

Unlocking Your Place Potential – Report and Feedback



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About the visit and this report

The High Streets Task Force visited Commercial Road, Portsmouth on 17 January 2022 to undertake an *Unlocking Your Place Potential* diagnostic visit. Dr Jo Morrison was the High Streets Task Force Expert undertaking the visit.

The attendees representing Portsmouth can be found in Appendix 1.

The purpose of the visit was to diagnose the main barrier to your transformation. In other words, what problem, if not resolved now, will make it difficult for the town to change. To do this the Expert wanted to understand more about the challenges facing the town, your plans for transformation, meet key stakeholders, ask questions and tour the town.

As a result of the diagnostic process, the Expert has identified collaborative working as the main barrier to transformation in Portsmouth.

The rest of this report identifies the strengths of the town, the main barrier to transformation the Expert found, as well as clear recommendations the Local Authority and partners can action now to accelerate the transformation process. The report ends with a list of High Streets Task Force Products that the Expert has prescribed.

On behalf of the High Streets Task Force, may I take this opportunity to thank attendees who gave up their time to attend the meeting, and who contributed to a frank and positive discussion. Thank you to Steve Curtis for organising the session and Rebecca Alexander who led an informative and well-planned town tour.

From reading the feedback from the visit, and this report, I can see you have a lot going for you in Portsmouth City Centre – and many strengths both in the town and in your people. The High Streets Task Force is here to help you build on those strengths, and I hope you find it useful.



Matt Colledge

High Streets Task Force Project Director (interim)

Commercial Road, Portsmouth – Strengths

- ✓ Array of ambitious plans in the city centre
- ✓ Strong transport links
- ✓ Proximity to Victoria Park
- ✓ Proximity to seafront
- ✓ Weekly outdoor market (Thursday-Saturday)
- ✓ Mix of retail, hospitality and some consumer services
- ✓ Cascades shopping centre
- ✓ Guildhall and library
- ✓ Pedestrianised and accessible public realm
- ✓ Evidence of some partnership working
- ✓ Evidence of some community engagement
- ✓ Nearby residential including significant student accommodation

Portsmouth is an ambitious waterfront city, with remarkable heritage and countryside right on its doorstep. It enjoys a relatively large catchment within walking distance of the city centre and good rail and bus links. Its Commercial Road pedestrianised high street is the spine that connects Victoria Park, the railway station and the civic and cultural centre with city centre north (the site of a major regeneration plan). There is a large amount of development projects planned and being delivered in the area which, in combination, will lead to significant change over the next few years. In summary, the city centre has many strengths and opportunities to transform into a destination desired by residents, workers and visitors.

4Rs framework and our method

The aim of the Unlocking Your Place Potential workshop is for our High Streets Task Force Experts to identify the key barrier(s) to the improvement of your high street and recommend an appropriate strategic response. To enable our experts to do this in an evidence-based way, the High Streets Task Force uses the '4Rs' framework.

Research has identified 237 factors that impact on the success of the high street. However, it is too overwhelming to think of all these at once, so we have developed the '4Rs' framework to provide some structure to the incredibly complex practice of place transformation. Without a framework, it is easy to be drawn into so much detail that you cannot see the big picture.

When you simplify the process of renewal, the reasons why so many regeneration plans do not result in the changes people expect fall into four categories:

- The problems facing the centre were not accurately identified
- The plans were good but not enough changed
- The place changed but people's perceptions didn't
- There were fundamental issues with governance or the spatial layout of the place.

We looked at these problems and identified four strategies to address them: *Repositioning*, *Reinventing*, *Rebranding*, and *Restructuring*. So, the framework distinguishes between the processes of analysis and decision making (repositioning), effecting change (reinventing), communication (rebranding), and governance/spatial planning (restructuring).

More detail on each of the '4Rs' is set out in Figure 1 below.

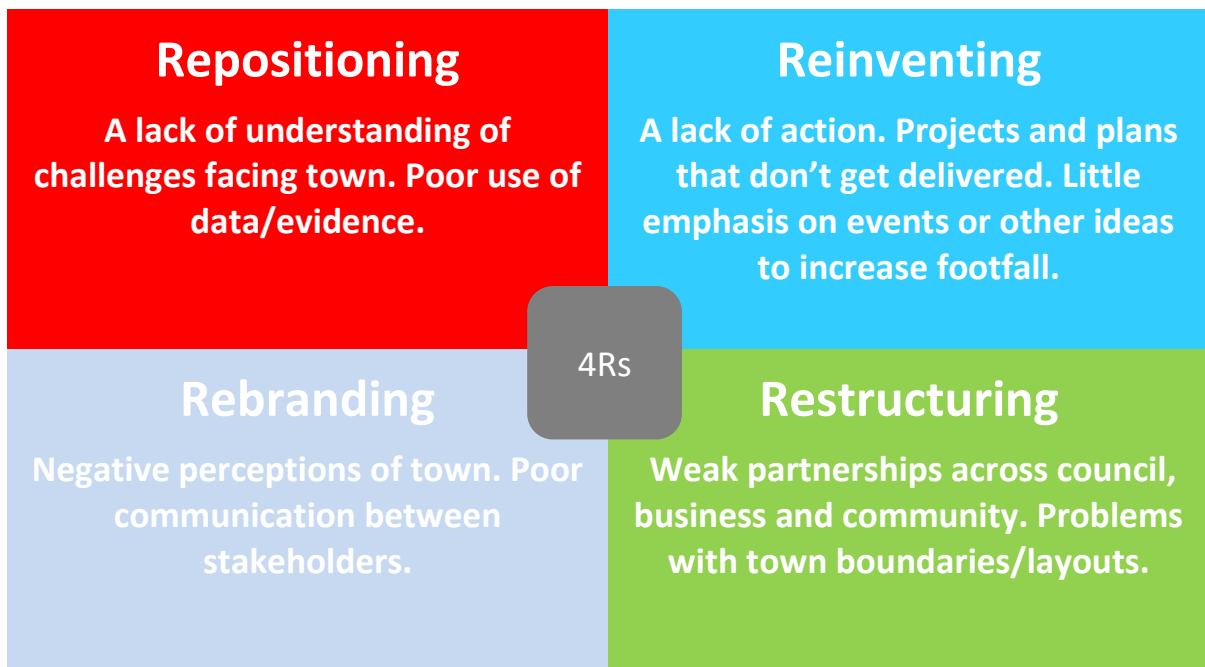


Figure 1: The 4Rs framework

Applying the 4Rs to Commercial Road

Although the town and its people have many strengths, we did identify a number of weaknesses. We have grouped these using the 4Rs framework – see below.

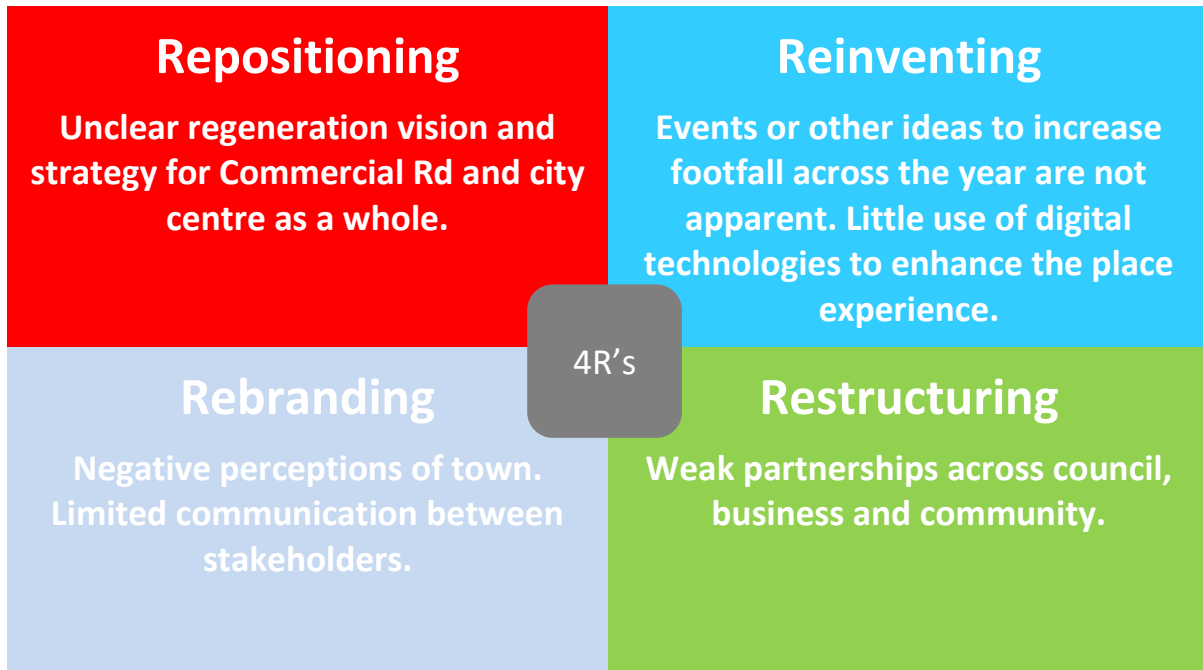


Figure 2: Applying the 4Rs Framework to Commercial Road

We used all the information we had to identify which of the descriptions above fitted the evidence we had collected. We collected this evidence from looking at your Expression of Interest to the Future High Streets Fund, the Unlocking Your Place Potential visit, including our meeting and discussions, and the in-person town tour. We also included the information we found out about Portsmouth from our desk research.

We then grouped each piece of evidence under the 4R headings of Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding and Restructuring. You can see our working on the Fishbone Sheet included in this report.

By classifying every clue, we could see how these are grouped and where Commercial Road, Portsmouth is facing major barriers. This then allowed us to recommend suitable strategies to overcome these (see Figure 2). These strategies are *ways of working*, rather than ‘magic bullets’ relating to any particular intervention in your town. As mentioned at the start of the Unlocking Your Place Potential visit, you are the experts in Portsmouth.

You can see the major barriers to your transformation in the next section.

Fishbone Analysis

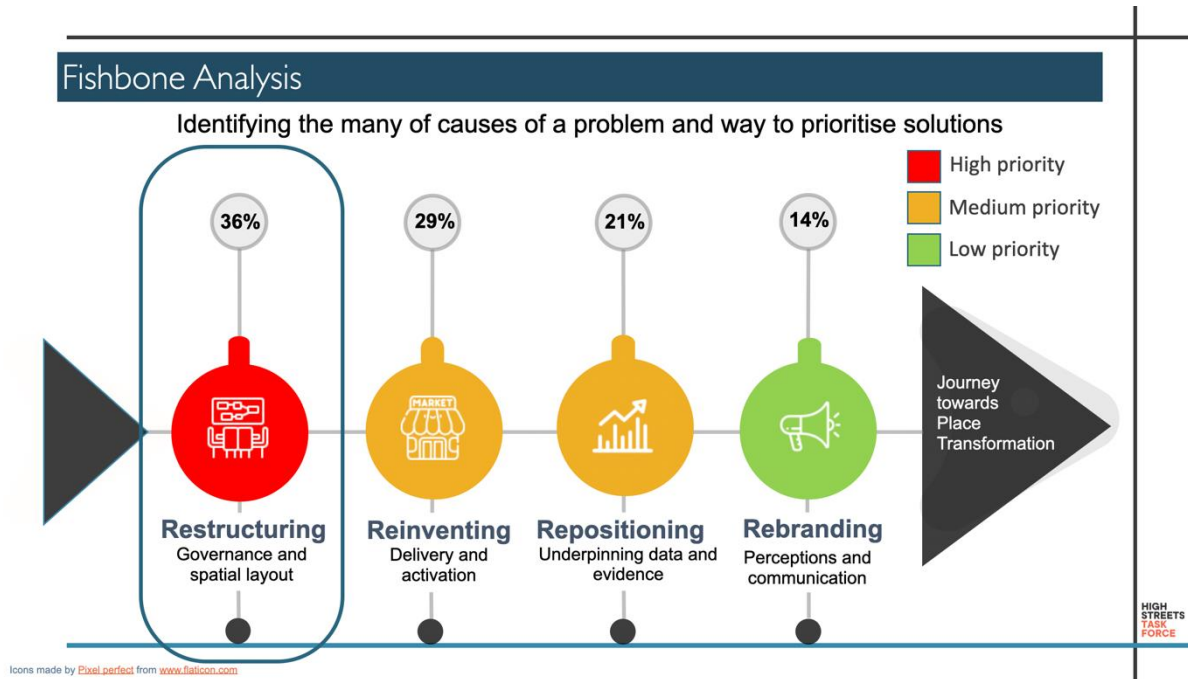


Figure 3: Fishbone Analysis

Diagnosis of main barrier to transformation

As a result of the diagnostic process, the Experts have identified multi-stakeholder collaborative working as the main barrier to transformation in Commercial Road, Portsmouth.

During the town visit, it was clear there is a wealth of regeneration activity and planning happening in and around the Commercial Road area, however, the activities are largely independent of each other, often undertaken by developers in isolation (i.e. not part of an overarching masterplan) and so lead to a fragmented and fluid environment.

Commercial Road is the 'spine' of the area, connecting all of the developments, and it is ultimately central to the human experience of living/working and moving through the locale –both now and in the future. As such, we believe there is a real opportunity for Portsmouth City Council to improve its collaborative working on Commercial Road by forging stronger partnerships and communications with business leaders and the wider community, e.g. the University, residents and civil society. This will enable a shared vision to be developed, which will provide consistency and inform future plans.

Stronger partnerships between council, businesses and the wider community will also build more capacity for making change in the city centre. A shared and more coordinated approach will ensure improved impact from investment and interventions, whether initially they are led by the public, private or voluntary sector.

It was clear from our meeting that the council has a great deal of enthusiasm for city centre transformation and many ideas about how to achieve it. However, at the meeting there were few attendees from outside of the council - suggesting a lack of collaborative working between multiple stakeholders. More frequent and open communication is needed, and we recommend restructuring your governance systems to facilitate a team approach to transformation, with council, business and the community working together to create and achieve the vision for the city centre.

Recommendations

To improve collaborative working, we are recommending a primary strategy of restructuring to consolidate your approach to place leadership. We understand it is not always easy to change cultures, structures and behaviours to work in a more collaborative way, so we are giving you immediate recommendations that if you adopt, will lead to some quick improvements.

1. Share the final version of this report with everyone that attended the Unlocking Your Place Potential meeting – as well as a wider range of key partners such as local resident representatives, major local employers (e.g. MoD and NHS), local businesses, cultural organisations and civil society groups.
2. Arrange an away day with a wide range of public sector, business and community leaders to review challenges facing the city centre and the feedback from the UYPP visit - consider how these may inform future coordination of place management partnership. Here, you could draw upon some of the participants at the workshop delivered to inform your successful Future of the High Street application.
3. Form a new and comprehensive partnership structure to shape the strategy for the centre, oversee projects and coordinate plans and activity.
4. Your new partnership structure should then identify who will own or action the areas for improvement identified in your Fishbone Analysis. You may want to structure working groups around the 4Rs – or it may be that your new group coordinates and ensures all the actions have a home and there is regular monitoring and reporting on progress.

The amount of new and planned city centre residential dwellings is sizeable and will impact upon the demands and experience of the area. A further recommendation is that the views and feedback of existing local residents and new local residents are regularly sought in order to help shape and validate the range of improvement plans over time.

Our final recommendation is that the work and resulting outputs of the new partnership are published regularly and widely via a range of media. Doing so would help to foster an inclusive culture for the city centre communities.

We hope these recommendations are useful. As we explained in the Unlocking Your Place Potential visit, you are the experts in Portsmouth City Centre, not us. Nevertheless, we have experience of working with many towns and cities around the country that face similar challenges – so when we undertake a diagnostic visit we are well trained in looking for strengths and weaknesses in the town's offer, as well as the structures and processes that manage and change the town.

High Streets Task Force Product Prescription

Based on our recommendations, we would like to offer you the following products. This has been decided after considering your key barriers to transformation and what we have concluded as the best way to help you achieve your transformation goals.

High Streets Task Force Products Prescribed:

Product prescribed	Rationale
<p>Mentor support</p>	<p>Commercial Rd is at the heart of the city centre and is the critical link between the north and south areas. There is a large amount of regeneration activity underway in the city centre, undertaken variously by Portsmouth City Council, private investors and partnerships. At the same time, despite its central location, the existing perception and experience of the of Commercial Road is poor.</p> <p>There is tremendous opportunity to create a vibrant, multi-dimensional and connected city centre. To do so requires an inclusive place leadership/governance structure.</p> <p>A mentor would be able to broker and mediate meetings with leaders from Portsmouth City Council and other stakeholders, developing a written partnership agreement for joint working.</p>
<p>Developing a Shared Vision</p>	<p>We have recommended that following the above Mentor support, Portsmouth city centre would benefit from a Developing a Shared Vision workshop. The above Mentor visit will be an opportunity to further discuss this product with you, to ensure that it is something that you will benefit from. If during the Mentor visit the need for the workshop is agreed, arrangements will begin to put this in place, and further guidance supplied.</p>

Online learning/resources

The HSTF has a range of helpful online learning resources to help you achieve change. In reviewing the Fishbone analysis, we recommend the following two online courses:

[Restructuring: building capacity, partnerships and assessing the need for spatial change](#)

[Repositioning: developing collaborative, inspiring visions that achieve change](#)

You can find more resources on the High Streets Task Force website:

<https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/>

Next steps:

Please liaise with your Operations contact to make arrangements for the delivery of the next stage of your support. The Operation team are available to assist with any queries relating to the delivery of the above support, so please do not hesitate to get in touch if any aspect is unclear. More information about all of these products can be found on the HSTF website [here](#).

Appendix 1 – List of town attendees

Steve Curtis, Bid Manager, Portsmouth City Council

Rebecca Alexander, City Development Place & Markets Officer, Portsmouth City Council

Ian Maguire, Assistant Director of Planning and Economic Growth, Portsmouth City Council

Mark Pembleton, Economic Growth Manager, Portsmouth City Council

Claire Looney, Partnership & Commissioning Manager for Culture, Leisure & Regulatory Services, Portsmouth City Council

Sarah Willett, Project Manager for City Centre North Development, Portsmouth City Council

Caroline Hopper, Business Assurance Lead - leading on Safer Streets, Portsmouth City Council

Anne Cains, Project Manager for City Centre North Development, Portsmouth City Council

Jason White, Comms & Engagement Officer Major Projects, Portsmouth City Council

Les Pink, CHG Holdings

Andrew Philip, Manager, Cascades Shopping Centre

Chris Worrall, Innovation Director, University of Portsmouth

Tim Clark, Agent, Vail Williams