

## Economic Development, Culture & Leisure Scrutiny Panel - Scoping paper

Proposed scrutiny topic 2023/24:

*To look at our town centres and high streets to establish what may be done to improve them, including dealing with empty properties and cultural aspects.*

The consideration may include Palmerston Road, Commercial Road, High Street Cosham, Fratton Road and North End.

The scope does not include the cleanliness of the streetscape as this is outside the scope of this Scrutiny Panel. Street cleansing is undertaken by Colas for the Council under the PFI contract and would comprise a separate scrutiny topic.

This paper is a joint enterprise between Culture and Leisure and Regeneration directorates.

### *Current position on UK town centres and high streets*

Traditionally the 'High Street' is any British town or city that is normally the 'central retail thoroughfare' with a mix of shops going back 150 years.<sup>1</sup> The growth of out of town, outlet and suburban centres has shifted the demand of the traditional high street, together with the pull of online retail and the post pandemic effects. The future of high streets therefore has moved away from retail dominance to health, wellness and socialising with others. Government policy to improve the high street includes the Future High Street Fund, Levelling Up Fund and Heritage Action Zones.

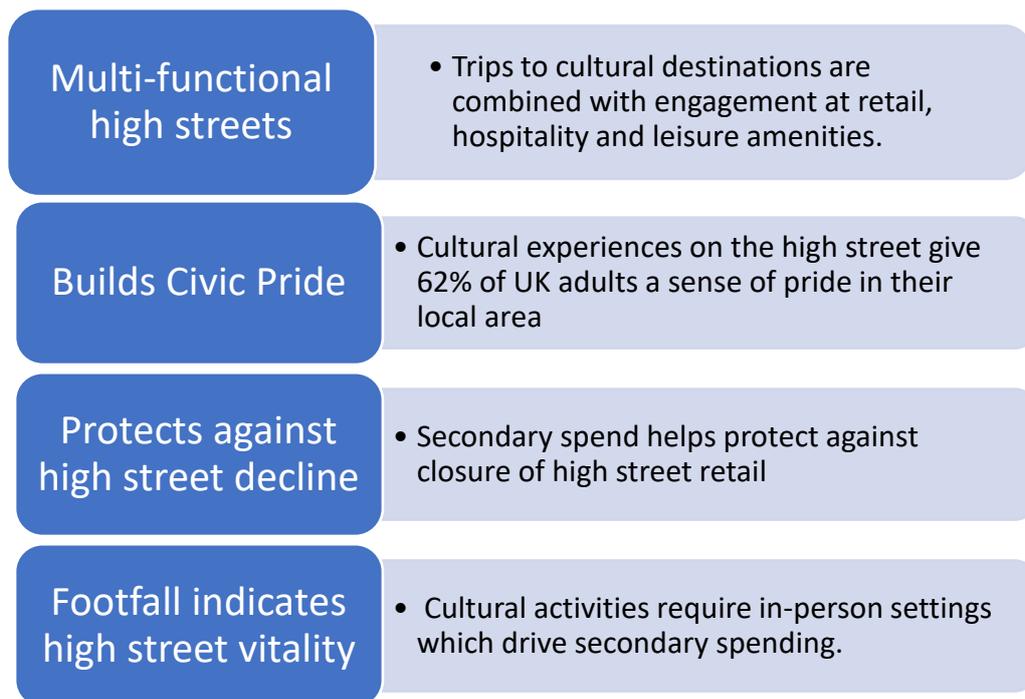
High streets are multi-functional spaces and footfall and spending is not entirely dependent on retail. Theatres, events, art galleries and museums have the potential to attract both locals and visitors from further afield who commit to secondary spend.

75% of buildings used by organisations funded by Arts Council England are on or within a 5 minute walk of a high street.<sup>2</sup> The effect of a high street presence can be summarised as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> [What Happens to the High Street? \(retailresearch.org\)](https://www.retailresearch.org/)

<sup>2</sup> [A High Street Renaissance | Arts Council England](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news-and-events/a-high-street-renaissance)



A broader cultural offering can also widen the appeal of the high street to younger and diverse audiences. If high streets remain solely about financial transactions, the threat from online retail to close down the high street remains greater and the remaining offer has a more challenging struggle to survive. By diversifying the reasons to visit the high street, to health and wellbeing and socialising, for example, a more comprehensive offer will keep visitors longer in the space.

Cultural offering in city centres helps build civic pride which in turn develops a sense of place, belonging and ownership. This can take the form of activities with other residents, thereby developing a sense of community and reducing social isolation.

Responses to a Deltapoll undertaken by BOP Consulting on behalf of Arts Council England in 2021, shows that the appetite for the UK high street remains healthy with the majority of respondents wanting to spend the same amount of time at the high street / town centre as pre Covid. Moreover the desire for cultural engagement in the high street is high with 85% wanting the same or more culture and leisure opportunities.<sup>3</sup> 70% of respondents agree or strongly agree that cultural opportunities on the high street make local areas better places to live. Preferences for such opportunities included pop-ups, cinema, museum, theatre and libraries.

### **Business rates**

Business rates are an annual property tax charged on most non-domestic properties such as shops, offices and public houses. Business rates are set by central government which sets the annual business rates multiplier, which is applied to the rateable value. Portsmouth City Council does not have a role in setting the business rates multiplier or in the property valuation to determine the rateable value. The local authority issues the business rates bill and is responsible for the collection and recovery of the property tax, with half of the income from business rates being paid by the local authority to central government.

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<sup>3</sup> [A High Street Renaissance | Arts Council England](#)

## Evidential examples from across the UK

Bristol	<i>See No Evil</i> - a street art project to transform an unloved street thoroughfare into a tourist attraction. <sup>4</sup>
Blackpool	<i>Blackpool Treasure Trove</i> saw 7 pop up museums across the city, with 4 co-produced with young people. <sup>5</sup>
Stoke on Trent	<i>Community Maker</i> created a space for people to get together, eat, talk and make ceramic items - and develop a community through these activities. Participants said the group helped grow positive impact of their perception of the town. <sup>6</sup>
Ipswich	<i>Mapping Suffolk's Stories</i> project took place whilst The Hold, a new £20 million visitor attraction was constructed. The Hold is a new heritage centre on Ipswich waterfront which holds the county archive collection together with gallery, café and education room. <i>Mapping Suffolk's Stories</i> was a co-production project, with community groups and schools exploring local heritage and groups could share their work through mini exhibitions and pop-ups. <sup>7</sup>
Gosport	In partnership with Hampshire Cultural Trust, Gosport Borough Council has secured funding of £1.78m for a High Street Heritage Action Zone <sup>8</sup> (HSHAZ) programme. This includes several projects to transform unused high street buildings to establish cultural and commercial opportunities. This is part of a broader Heritage Action Zone managed by the Planning Service.  Examples of the HSHAZ include:  <i>Gosport Pop</i> - a temporary pop up museum in a vacant property on the high street (whilst Gosport Museum is closed for development).  <i>Imagination Refinery</i> - comprising maker spaces and business incubator spaces on the high street. This offers multiple spaces for small start ups to work together, enabled by community and supporting growth. The Imagination Refinery is an initiative by The Makers Guild, who were also part of the collaboration with Portsmouth Creates in developing the We Create Market in 2020. <sup>9</sup>
Glasgow	<i>Paisley: The Secret Collection</i> is situated on a UK high street and is the first publicly accessible museum store.

<sup>4</sup> [See No Evil 2! – Bristol Temple Quarter](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Blackpool's Treasure Trove | Blackpool's Treasure Trove is a two year project exploring Blackpool's entertainment industry from 1950 to the present day. \(wordpress.com\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [People, culture and place: the role of culture in placemaking \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [People, culture and place: the role of culture in placemaking \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [HSHAZ - Gosport Heritage Action Zone \(gosporthaz.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Home | Imagination Refinery](#)

	This allows members of the public to view thousands of items from the museum collections that have not been on display at the museum or seen by the general public for many years. <sup>10</sup>
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## *Culture & Leisure in Portsmouth*

Culture brings colour and personality and an increased sense of uniqueness of place. It can help to reach more audiences and spread benefits equitably, using social capital to deliver social value. Effective cultural regeneration needs to start with the cultural social capital as the catalyst for deliver regeneration.

One of the big challenges with the city centre is to encourage residents to feel ownership. Culture helps communication and engages people through relevance. Working with residents in co-production models helps people generally feel more positive when things are being done with them.

The Renaissance of Portsmouth Harbour as part of the Millennium Project, which delivered Gunwharf Quays and the Spinnaker Tower, is an example of a long-term project to regenerate a significant area of the city. The scheme also demonstrated the need for a long-term vision, with the original concept formulated 10 years before the final element opened.

The ultimate aim has to be to help deliver the aspirations of the Imagine Portsmouth vision<sup>11</sup> - healthy and happy, culture and creativity, thriving economy, lifelong learning, green city and easy travel together with the Council's corporate plan to stand up for Portsmouth<sup>12</sup>. Whilst improvements such as those below are possible, the Council owns relatively little of the property in the 'high streets' of Portsmouth which affects the level of influence it has for change.

By the term 'culture-led regeneration', the Council is looking at culture as a catalyst for improvement. This could be a large investment such as a new museum, which is the cornerstone or flagship of a much wider development, or a major anniversary might spark a landmark event, the need for a new development or inspire overarching branding. An example of this would be the city's Second World War role leading to the opening of the D-Day Museum in 1984 and its redevelopment as The D-Day Story in 2018, which in turn attracted the international-level D-Day 75 events and Landing Craft Tank 7074 to the city. The LCT has brought many opportunities for engaging with the city, including hosting choral events enabled by its unique acoustics.

The city centre has huge potential for regeneration, and not only is culture ideal capital for inspiring and driving change, but in many cases it is already doing so. The Guildhall is a high profile performance venue in a listed, civic building, currently engaging in a project 'The Basement' to bring opportunities for young people to engage with culture and the arts<sup>13</sup>. Guildhall Square itself plays host to many events throughout the year, from Remembrance Sunday to the Ice Rink every Christmas. In addition, the Guildhall Square includes the Big Screen, which provides large scale advertising for the many culture and leisure offers in the city at a competitive rate. The New Theatre Royal is a short distance away in Guildhall Walk. Culture & Leisure Services have been delivering the National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project to reimagine Victoria Park, which is a valuable green space in the heart of the city. The project is aimed at engaging with local communities,

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<sup>10</sup> [Paisley: The Secret Collection - museum store - Paisley.is](#)

<sup>11</sup> [The Vision - Imagine Portsmouth](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Corporate Plan - Our plan for recovery and renewal 2021/22 \(portsmouth.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Guildhall Renaissance | Portsmouth Guildhall](#)

including providing a new community hub. The Park has also played host to We Shine events in 2021 and 2022, together with accessible opera and family fun days at the park. There is also opportunity for individuals and groups to get involved in wildlife spotting and community gardening. There has also been an increase in street art in the city centre in the past few years.

## *Suggested areas of interest*

### **Portsmouth Creates**

Portsmouth Creates was established in 2019 as an independent cultural organisation for the city. During the Covid-19 pandemic Portsmouth Creates delivered the hugely successful We Create markets, and for the past two years have organised the We Shine light festival, which in 2022 attracted over 90,000 people. Supported by PCC, the University of Portsmouth, Arts Council England and Victorious Festival, Portsmouth Creates is a good example of partnership working and the capacity of the arts to bring regeneration and resident engagement. Portsmouth Creates is also a vital organisation in providing a cultural and creative input to partner organisations such as Shaping Portsmouth and The Hive.

Please contact **Claire Looney** for more information and suggested witnesses from Portsmouth Creates.

### **Hotwalls Studios**

The Hotwalls Studios are a landmark development situated in Old Portsmouth. Operational since 2016, the 13 studios provide an environment in which start up artists and makers can develop their businesses and engage with the public. The site also includes a café, The Canteen, and the Round Tower which is used as a flexible exhibition, workshop and event space. Artists and makers must be open to the public for a minimum of 30 hours per week and must be open on Open Studios days which are on the third Sunday of every month. The Hotwalls therefore meets the need for affordable studio space in a flexible and supported environment to enable creative ventures to grow. It provides a cultural hub for the creative community by showcasing high quality work and offering a creative events programme, enabling the residents of Portsmouth to experience the creative industries.

Please contact **Claire Looney** for more information and suggested witnesses from Hotwalls Studios.

### **Libraries Service**

This service manages nine libraries across different communities.

**Southsea Library** is situated directly in Palmerston Road shopping area and functions as a pedestrian corridor between Palmerston and Marmion Roads. By opening 7 days a week, the library supports the retailers of Palmerston Road. Whilst there was some initial resistance to a library on Palmerston Road, within six months of the library opening the footfall to the area increased by 5%. The library has an active Friends Group and offers many activities varying from Scrabble Club to Slow Sew and Create and Chatter Craft.

**Cosham Library** is sited adjacent to Cosham High Street. The library is open 6 days a week and re-opened in July 2021 following major refurbishment, including a new IT suite.

**North End Library** is sited at Gladys Avenue, North End, at the main roundabout in the commercial thoroughfare. Open 6 days a week, this is the most significant library in the north of the city and the most successful in terms of numbers of children participating and completing the annual summer reading challenge. It is a key community resource in the area, celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> year but would benefit from investment to improve the appearance of the library.

The service also has a **mobile library**, which has a weekly timetable of stops, mainly in the north of the city and including two supermarket car parks.

In March 2023, funding was confirmed from **Arts Council England Libraries Improvement Fund**. This funding will cover two capital projects:

- The purchase of electronic, environmentally sustainable tuk-tuks which will support community engagement activity across the city;
- Office pods will be installed in two city libraries to provide further facilities.

Please contact **David Percival** for more information and suggested witnesses from the Library Service.

### **Tourism and Visitor Services**

The Tourism and Visitor Economy Strategy was adopted by the Council in December 2022.<sup>14</sup> The strategy has 3 key objectives:

- To grow the profile of Portsmouth as a national brand;
- To increase the value of the visitor economy to Portsmouth;
- To work with partners to manage and develop the destination offer.

To grow the brand, the service designs and delivers year round marketing campaigns, for example, 'Portsmouth, Put The Wind In Your Sails'. The advantage of digital campaigns is that both scalable and affordable and can be easily 'tweaked' and updated. Profile raising takes place both locally, regionally and nationally with both digital marketing and marketing on display from Portsmouth to London. By leveraging the benefits to the city of major events - such as Victorious Festival- further promotion of the city takes place, with the economic impact of Victorious being valued at £15m.<sup>15</sup>

The service takes steps to increase the value of the visitor economy by managing the Visit Portsmouth webpages (which offer free online listing) together with cost effective printed publications. Dedicated tourist hubs are situated at The Hard and at the D Day Story on the seafront and the service also provides a tourist guiding offer.

Strong relationships exist between the service and partners such as Visit Britain, Tourism South East, Portsmouth International Port, Brittany Ferries and Southampton Airport. Together with the Port and Shaping Portsmouth, the service is working on the Cruise Passenger Programme to increase visits and spend at local tourism businesses.

Destination Network meetings regularly take place, to allow all tourism partners in the city to be kept updated and share developments. Partners are essential to create a stronger and broader

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<sup>14</sup> [24.444 Tourism Strategy appenidx 1.indd \(portsmouth.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Victorious Festival: Evidencing economic and wider impacts - Bluegrass \(bluegrassresearch.co.uk\)](#)

Portsmouth offer, engaging with University of Portsmouth, England's Coast, Visit Hampshire, Visit Isle of Wight, Discover Gosport and Solent LEP.

Please contact **Jane Singh** for further information and suggested witnesses from the partner listing.

## Events

The Grimsey Review 2020 emphasises the importance of the contribution of the local authority events team in managing a comprehensive programme of events which drives footfall to local high streets.<sup>16</sup>

The Events Service support the delivery of over 350 events annually which can range from small-scale events through to those with 80,000 footfall. The offering benefits both residents and visitors to the city, raises the profile of the city and the opportunity for secondary spend. High profile events include those such as: Kite Festival, Southsea Food Festival, Great South Run, Christmas Light Switch On, Bandstand (including Bandstand on Tour) and new for this year, the Formula Kite European Championships (which makes its Olympic debut in 2024). The service is starting to plan in partnership with the Museums Service for the commemorative events for D Day 80 in 2024.

Many events also provide the opportunity to express the diversity of our city and celebrate all cultures and faiths, including through twinning and civic events.

The service also provide a comprehensive sponsorship package to promote opportunities on offer to local businesses, as to support the provision of events external sponsorship is key, which can include business to business links.

### Southsea Food Festival

The 2023 festival saw an increased footfall to the Palmerston Road, Southsea area on its only day of delivery this year, exceeded the record footfall achieved in 2022 (8% increase on best day 2022). For the first time in its 15<sup>th</sup> year the Food Festival, a regular event focused on celebrating food and supporting local traders and businesses was impacted by poor weather (high winds) resulting in the cancellation of day one.

More positively, trader numbers saw over 50 traders showing further increase on previous years and the footprint extended along Avenue De Caen to bring in the close areas of the open green areas to provide a more spacious feel to the market. This also supported avoiding challenges around high winds from Osborne Road and allowed a more open feel to the market which welcomed over 40% of

Social media was effectively used to engage residents and visitors, using existing channels (PCC Channels, Invest Portsmouth, Rediscover Portsmouth, Visit Portsmouth) alongside a bespoke Facebook page and partner channels to reach a PO1-PO6 market and opening wider visitor groups.

A PR partnership with Wave 105, Hampshire Fare, Express FM and Hovertravel promoted the event and sponsorship from LEXUS secured the event.



<sup>16</sup> [GrimseyReview2.pdf \(vanishinghighstreet.com\)](#)

PO1-PO6 traders, in addition to support from local traders and hospitality outlets who engaged from their existing footprints (including street licences) to benefit from the additional footfall.

#### Eat the Island

This networking event was created to meet a need from hospitality and tourism businesses and act as a soft launch for the Southsea Food Festival. This was delivered in partnership with Hampshire Fare, who are an engaged partner through Regeneration's Business South partnership. Initially intended to provide 10 stands and engage 30-50 individuals, 164 pre registrations were secured, with 92 attendees from 35 named businesses.

Positive media support was secured for the event and evaluations continued the theme [Eat the Island launched to celebrate Portsmouth's 'incredible foodie vibe'](#)

Evaluations confirmed 83% of attendees were satisfied or very satisfied with the event and significant partnership working is being confirmed by attendees, including Queens Hotel promotion and partnership with new partners.

Please contact **Lydia Mellor** for more information and suggested witnesses in connection with the Events Service, together with **Rebecca Alexander** and **Bill Sainsbury** from Economic Growth service.

#### Portsmouth Museums

The Museums Strategy, adopted by the Council in March 2022<sup>17</sup> identifies a new story for Portsmouth Museums, one that identifies '*Portsmouthness*': the qualities, characteristics and distinctiveness of the city. This will engage residents in the history of Portsmouth as *their* history and provide an opportunity for co-production, working with communities, going forward. Subject to capital funding, external funding and other intersecting projects (e.g. Civic Offices Regeneration), there is an opportunity to relocate the Portsmouth Museum and Art Gallery to a high street location as part of wider regeneration aims. Consideration is also simultaneously being given to redeveloping the existing site and creating new storage and display space for the city's extensive collections. The Museum and Art Gallery also cares for over 10,000 pieces of art, many of national significance, and there is an aspiration to create spaces where these artworks can be more effectively displayed for members of the public to enjoy.

During the covid pandemic, Portsmouth Museums needed to find a way to support the community and develop a new audience through new avenues of engagement. An opportunity arose to use an empty shop window in Cascades which featured a mix of unusual objects, to capture the attention of passers-by, and those who would not normally visit museums.

A community artist was commissioned for a shop window display, 'A World of Wonder', which opened two weeks before the second lockdown (November 2020). CCTV captured 66,000 passing footfall by February 2021 and remained occupied until September 2021. A QR code as part of the display led to 202 page views, with visitors spending 65% more time on the page than other Portsmouth Museum pages. There was also an opportunity for members of the public to send in paper butterflies and moths which were added to the display and led to further invitations for the Natural History team to engage at other events. Between April and August 2021, 700 information sheets were taken away by visitors to the window.

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<sup>17</sup> [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 8th March, 2022, 1.00 pm Portsmouth City Council](#)



In addition to World of Wonder, Beaulieu Motor Museum have been making use of one of the empty units in Cascades for pop-up exhibitions over the past 2 years.

Further pop up 'mini' museums are planned; the ambition is for these to go into all our libraries (including our high street libraries) on a yearly exhibition cycle. The pop up exhibition theme for 2024 will be D Day 80, which to date is confirmed for Cosham Library to launch in January, 2024. Community engagement will take place to plan what the mini-installation includes. The service are currently looking to a local company to fund the pop-ups for the remaining libraries.

Culture and Leisure are also meeting with Historic England in autumn 2023 to discuss a report from the Historic Places Panel visit which includes consideration of high streets and Commercial Road.

Please contact **Cathy Hakes** for more information and suggested witnesses from Portsmouth Museums.

## *Economic Development (Regeneration)*

### **Future High Streets**

The Development Team in regeneration are leading on the delivery of the Future High Streets Programme. This includes a regeneration project currently focused around City Centre North and Central (fountain). Further information can be found here [Home - Portsmouth City Centre](#)

City Centre North will evolve into the most sustainable city district in the UK, renowned for being an inclusive, biodiverse and eco-friendly place for local communities and visitors.

A beautiful and purposefully designed open green space is at the heart of the plans for the north of the city centre. The proposed development will support the revitalisation of the whole city centre and the council's aspirations for sustainable communities, better connectivity, and greener travel.

It will knit into existing communities, provide substantial green open space for all and create new walking and cycling routes between neighbourhoods.

These improvements will complement plans already in place as part of the [South East Hampshire Rapid Transit scheme](#) ( [South East Hampshire Rapid Transit \(sehrt.org.uk\)](http://sehrt.org.uk) ) and the [Portsmouth transport strategy project](#) ( [Portsmouth Transport Strategy 2021-2038](#) ).

Our Places and Markets team are working with the Future High Streets Taskforce, on a series of recommendations and improvements to help reinvigorate the high street, particularly in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Further information on the pop up shops and markets work can be obtained from **Rebecca Alexander**.

Work includes support to businesses through [Rediscover Portsmouth](#) and the free to access (residents and business) website where businesses (both independents and chains) can promote their work and specific offers. This website is targeted at residents but has general web access. An online option has been added to support home based businesses.

The council has also secured funding from the Future High Streets Fund, Safer Streets Fund and Safety of Women at Night Fund to make improvements to areas around Commercial Road.

These improvements aim to create new welcoming outside spaces where people can sit, relax and play, as well as take steps to tackle crime and combat violence against women and girls in public spaces.

For additional information about the Safer streets projects please contact **Caroline Hopper** from the Strategy team.

Further plans focus on the Guildhall area but following an unsuccessful Levelling Up (Round 2) Bid, these are moving forward with alternative strategies to support the development of the area.

### **Market Strategy**

The Council's current Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy [Portsmouths economic development and regeneration strategy 2019-2026](#) will go through review in 23/24 to accommodate the impact of Covid and to recognise the development of key strategic documents including the City Vision [The Vision - Imagine Portsmouth](#) produced by residents and businesses to plan the future of the city and its aspirations.

As part of this work, a practical Markets Strategy is being produced to focus development around our market traders and street licences work and to increase accessibility for start up and small businesses to our high street areas and shopping districts as part of our wider refreshment and regeneration of these spaces.

### **Footfall reporting**

Springboard footfall reports are in place for key shopping districts to allow a review of footfall comparison to pre covid. Reports show footfall reaching pre covid level, particularly around Commercial Road which allows a focus on dwelling and engagement.

### **Property Ownership**

A focus for all high streets is often around ownership and occupancy with most UK high streets showing significant increases in empty shops.

For Commercial Road the city benefits from Cascades and under their new ownership in 2022, empty shop projects have grown to increase engagement around the centre (see above for creative examples) and the management have engaged with Portsmouth Creates around potential Christmas Market locations and pop up shop options to increase occupancy and ensure diverse engagement across the site. Occupancy is good in the centre, with clear strategies for addressing issues, but the

site is dominated by an empty Marks and Spencer unit, which whilst unused is still under contract with the company and therefore unavailable for rent. We would suggest that the **Cascades Centre Manager** is called as a witness.

On Commercial Road, there is no Council ownership. An attempt to purchase central sites was disturbed by a vibrant and competitive market leading the Council to withdraw to allow fresh retailers. This has resulted in the recent opening of 'Wendy's', as a premium fast food outlet opening by the Fountain which we anticipate will increase footfall to that area, together with supporting the Council's refreshment of the area as we move to anticipated demolition of key buildings (potential planning for Jubilee Place - old Debenhams building).

Ownership of other buildings in this area is not always clear. Extensive engagement during Covid to support the Covid Heroes project (vinyls celebrating essential workers) saw poor engagement from landlords when these were able to be identified. A small number of properties remain empty with no engagement but due to private ownership this remains beyond our control.

Fratton Bridge Centre has been subject to extensive work from the Development Team in regeneration, including successful traffic management road closures to trial work supported by Fratton Big Local and resident partners. Plans for redevelopment of this area can be discussed with **Oliver Willcocks**.