently has a more philanthropic relationship with the social sector rather than a practical and functional one based on collaborative working. The two need to come together to work practically with a relationship built upon common values. For example, a focus on supporting enterprise, employability, skills and health and wellbeing within the local community, something which is mutually beneficial to all.

The full Manifesto for Local Economies
can be viewed on the CLES website, [here](#).