

Understanding the challenges facing Tamworth town centre

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Tamworth – quick overview

- 15 miles north east of Birmingham, in Staffordshire
- Small urban authority area, 12 miles squared, Town Centre is heart of Borough.
- Population of c. 75,000 with catchment on borders of c.110,000
- Market Town, dating back to Norman conquest with Motte and Bailey Castle.
- Significant residential expansion since the mid 1960's, particularly from Birmingham.
- Strong connectivity to wider midlands, M6, M42, M1, A5, A38, two main trainlines.

Key challenges facing Tamworth (pre covid)

- **High levels** of vacant properties (14.2%) – future uncertain
- **Reduced footfall** – 44% reduction between 2008 and 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Unbalanced** housing, retail and office accommodation offer – above average number of retail units, below average number of offices and homes.
- **Limited** night time economy: food, drink and evening leisure offer
- General perception that the Town is a dated, unsafe and unattractive **environment**.
- Lack of engagement and ownership by business community

Key challenges facing Tamworth (post covid)

- Sustained reduced footfall – 23% reduction since Jan 2019 levels
- Increased and sustained poor perception of environment, crime and anti social behaviour.
- Large, dominant 1980's Shopping Centre with majority of vacancies
- Growth and change in large edge of centre retail offer.

Future High Street Fund – key drivers

- Reduce retail floorspace
- Promote Heritage – connect three core buildings – Medieval Castle, Town Hall and St Editha's Church.
- Transformational change – make an impact
- Focus on demographic use changes and improving footfall.

Future High Street Fund

- Former Co-op Building
 - 90,000 sqft vacant retail space
 - 1960s building / Front local listed
 - New College
 - Managed Workspace (Council Operated)
- St Editha's Square Improvements



Future High Street Fund

Middle Entry Shopping Centre

- Vacancy Issues
- Covered Mall / Restricted Views
- Acquire part of Shopping Centre
- Remove roof & bridge links
- Provide flexible space managed by Council / links to College



Nationwide Building Society

- Relocation to Council owned property
- Improve gateway to Castle with new bridge
- Improvements to listed buildings



View looking north towards the Town Hall with the footbridge over the Castle

Economic Growth Adviser Support

Huge, generational physical changes coming – how can local businesses be supported to address barriers and take advantage?

- Review of baseline and existing data
- Walk round with key officers to understand the place
- Detailed engagement and consultation – over 50 businesses and stakeholders

Key findings

- Perceived lack of visibility of Councillors with regards Town Centre issues and engagement.
- Need for stronger, clearer communication particularly around what was happening with regards physical changes on the high street.
- Low use of digital and social media by local operators.
- Need for an improved night time economy with a more ambitious food and drink experience
- More ambitious market offer
- Public transport access and amenity in the town centre.
- Prohibitive business operating costs
- Challenges with low footfall

Key priorities

- Supporting and encouraging aspirational local independent business (both physical and digital)
- Transforming Tamworth's food, drink and cultural offer to diversify away from retail and create a stronger night time economy.
- Putting great experiences at the heart of the Town Centre by holding more events. There should play to Tamworth's strengths and rich heritage, and encourage a wider catchment including visitors to Ventura retail Park to come into Town.

Roadmap

Designed By RACHAEL @ Make.a.Mark.Design



Current activity being undertaken

- Increased events – Castle Fest – three week celebration linked to start of Commonwealth Games – concerts, sports activities, community engagement.
- New website and engagement opportunities explaining changes coming to Town Centre
- Street market Expansion – 3 large food festivals as an extension to existing market to prove demand and viability for new food operators.
- Support to 2 new food operators into the Town Centre, 1 in a Council building other through advice.
- Creation and launch of a 3 year business support programme for Town Centre business to support them to grow and adapt, focus on independents.
- Heritage activities in castle grounds focused on engagement with archaeology
- Increased Councillor profile and involvement in town centre activity.
- Focus on a council led responsible officers group covering a variety of town centre issues from licensing through to safety and crime.

Next steps being developed

- Feasibility studies to :
 - Understand how to best market the wider place for visitors and investment
 - Understand the role of tourism in Tamworth and what this should look like.
- Support for voluntary groups to increase capacity and social action:
 - Heritage groups
 - Business groups
 - Voluntary sector organisations
 - Civic societies

Lessons learned

- Focus on what you can do to make the most impact – this might not be everything you want to do
- Regular engagement and consultation in various form with stakeholders either formal and informal.
- Transparency and communication – be clear on the why and objectives
- Commitment to chosen activity – give confidence.