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MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny District Centres Subgroup

Date: Thursday, 28 November 2019
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: Council Antechamber - Level 2, Town Hall Extension

This is a **second supplementary agenda** containing additional information about the business of the meeting that was not available when the agenda was published

Access to the Council Antechamber

Public access to the Council Antechamber is on Level 2 of the Town Hall Extension, using the lift or stairs in the lobby of the Mount Street entrance to the Extension. That lobby can also be reached from the St. Peter's Square entrance and from Library Walk. **There is no public access from the Lloyd Street entrances of the Extension.**

Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny District Centres Subgroup

Councillors - Shilton Godwin (Chair), Hughes, Kirkpatrick, Madeleine Monaghan and Stanton

Second Supplementary Agenda

2. **Withington District Centre** 3 - 62
Report of the Institute of Place Management

To receive the Vital and Viable Withington report and to consider how the Our Manchester Approach was used in relation to Withington District Centre.

Further Information

For help, advice and information about this meeting please contact the Committee Officer:

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This supplementary agenda was issued on **Tuesday, 26 November 2019** by the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit, Manchester City Council, Level 3, Town Hall Extension (Lloyd Street Elevation), Manchester M60 2LA

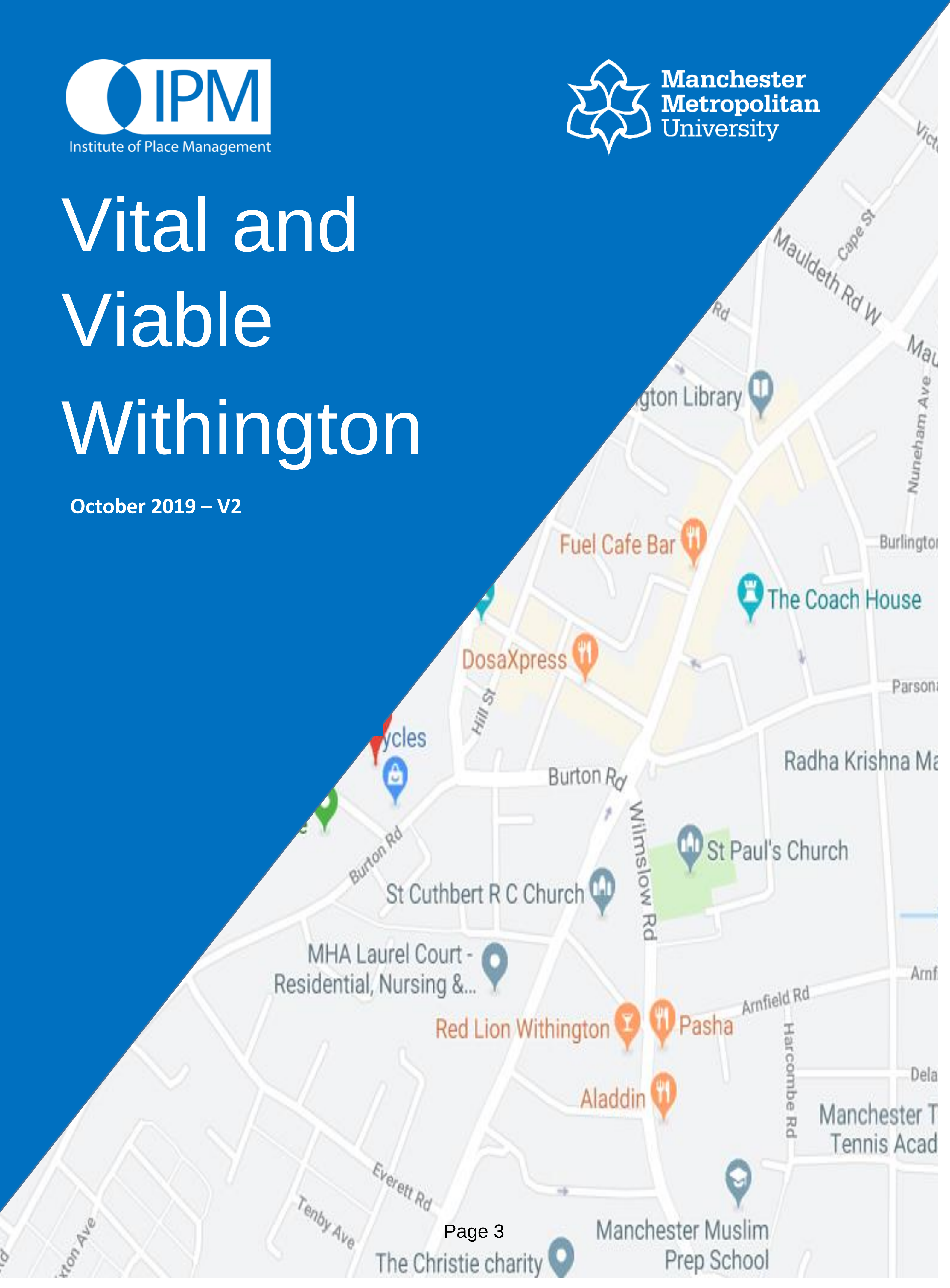
Item 2

Institute of Place Management

Manchester Metropolitan University

Vital and Viable Withington

October 2019 – V2



Foreword

There are a number of structural developments currently impacting traditional retail and district centres in the UK, such as the growth in out-of-town and online retailing. However, whilst much research focuses on reversing the fortunes of city and town centres, the project on which this report is based revolves around better understanding how to improve the vitality and viability of Manchester's smaller district centres- including Withington.

Based on secondary data, a primary audit of Withington, meetings with Withington's Neighbourhood Manager and community partnership, a workshop with 40 local stakeholders, and footfall data, this report explores Withington's activity patterns, in relation to the IPM's 'footfall signature types'. It also outlines the centre's key strengths and weaknesses by drawing upon the IPM's 'Top 25 Factors'. It concludes by detailing what stakeholders in Withington can do going forwards to improve its vitality and viability, in relation to the IPM's '4Rs' framework.

About the Institute of Place Management

The Institute of Place Management is the professional body for people involved in making, maintaining and marketing places. As part of Manchester Metropolitan University, the Institute of Place Management is dedicated to supporting people who serve places, providing them with unbiased research, continuing professional development, qualifications, conferences, events and networking opportunities.

Copyright information

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Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres: Withington Report

1. Introduction

The Institute of Place Management (IPM) based at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Manchester City Council (MCC) are currently leading a project to improve the vitality and viability of district centers across Manchester. Footfall data is also being provided by project partners Springboard to track the activity levels of 10 district centres in Manchester. And so, for the first time, activity and performance across the whole city can be analysed. *The Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres* project, which began in 2016 and will continue into 2019, has the following key aims:

1) To inform the Terms of Reference and Work Programme of the District Centres Subgroup.

2) To develop a long-term vision and strategy for neighbourhood centres across Manchester, in full partnership with MCC and district centre stakeholders, that is rigorous and based upon the latest academic and performance evidence.

This work will, in turn, have a measurable impact upon:

a) The sustainability of Manchester's existing centres as places that serve the needs of their catchment communities; and

b) The liveability of neighbourhoods that are currently, or at risk of being, underserved in terms of access to district centre services.

As part of the project, the IPM and MCC are also working more closely with a range of stakeholders (including residents, councillors, local traders, neighbourhood teams, and other key individuals) in a number of centres. This approach is to help foster stakeholder collaboration, and ensures any interventions that have most impact on vitality and viability are prioritised and can be implemented locally. Withington is one of these centres. This report details the outcomes of our work with Withington, including analysing its current strengths and weaknesses, in addition to looking at what stakeholders in the centre might be able to do to improve its vitality and viability.

The report is structured as follows:

- It first details the issues currently impacting traditional retail centres in the UK.
- Second, it discusses the challenges of defining what a district centre is, before more specifically addressing Manchester's district centres.
- Third, the report details key findings stemming from the IPM's *High Street UK 2020* (HSUK2020) and *Bringing Big Data to Small Users* (BDSU) projects, which underpin our analysis of Withington's performance.

(the above sections are useful for providing a context and background to the analysis of Withington which follows)

- Fourth, the key insights about Withington emerging from the *Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres* project are outlined, drawing on centre audits, footfall data, meetings with the neighbourhood team, and a workshop with local stakeholders.

- The report concludes by proposing several recommendations regarding how Withington's vitality and viability can be enhanced, in relation to the IPM's '4Rs' framework (*reinventing*, *repositioning*, *rebranding*, *restructuring*).

2. Challenges impacting traditional retail centres

As many of our traditional retail centres and high streets have been market places for around a thousand years, it is perhaps easy to think that they are places of constancy and that the challenges they are facing today are unprecedented. It is certainly the case that the challenges are significant; but traditional retail centres have always faced change, and the majority have proved to be resilient in their response. Many have overcome disruptive change from industrial development, the impact of new transport modes, and rapid population growth. Though most city, town, and district centres are still retail centres, they are also increasingly looking to their other traditional roles as places of entertainment and leisure, as civic, educational and service centres, of employment and business, and as places to live, to ensure they have a sustainable future.

There are a number of critical trends that are currently impacting traditional retail centres in the UK. Population growth in the country as a whole is significant, having risen from 52.4 million in 1960 to just over 66 million in 2017, and forecast to reach 72.7 million by 2040 (ONS, 2018). This creates demand for the services that town centres offer; but some of that demand is now being met elsewhere. Since the 1970s, we have seen much retail expenditure head to out of town locations. Despite various attempts by central government to restrict new development of out of town centres through planning policy, some 4.6 million square metres of new out of town floorspace was built in the first decade of this century. This, coupled with changes to our shopping habits, has contributed to a developing issue of over-supply which we are now beginning to see affect our traditional centres, leading to vacant primarily A1 usage units (average GB retail vacancy fell from 14% in 2012 to 11% in 2017, though is now beginning to rise again - Local Data Company, 2017). This recent trend is likely to continue over the coming years, with retail vacancy increasing, simultaneous with a fall in demand for this space. As a result, reduction in space or a change in usage are the likely outcomes.

In terms of changing shopping habits, as well as out of town retailing attracting expenditure away from town centres, the UK is also the world-leader in adapting to online retail. According to the Centre for Retail Research (2016), some 16.8% of UK retail spend was online in 2016. The growth in this has been very rapid. In 2002 it was just 1.6%, and is forecast to reach 21.5% in 2018. It is perhaps no surprise, therefore, that the share of retail expenditure in town centres which fell below half in 2000, continues to decrease, having fallen below 40% in 2014 (Parliament, 2014). The growth of online retailing has been having a profound impact on the presence of multiple retailers in town centres. Various commentators have suggested that a multiple retailer needed to be in over 250 town centres in 2000 to have a national presence but can now exist in just 70.

Away from pure retail, other impacts are also being felt on the High Street. Around one fifth of all pubs in the UK have closed since 2010 (CVS, 2017); and though the rate of closure appears to have slowed, there are concerns about the impact the recent business rate revaluation will have on many pubs. And it is a combination of these factors that have driven a general rise in retail vacancy across the UK.

Despite vacancy levels beginning to rise over the last twelve months, the fall in retail vacancy between 2012 and 2017 suggests some cause for optimism. Branded coffee shops continue to expand across the UK, growing by 6.9% in 2016 alone (Allegra, 2016) and, on current trends, will overtake the number of pubs by 2030. This has contributed to an overall growth in leisure in town centres in 2016, and likewise service retailing is increasing (hairdressers, nail bars and the like) as is convenience retailing (Local Data Company, 2016).

Whilst much focus has been assigned to reversing the fortunes of city and town centres, surrounding these larger places are smaller district centres like Withington, on which local communities rely. And it is these smaller centres at the centre of the Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres project to which we now turn our attention.

3. District centres

3.1. What are district centres?

District centres lie at the heart of the Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres project. Yet understanding what a district centre actually is has always been a difficult task for planners and academics. This is since they “generally lack the historical associations of market towns, and often have a less clearly defined and established role” (DoE, 1998: 5). Usually, researchers based their assumptions on subjective sub-divisions of these centres, taking into account various measures (e.g. business trade, retail turnover, size, catchment, merchandise, uses, assortment, and floorspace) (Guy, 1998; Reynolds and Schiller, 1992). Schiller and Jarrett (1985) argued that district centres are less specialised than regional and town centres, as they tend to be the main weekly shopping centres that supply convenience and durable goods. Whilst the diversity of these centres led Reynolds and Schiller (1992) to classify them into minor and major, depending on the number of variety stores in the centres. However, with the closure of many shops due to the effects of retail decentralisation, many district centres declined to a residual status serving less mobile local residents, and offering a top-up or emergency shopping function for the remainder (Thomas and Bromley, 1995).

In PPG6, a district centre was defined as "groups of shops, separate from the town centre, usually containing at least one food supermarket or superstore, and non-retail services such as banks, building societies and restaurants" (DoE, 1998: 18; also see DoE, 1993, 1996). However, this definition can also apply to large food stores with other unit shops and in-store services that can potentially perform the role of a district centre, even though these were not recognised as such (Lowe, 1998). One significant outcome of such policies, was the advent of the corporate food store in district centres, which was considered by some academics as a vital anchor in maintaining the quality and range of shopping in district centres (Thomas and Bromley, 2002, 2003; Wrigley and Dolega, 2011).

In the NPPF, a minor adjustment was made to the existing PPG6 definition, highlighting the importance of local public facilities (such as a library) in district centres, and the social community focus that these centres provide (DCLG, 2012; Gransby, 1988). However, the ambivalence of what a district centre is, and how it differs from the traditional town centre, still remains, as the report clearly states that:

> "A town centre is an area defined on the local authority's proposal map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance".

What is not under question from the above, is the importance of district centres in planning policies and sustainable development. District centres, just as any other type of centre, need to steer away from mono-functional, retail-oriented representations, and emerge as multi-functional ones, supporting leisure and recreation, employment, tourism, heritage, culture, housing, employment, education, health and wellbeing, as well as retail (Millington et al., 2015), thus becoming resilient to anticipated future economic changes (DCLG, 2012). As such, there is a clear requirement for centres to adapt to ensure that they meet this challenge.

3.2. Manchester's district centres

In the City of Manchester, planning and strategic approaches towards district centres have mostly followed the directives of national planning policy, such as PPS4 and NPPF. Core strategies for the City have identified that district centres provide "the focus for local accessible shopping facilities and a full range of community services, with the City's neighbourhood centres primarily serving local residents' day to day needs" (MCC, 2009). Whereas economic development remained the main driver behind district centre strategies, other documents stressed the importance of a sense of community, and the creation of successful neighbourhoods that attract and retain people from diverse communities, and in which people feel secure and supported. The majority of Manchester's residents seem to have similar opinions about what a district centre should be:

> "Regarding the role of district centres, a very high percentage (90%) of respondents stated that local areas should provide nearby residents with the core goods and services to support a sustainable centre. This would help reduce the use of transport, alleviating the need for unnecessary travel to shops and services further afield. Also, assist in the building and expansion of local communities, to support the City Council's Community Strategy" (MCC, 2009: 3–4).

The Core Strategy (see MCC, 2012) identified 17 district centres in Manchester (including Withington), which varied in the quality and range of facilities and services they provided; but comparison goods functions were associated with bigger district centres (e.g. Chorlton, Wythenshawe, and Cheetham Hill). Furthermore, there is also a clear distinction between district centres led by convenience retail anchors such as superstores (e.g. Hulme and Sportcity), and those that have a broader range of retailers and services, making them more attuned to the traditional notion of a district centre. At that point, different retail functions, as well as public investment for health and community centres, were proposed as areas for improving the City's centres, with an attention on community empowerment and inclusion. Manchester's Community Strategy documents have also been consistent with these directives; however, they have also emphasised how place-specific factors, such as cleanliness, safety, green spaces, and public services (i.e. libraries, sports, and cultural facilities), are critical to the fabric of successful district centres. Manchester City Centre and its district centres are places to shop, work, eat, drink, enjoy leisure activities, access services, and increasingly to live. They are also a key economic asset, with the City Centre recognised as the primary economic driver for the City Region. Essential to delivering Manchester's community strategy vision of a successful city that attracts and retains successful people, is ensuring that everyone has access to a range of shops, community facilities, services, leisure, and culture opportunities that meet their needs in a sustainable way. Accessible district centres and local centres are thus important in creating a sense of place and focus, and in turn to creating neighbourhoods of choice.

4. HSUK2020 project: Factors impacting vitality and viability

There are two main research projects conducted by the IPM underpinning the Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres project, and the analysis of the centres within it, the first of these being High Street UK 2020 (HSUK2020). And this project will now be briefly outlined.

In 1994, the government commissioned the publication of a research report called *Vital and Viable Town Centres: Meeting the Challenge* (HMSO, 1994). This report led to changes in national planning policy, which then placed a clear focus on town centres first for future development. The report defined vitality and viability in respect of town centres. They are both concerned with life: the first (vitality) being about whether a centre feels lively and the second (viability) whether a centre has the capacity to attract the investment needed, not only to maintain the fabric of the place, but also to allow for adaptation to changing circumstances. The terms vitality and viability were used in national planning policy, used by local authorities and local partnerships, and much discussed by researchers. A wide range of initiatives were also undertaken in town centres across the country with the aim of promoting vitality and viability.

In 2014, as part of the ESRC-supported HSUK2020 project, the IPM undertook a comprehensive literature review to identify factors contributing to centre vitality and viability (see Parker *et al.*, 2017). This produced some 160 factors and these were discussed with a number of stakeholders from ten UK town centres who were partners in the project. This meeting identified additional factors, some of which were found in the wider literature, and some of which had not yet been researched. In total, the study identified 201 factors that impact on town centre vitality and viability. However, as they stood they had no sense of priority or importance. And so 22 leading town centre experts drawn from practitioners and researchers were asked to rank them using two scales: how much a factor impacted on town centre vitality and viability, and how much local control could be exercised over a factor. This then led to the 'Top 25 Factors' impacting vitality and viability, detailed below:

1. ACTIVITY HOURS	Ensuring the centre is open when the catchment needs it. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment?
2. APPEARANCE	Improving the quality of the visual appearance. How clean is the centre?

3. RETAILERS	Offering the right type and quantity of retailers. What retailers are represented?
4. VISION & STRATEGY	Having a common vision and some leadership. Do stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans?
5. EXPERIENCE	Considering the quality of the experience? Measuring levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. What is the image of the centre?
6. MANAGEMENT	Building capacity to get things done. Is there effective management – of the shopping centre(s) and town centre?
7. MERCHANDISE	Meeting the needs of the catchment. What is the range and quality of goods on offer?
8. NECESSITIES	Ensuring basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking; amenities; general facilities, like places to sit down and toilets etc.?
9. ANCHORS	The presence of an anchor which drives footfall. This could be retail (like a department store) or could be a busy transport interchange or large employer.
10. NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS	Presence of strong networks and effective formal or informal partnerships. Do stakeholders communicate and trust each other? Can the council facilitate action (not just lead it?)
11. DIVERSITY	A multi-functional centre. What attractions are there, apart from retail? What is the tenant mix and tenant variety?
12. WALKABILITY	The 'walkability' of the centre. Are linked trips between areas possible – or are the distances too great? Are there other obstacles that stop people walking?
13. ENTERTAINMENT & LEISURE	An entertainment and leisure offer. What is it? Is it attractive to various segments of the catchment?
14. ATTRACTIVENESS	The 'pulling power' of a centre. Can it attract people from a distance?
15. PLACE ASSURANCE	Getting the basics right. Does the centre offer a basic level of customer service, is this consistent? Or do some operators, or parts of the offer, let this down?

16. ACCESSIBLE	Each of reach. How convenient is the centre to access? Is it accessible by a number of different means, e.g. car, public transport, cycling etc.?
17. PLACE MARKETING	Communicating the offer. How does the centre market and promote itself? Do all stakeholders communicate a consistent image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow – with signage and guides etc.
18. COMPARISON/CONVENIENCE	The amount of comparison shopping opportunities compared to convenience. Is this sustainable?
19. RECREATIONAL SPACE	The amount and quality of recreational areas and public space/open space. Are there places that are uncommodified? Where people can enjoy spending time without spending money?
20. BARRIERS TO ENTRY	Refers to obstacles that make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the centre's market. What is the location doing to make it easier for new businesses to enter?
21. CHAIN VS INDEPENDENT	Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix of a centre/High Street. Is this suitably balanced?
22. SAFETY/CRIME	A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting. Perceptions of crime are usually higher than actual crime rates. Does the centre monitor these and how does it communicate results to stakeholders?
23. LIVEABILITY	The resident population or potential for residential in the centre. Does the centre offer the services/environment that residents need? Doctors, schools etc.
24. ADAPTABILITY	The flexibility of the space/property in a centre. Are there inflexible and outdated units that are unlikely to be re-let or re-purposed?
25. STORE DEVELOPMENT	The willingness for retailers/property owners to develop their stores. Are they willing to coordinate/cooperate in updating activities? Or do they act independently?

You can read more about the IPM's HSUK2020 project on the IPM blog here, or alternatively in the Journal of Place Management and Development's open access special issue here.

5. The BDSU project: Footfall signature types

The second key study underpinning the Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres project is Bringing Big Data to Small Users (BDSU). It is a collaborative research and development project funded by Innovate UK, led by retail intelligence specialists, Springboard, and involving the IPM, Manchester Metropolitan University, Cardiff University, MyKnowledgeMap, and other key partners. Springboard have provided footfall data for more than 100 town and city centres, dating back as far as ten years, that looks at footfall changes on an hourly basis. Footfall measures the number of people passing a particular point or points in a centre. It has been recognised in national planning policy statements as the prime indicator of town centre vitality since 1994.

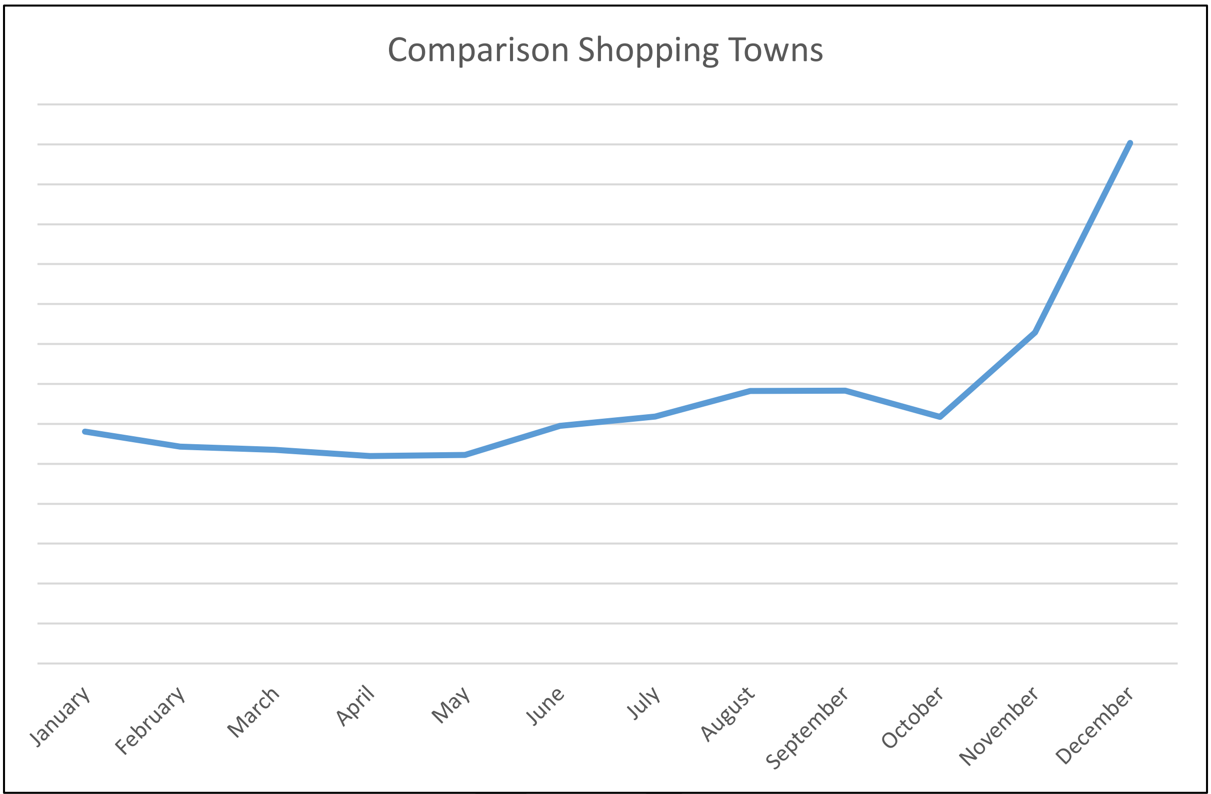
Analysis of this data has identified four basic patterns that have profound significance in thinking about the future of traditional retail centres. The patterns show usage of a centre by month over a twelve-month period. Whilst it had traditionally been assumed that most centres show an increase in footfall in the pre-Christmas period and that this is the busiest time of year, the patterns show that this is not true of all centres. And, even where it is the case, the significance of the upturn in activity has in many cases been over-estimated. It is important to stress that the patterns reflect actual usage of a centre, and that footfall is not the same as retail sales, as people may be in a centre for many other reasons than to shop.

The project has identified that all centres fit within these four pattern types, though some do so more closely than others. It is evident that some towns are changing and are transitioning from one town type to another. The significance of the town types is that data analysis shows that the more closely a town is used in line with one of the patterns, the more resilient its footfall is. Footfall in centres has been reducing as a whole, and the research suggests that will continue as we look to 2020. But towns that have footfall patterns more closely related to the four patterns are seeing footfall decline less rapidly than centres with more hybrid patterns, as they have a clearer offer and image.

The four key footfall signature types identified in the project are detailed below:

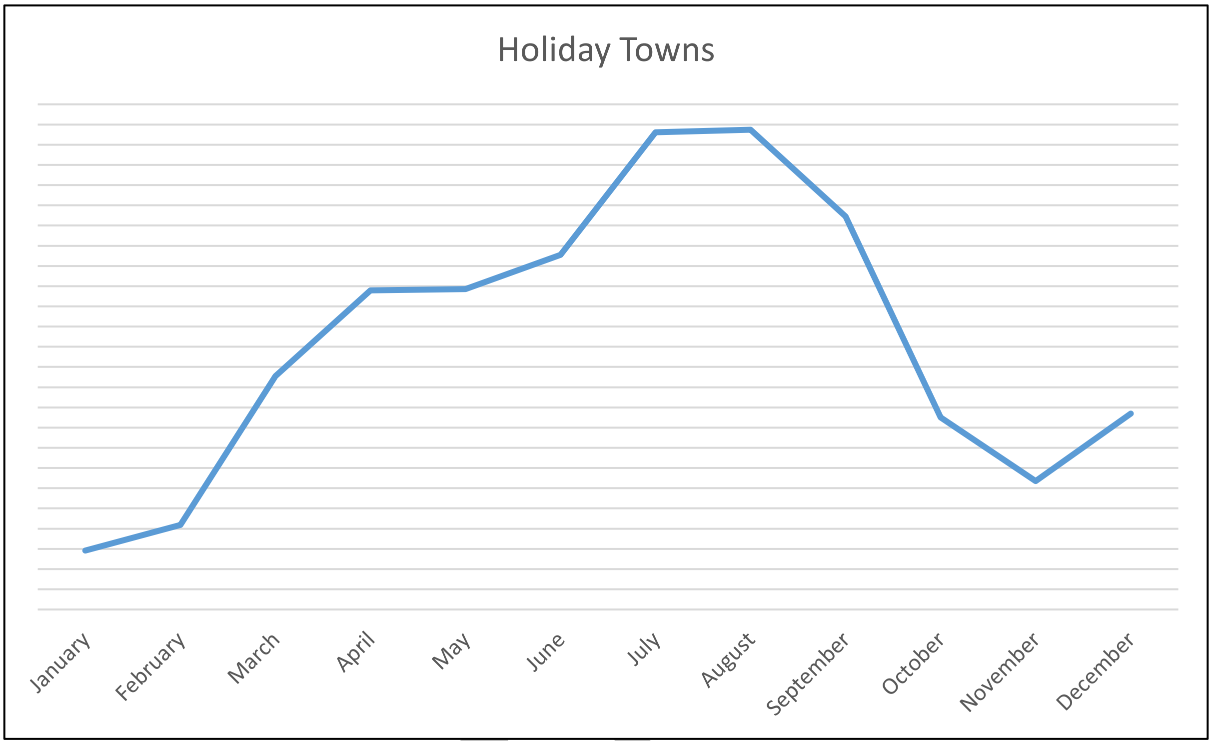
Comparison shopping towns

Comparison shopping centres tend to be located in larger town and city centres, and their monthly town signatures can be identified by a footfall peak in December, coinciding with the Christmas preparation period (as seen in the figure below). Here you will typically find a range of department stores, major variety stores, and a solid line-up of fashion and other comparison retailing. They draw people from a wide catchment area, though visits may be relatively infrequent. As such, they need to be accessible by a choice of means of transport with good links to the region they serve. These centres compete with other similar centres and with other retail channels.



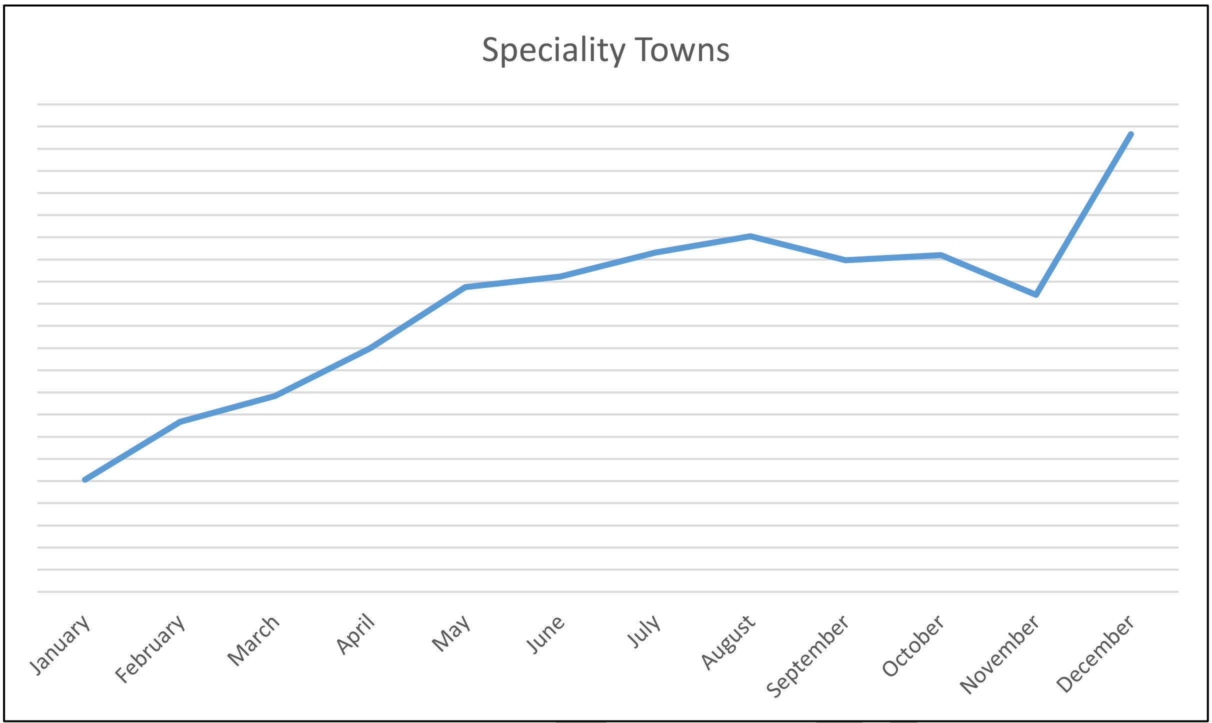
Holiday towns

In holiday towns, the peak pedestrian flow is in the summer months (as seen in the figure below). Although these are usually coastal resorts, this pattern is also found in some inland places with strong visitor appeal. Their anchor is usually not retail but perhaps a natural feature like a beach or the countryside. The retail offer in the town is very much geared towards tourists and does not serve the local community very well, as reflected in the lack of use out of season. These centres need to maximise trade in the peak months, through extended opening hours and increased trading areas, but in the future, they need to look at extending the visitor season and providing more for local communities.



Speciality towns

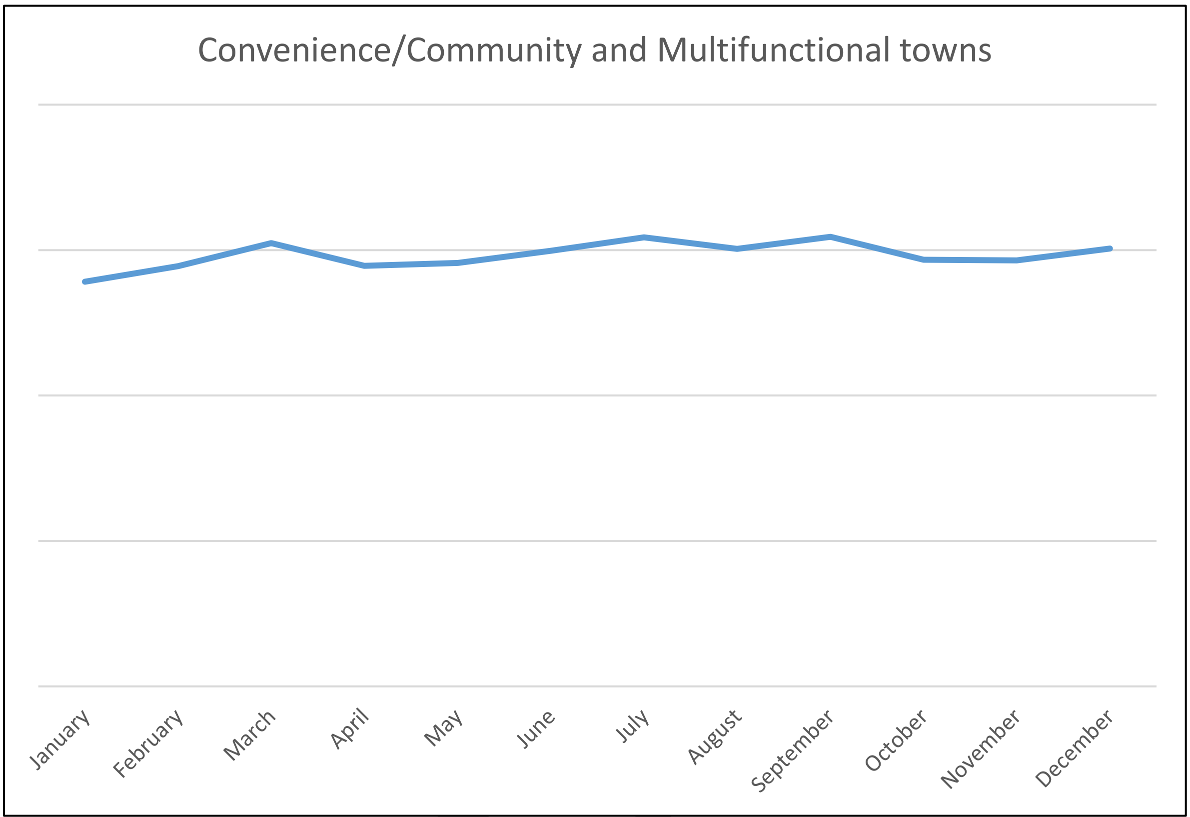
Speciality towns have a notable Christmas shopping peak, but they also attract visitors through the spring and summer (see figure below). They offer something unique and special that appeals to visitors from a wide area, in many cases including overseas visitors. Their anchor is not retail but perhaps a distinctive cathedral, museum, city walls, or unique quarter. Speciality towns primarily organise themselves to protect and promote their identity and positioning. It would appear that people spend longer on their visits to these centres and this may be supported by a strong retail and leisure/hospitality offer. This means these centres do also provide well for their local communities. They need to focus on how they make themselves more special and distinctive, whilst still meeting the needs of their catchment.



Convenience/community towns and multifunctional centres

The largest group of centres identified by usage, termed convenience/community towns and multifunctional centres, have a fairly steady footfall profile throughout the year (see figure below). And centres of this kind are focused on their local community. Their anchor might be food retailing, employment, access to public transport, or a strong resident base. They are places that offer a convenient mix of goods and services. Centres with a relatively low volume of footfall through the year need to think about how they are locally connected and focus efforts on improving convenience for people in the immediate area. This may be through ensuring trading hours meet local needs, through introducing new offers such as parcel collection from retail units or lockers, pop-up retailers and restaurants or regular markets which bring in new product lines and services on an occasional basis, home-working and small business facilities, a very strong customer service approach focused on maintaining customer loyalty, or other things that enhance convenience and respond to community need. Centres with a higher annual footfall may be quite large and have a strong retail offer but they have steady footfall flows because they are multifunctional centres. Their employment base, hospitality offer, culture and entertainment, strong service offer, and central housing all ensure that footfall remains steady through the year. They also need to think about connectivity, but perhaps at a regional level, and about ensuring they can support the range of activities that take place in the centre.

Understanding what type of centre you are is a basic first step in determining how best to go forward. It also ensures that decisions you make are rational, and hence have a better chance of success. The 25 priority factors for vitality and viability (as discussed in the previous section) will apply to all centres; but the interpretation and implementation of these factors depends to a large extent on knowing what kind of centre you are.



6. Investigating Withington's vitality and viability

To understand more about how the trajectory and development of centres can be changed in line with the 'Our Manchester' philosophy, the IPM has been working with stakeholders in a selection of Manchester's district centres. A rationale for centre selection was developed between the IPM and MCC, along with a suggestion of four centres that would benefit from the research programme. The four suggested centres - Chorlton, Gorton, Harpurhey, and Northenden - were then approved by the District Centres Sub-committee. Outside of the scope of the Sub-committee, but following the same research process, Withington became the fifth centre in which a more detailed level of investigation was carried out.

The work we have undertaken that has led to this report was not an in-depth study of Withington. We were not commissioned as consultants to undertake extensive local research. We have, however, read various background documents provided by MCC, undertaken a primary audit of the centre, had meetings with Withington's Neighbourhood Team, the local councillors, and various stakeholders and stakeholder groups to learn a bit more about the centre, and we also ran a development workshop attended by over 40 local stakeholders.

We will now discuss what we learned about Withington from this work, before moving onto presenting some recommendations about what the centre could do to further enhance its vitality and viability going forwards.

6.1. *Primary centre audit*

To enrich our understandings of Withington's performance, members of the IPM research team undertook a primary place quality audit of the centre in 2019 based upon the 25 factors identified in the HSUK2020 project (Appendix 1), in addition to updating MCC's retail use list (Appendix 2).

From this audit, we were able to identify Withington's key strengths and weaknesses in terms of those factors which have the most impact on its vitality and viability. Five factors for which Withington is performing well, and five for which there is room for improvement, are detailed in the table below:

Key strengths	Key weaknesses
Factor 1. Activity hours - Average business hours in Withington extend slightly beyond the average 9-5 working day (on average 9am-6pm). - An evident evening economy with several bars and pubs in the centre with late opening hours.	**Factor 2. Appearance** - Although there are plans in place to address such issues (e.g. Shutter Art Scheme), there are evident challenges around appearance in the centre, with graffiti and many vacant units. This is particularly the case in the daytime with graffiti on closed shutters.
Factor 8. Necessities - There is a Lloyds bank cashpoint on Wilmslow Road. - There is parking along the side of Copson Street, as well as 30 minutes free parking for Co-Op customers, Gledhill Street car park (which is not well-maintained), and, for staff and patients, The Christie multi-story car park nearby (a new multi-storey car park for The Christie staff will be built in the near future close to the junction of Cotton Lane and Wilmslow Road). - The public toilets are closed but there are some available in the public library.	**Factor 9. Anchors** - The centre lacks any clear anchors to drive footfall into the centre apart from the Christie Hospital, which itself possesses several retail/food outlets that may deter people from venturing in to the district centre. - The Sainsbury's and Co-op could function as retail anchors, although these seem to mainly cater for the basic grocery needs of the local catchment, rather than having the power to pull people from further afield. - The proposed market will imaginably prove to be an important attractor, and the swimming baths are an important hub for the local community.

Factor 10. Networks and partnerships - The Withington Village Regeneration Partnership brings together a range of passionate stakeholders on a monthly basis around a shared vision to regenerate the centre. Whilst this group could be expanded, there is notable effort being made to engage a wider range of stakeholders in centre plans, such as The Christie and a local housing association. - There is also a Civic Society, and recently formed Traders Association in the centre.	**Factor 11. Diversity** - The centre possesses a relatively narrow range of basic retailers and services for the local catchment, providing basic groceries, food/beverages, household items, and healthcare services. - One concern is that the centre over-services younger students, which does not appeal to older residents, or professionals in employment. - There is more variety in terms of entertainment and events, with a range of pop-up events recently creating a sense of vibrancy in the centre (e.g. craft beer nights). - The proposed market will help to enhance retail diversity in the centre, as well as the planned cultural hub.
Factor 13. Entertainment and leisure - Recent pop-up events have created a sense of vibrancy in Withington and have been driving footfall into the centre (e.g. Factory Records and beer events). - The swimming baths are also an important community hub, hosting a variety of events, both fitness-related and community-focused, as well as providing a co-working space. - There are also a few bars and pubs in the area to offer entertainment in the evenings for the student population.	**Factor 12. Walkability** - The centre is quite compact, with linked trips between the units easy to make. The pavements, however, are quite narrow and blocked by bollards and parked cars in places. - There are some suggestions that the pavements need to be made more accessible and age-friendly to those living in the Old Moat area. - There are also suggestions that better signage is needed to encourage people visiting The Christie Hospital to explore the district centre more fully, together with improved synergy with the services and attractions on the edge of the district centre such as the baths.
Factor 16. Accessibility - The centre is easily accessible via a range of public transport options, including frequent bus routes from/into Manchester City Centre and the University area, and is within walking distance of the Withington/West Didsbury/Burton Road tram stops. - There are also multiple car parks in the centre for those accessing via car.	**Factor 19. Recreational space** - Old Moat Park is within walking distance of the main district centre; however, the centre generally lacks public spaces for people to dwell. - The Withington Village Regeneration Partnership have successfully had a bid accepted to fund the Parsonage Pocket Park scheme to address such concerns around a lack of recreational space in the centre.

Land Use Survey

Retail Use Values	2015	2019	Change	Change(%)
A1 - Shops	51	47	minus 4	-8%
A2 - Financial & Professional	18	12	minus 6	-33%
A3 - Café & Restaurant	8	10	plus 2	25%
A4 - Bar/Pub	4	4	no change	0%
A5 - Hot Food takeaway	6	8	plus 2	33%
B1 - Office	1	1	no change	0%
D1 - Non-Residential Institutions	6	5	minus 1	-17%
D2 - Assembly & Leisure	0	0	no change	
Sui Generis	6	5	minus 1	-17%
Vacant Building	7	15	plus 8	114%
Vacancy Rate (%)	6.5%	14%	up 7.5%	
Total Business Units	107	107	no change	
Business Turnover (against previous use list)	24	21	minus 3	-12.5%

The research team updated Withington's 2015 retail use type survey during the audit visit. Results of the survey are shown in the table above. Overall, the performance over the last four years has been negative. There is a substantial loss of A1 and A2 provision in the area, highlighted by the closure of NatWest and RBS that probably created repercussions on the district centre. There is a slight increase in A3 and A5 provision, but not enough to strengthen the offer in these categories. Overall, Withington's retail vacancy has increased by 7.5%, and is now above the national average of 10.2% (14%).

6.2. Footfall data

A footfall counter has been capturing around the clock footfall data in Withington since November 2017.

Unlike a planning classification, activity data demonstrates exactly how people are using a centre, and what its main function is (i.e. comparison shopping, speciality, holiday, or convenience/community). It also enables the development trajectory and management plan for a centre to be responsive to changes in consumer behaviour and other developments.

Automated footfall monitoring provides data on the volume of customers in a centre, and is critical for practitioners in the evaluation of whether strategies and initiatives to drive increases in footfall are effective. The dynamic nature of footfall means that this data delivers the most immediate response to any initiative, and so enables practitioners to be able to readily identify the impact of initiatives on the success of the centre. In addition, recording footfall in this way removes the reliance on secondary or associated indicators such as public transport or car parking usage, which often are limited in their effectiveness due to paucity of data or a less than direct correlation to customer activity.

Footfall monitoring has a number of key applications and supports a centre by:

- **Demonstrating its success in attracting customers** into the centre

- **Providing an objective measure of performance**, lessening reliance on anecdotal evidence as a measure of success

- **Detecting early warning signs of change**, so that relevant strategies can be implemented

- **Evaluating the success of marketing and promotion** by identifying the additional footfall generated during an event or as a result of a promotion

- **Attracting event sponsorship** by having clear evidence of the success in attracting more visitors to the centre

- **Establishing the contribution of development and public realm improvements** in increasing visitor numbers, both in the short and longer term

- **Providing data required to attract new occupiers and investors** into the centre

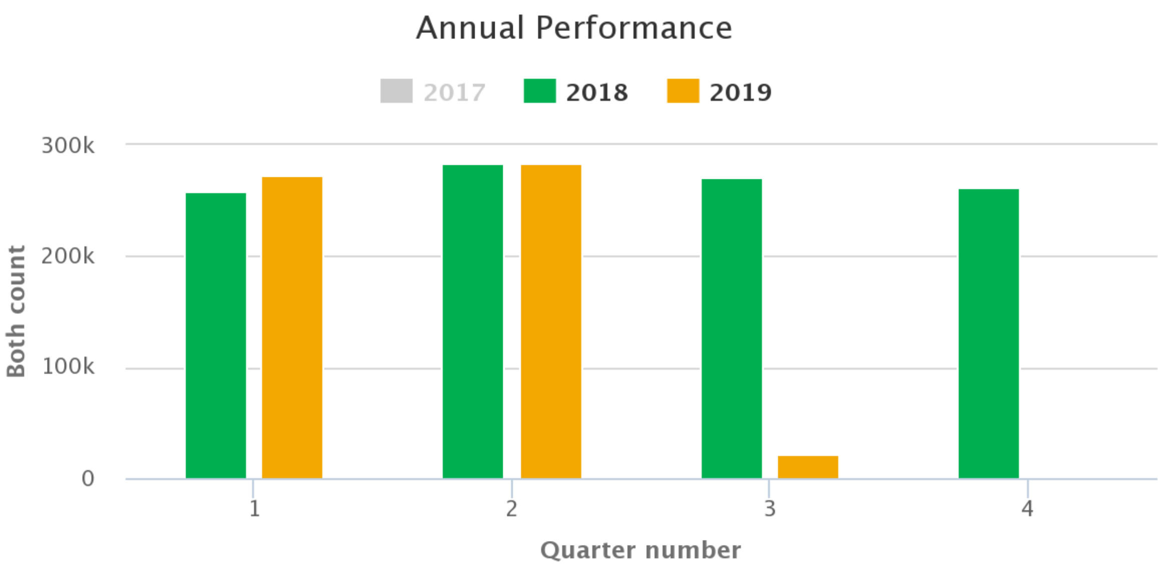
- **Providing data to existing businesses** in order to support business retention in the centre

- **Providing data to deliver efficiencies in resource allocation**, eg. cleaning, policing, ambassadors

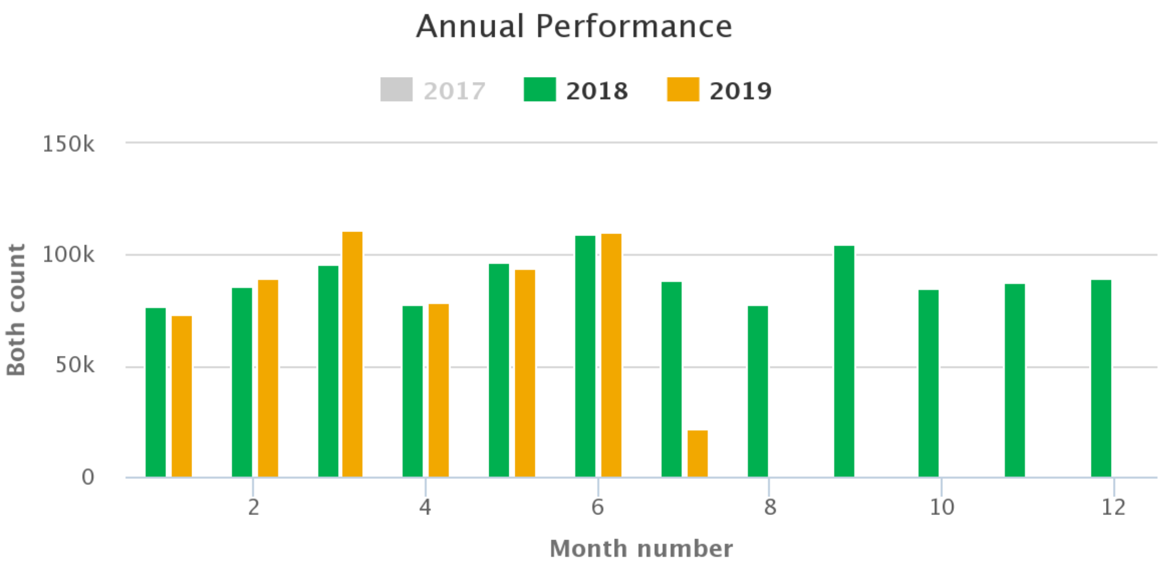
- **Identifying over or under-performance** by benchmarking against national and regional averages and peer groups to establish whether increases or decreases in footfall are in-line with general trends.

Withington's counter is located on Wilmslow Road, as seen in the image below. This counter, installed in November 2017, has been recording footfall 24 hours per day. As such, we currently have over 18 months of data that we can use to decipher how the centre is being used. Furthermore, as the data set grows, the longitudinal nature of the information collected will allow us to develop an enhanced picture of how the centre is performing throughout the year, and against previous years. This insight will be invaluable for tracking the success of any interventions which are put into place. A summary of the data collected to date is set out below.

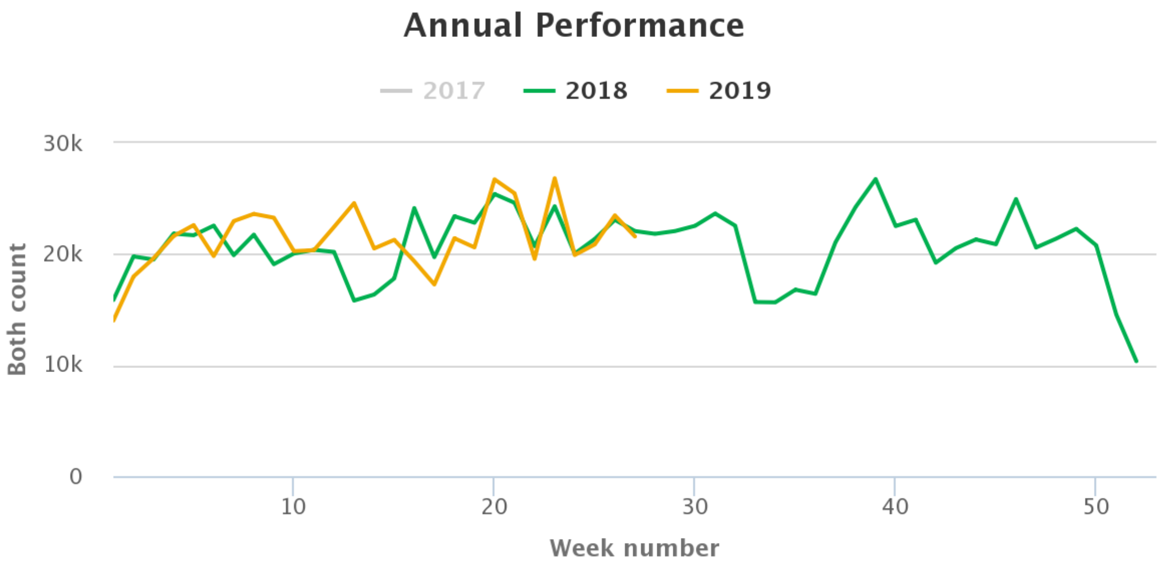
If we look at the data at the broadest level initially, by quarter, we can see that Withington's footfall recorded to date is relatively consistent. The counters have recorded approximately 250,000 movements on average per quarter, hence approximately 1 million movements per year.



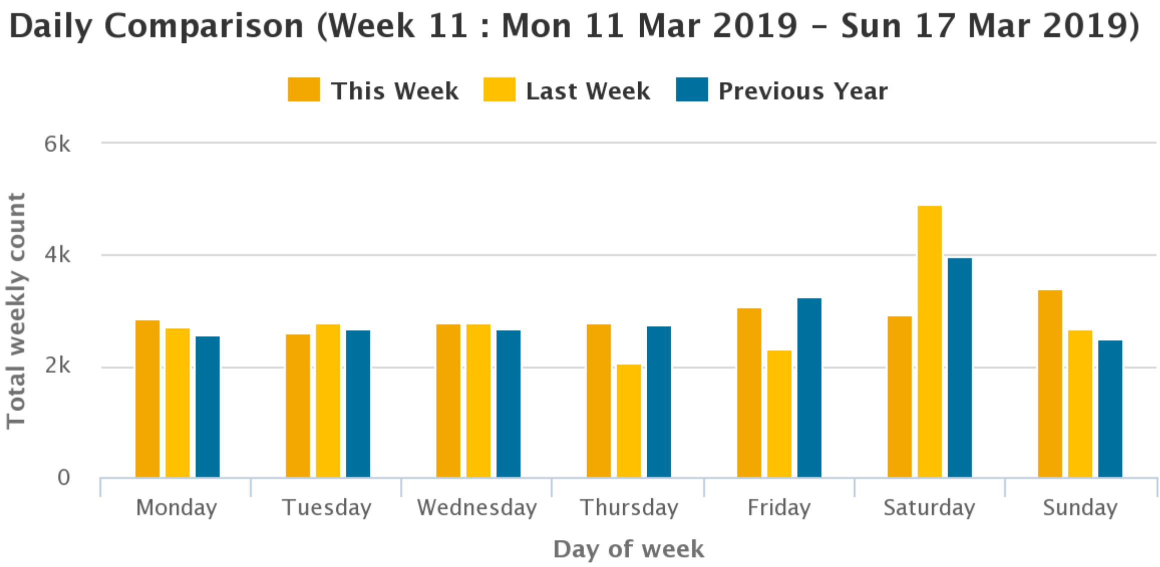
The graph below shows the total monthly footfall figures for Withington for 2018 and 2019. The range varies from approximately 75,000 to 110,000 movements per month. Fluctuations month-on-month and year-on-year are apparent, likely due to external factors such as weather or the wider political situation. Over a prolonged period of time, these deviations are likely to level out so that a linear trendline would be broadly flat. What is worth noting here is that over four of the six months for which we have 2018 and 2019 data, footfall has increased. In light of national trends, this is very positive.



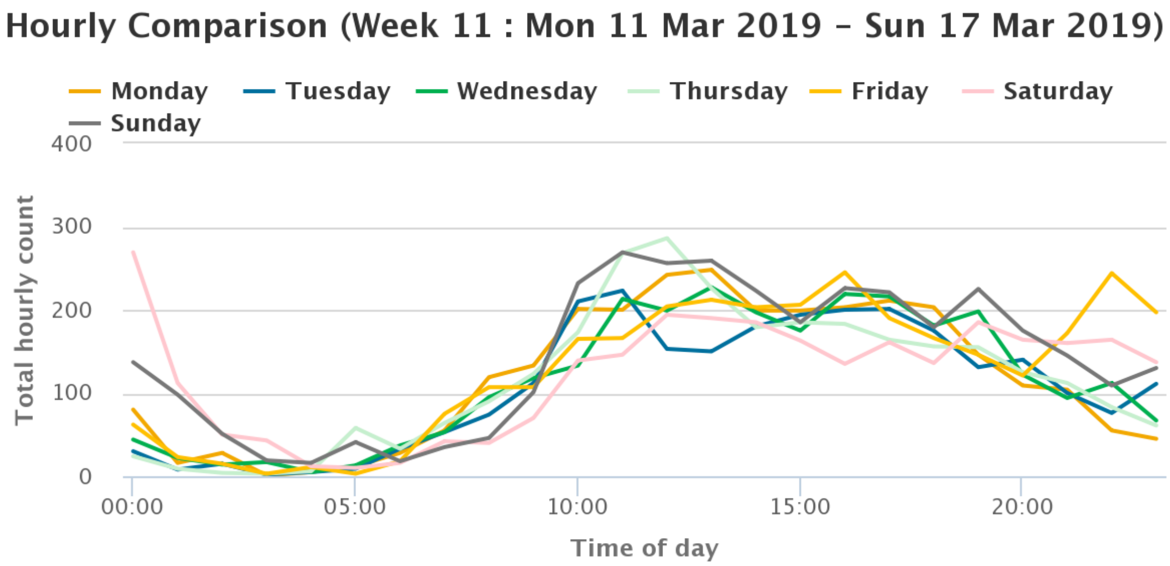
We can see a similar pattern of consistent deviation when we assess the weekly footfall totals in the centre, with between 15,000 and 25,000 movements recorded each week. Again, external factors are likely to be a significant driver of these peaks and troughs, though local drivers of this changes, such as the holding of events, could also be a contributing factor. With reference to our town signature types, the centre is displaying characteristics of a typical convenience/community centre, which fits with our assumptions and the views of the local stakeholders.



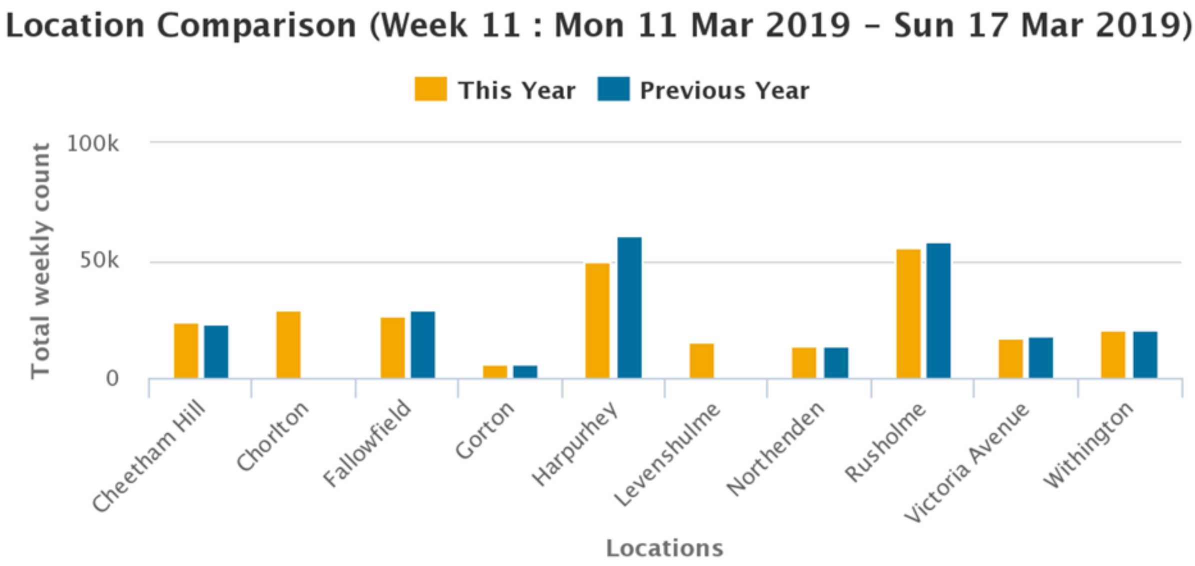
If we go into further detail and look at the days of the week and how the centre fared on each during the week the workshop took place (W/C 11th March), we can see that there is a consistency across each weekday, and broadly speaking a consistency between this week and the previous week, and the same week the previous year. The centre averages approxmately 3000 movements per day currently, with the figures below showing that Saturday of the previous week was particularly busy, with almost 5000 movements recorded that day. In comparison, Saturday March 16th was relatively quiet, particulary against the previous week/year, whilst Sunday held up well – something that is not the case in the majority of district centres we have studied.



The counter's 24 hour recording allows us to break down the data into hourly footfall. We can see that the footfall builds during standard business operating hours (9am-5pm), reaching a peak around midday, before gradually (and notably more gradually than we have seen in other centres) tailing off towards the evening. This is largely in-line with what we would expect to see in a convenience centre, however the centre differs in that it has a relatively robust evening economy. Indeed, we can see that on Friday evening of the w/c 11th March, footfall late in the evening was as high as at any other time during that week. What we can see from this data is that footfall spikes steeply after 10am, and doesn't begin to notably drop until around 7pm. This level of information is particularly useful for local businesses and services, who may wish to consider their opening hours as a result.



What this initial analysis of footfall in Withington tells us, is that the centre is likely to fit the convenience/community town type signature. It appears that the centre is being used as a functional requirement for those that visit, but what is also significant is the strong evening economy performance, across the whole week but particularly on Friday/Saturday evenings. The centre is clearly providing a strong offer in this area. This is important as a strong leisure/entertainment offer is something that lends itself to the daytime economy too, so it is likely that the bars/restaurants – whilst their core business hours will be during the evening – are open during the daytime also. This generates footfall and creates a vibrancy in the centre which is likely to be beneficial for Withington retailers.



In terms of comparison against other centres, we can see that Withington (for w/c 11th March) achieved footfall of around 20,000 movements, approximately the average recorded across all the centres for that week, and in-line with the same week in 2018. Given that footfall across the UK has fell in June by 4.8% year-on-year, maintaining a similar performance can be seen as a success, and offers a stable platform on which to build.

As we move forward, developing a longitudinal data set will allow us to build a more accurate picture of how the centre is performing throughout the year. Significantly, it will allow the impact of any interventions to be measured against previous periods, informing future activity as a result. This data-driven approach to the implementation of measures to drive more footfall to the centre will enable stakeholders to make better-informed decisions, which can only be good for the future of Withington.

6.3. Stakeholder workshop

To further enrich our understandings of Withington, we also conducted a two-hour workshop with 40 key local stakeholders, including residents, business owners, and local councillors, at the former Natwest bank on March 13th 2019. The workshop gave stakeholders an opportunity to meet each other, and voice their opinions on what makes Withington a great place to live, and the opportunities to make this even better. Within stakeholders' discussions of Withington, we were able to identify what they considered as being Withington's main positives, in addition to the key challenges the centre currently faces, as detailed in the table below.

Top factors activity

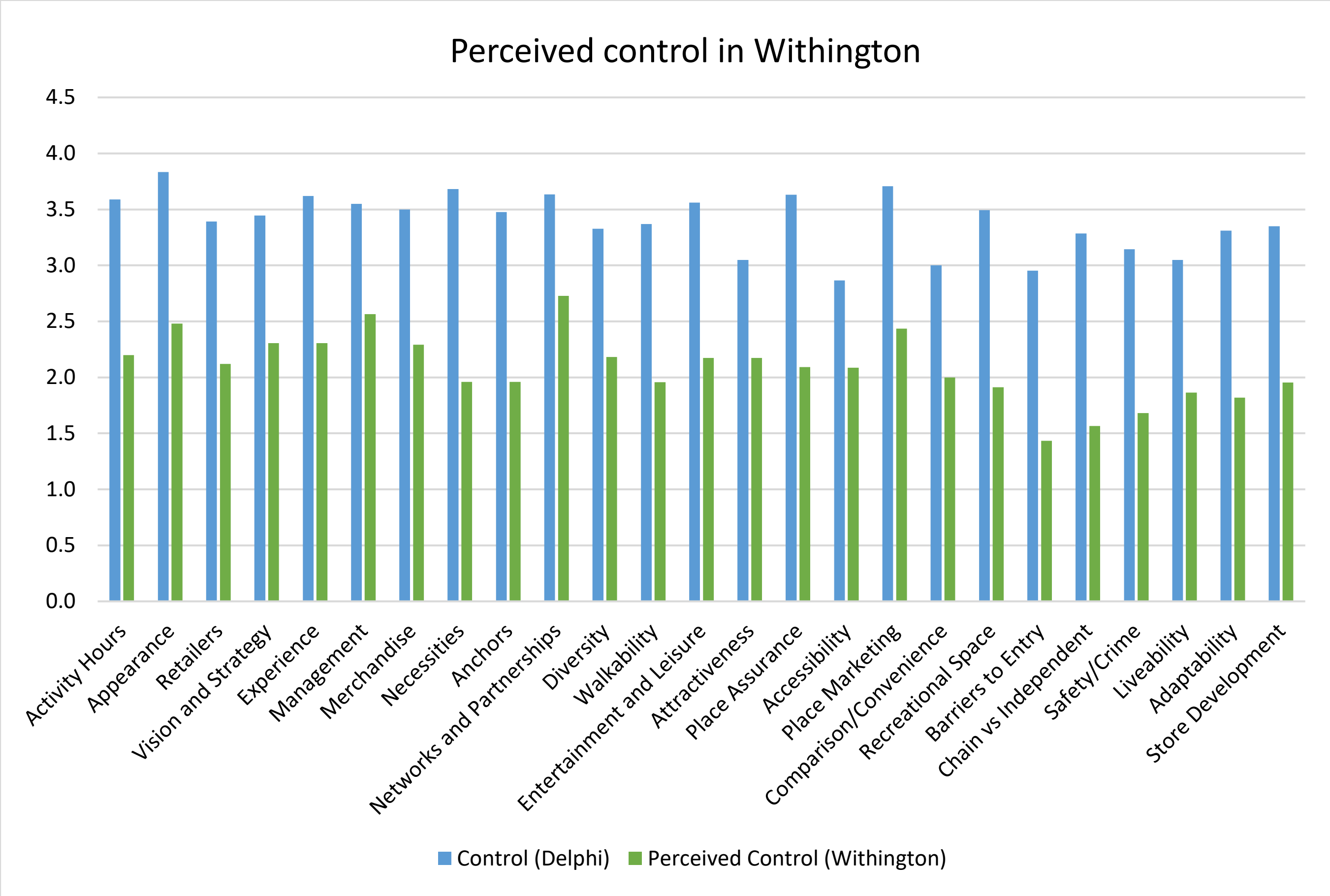
	Top factors
Group 1	1. Pavements have poor accessibility especially for older or disabled people 2. Poor general appearance of centre 3. Good independent offer in terms of retailers, bars, and pop-up events.
Group 2	1. Good evening economy 2. Diverse community living here 3. General appearance issues 4. Lack of public space to dwell 5. Busy road right through the middle of the centre causing pollution issues
Group 3	1. General appearance issues 2. Not enough attractions in the centre to encourage dwell time 3. Good range of community/civic buildings and services.

We can see from the above table that, in terms of Withington's key positives, and in line with the centre audit, stakeholders identified that the centre enjoys a thriving evening economy, with a good range of independent bars and pop-up activities. They also observed the diverse community living within the centre, leading to a sense of vibrancy, which are in turn provided with a good range of key services.

However, in terms of areas to improve upon, stakeholders identified that there are some general appearance issues to be addressed, again reflecting the centre audit. Furthermore, issues regarding walkability were highlighted, concerning poorly maintained pavements unfit for elderly residents, and the busy road cutting through the centre causing pollution and pedestrian health and safety issues. Finally, it was felt that there is a lack of spaces to dwell in the centre, alongside there not being enough attractions to encourage people to want to linger in the first place.

The workshop also included a task whereby participants were asked to rank the 25 factors from the HSUK2020 project in terms of how controllable they felt they were. Akin to when this task has been conducted in other centres across the UK, we found that stakeholders in general felt that they had less control over these factors impacting vitality and viability (as seen in the chart below). This is significant, as informing people of their capability to enact change is just as important as advising them how to enact it.

We will now move onto discussing interventions that stakeholders could collaboratively make in Withington to make it an even better place to work, live, and spend time.



7. Recommendations: What can Withington do?

The IPM's work with places across the United Kingdom always starts with the recommendation that decisions about the future of the local centre need to be based on evidence. Too often, places simply replicate what other towns have done, without understanding whether the action taken is appropriate to their centre. This can result in wasted time and investment, generating interventions which have little or no impact on vitality and viability. Such disappointments can exacerbate disillusionment amongst local residents and stakeholders.

Compared to other district centres in Manchester, Withington possesses many advantages in terms of the diversity and strength of the local offer, a discernible evening economy, and ultimately an existing local network of stakeholders who have been making strong and effective interventions to improve the district centre. However, the centre is not without issues, which need to be addressed; and, as the IPM can verify from its national research programme, sustaining the viability of a centre is dependent on having the right place management structures in place. Our engagement with local elected members, the Neighbourhood Team, Withington Village Regeneration Partnership, the workshop with local stakeholders, together with additional consultation with a newly formed traders group, reveals a range of committed people with a vested interest in improving the district centre. Evidence from Withington also reveals a strong network of invested local stakeholders, who are already working collaboratively and effectively. Key to the revitalisation of Withington will be the nurturing and development of this existing network, to develop local capacity further, and to enable invested local stakeholders to begin to tackle more strategic goals and ambitions.

We advise that future interventions in Withington should align with the IPM's top 25 factors and 4Rs framework (as discussed in this report) and should start by tackling the weaknesses identified in Sections 6.1 and 6.3. We recommend actions are drawn up to deal with each of the factors listed. Through our national research, we have identified that each of these factors can be influenced to a considerable extent by local actors working in collaboration. It may be, however, that additional mechanisms or partnerships are needed to bring about the necessary changes, or that existing networks and partnerships require strengthening. The timescale required to make these changes should also be considered. Many of the weaker areas might take years to achieve, which creates a risk of losing the momentum for change, and the centre may decline before it improves. We recommend, therefore, the immediate focus be on achieving "quick wins" that address the areas of concern, which can foster wider engagement and enthusiasm.

Based on the key findings discussed in this report, we now present several recommendations regarding what stakeholders in Withington could do to enhance the vitality and viability of the centre. We will present this advice in relation to the IPM's '4Rs' Framework, which was explained in the workshop, and includes *repositioning, reinventing, rebranding,* and *restructuring* as the four main areas in which a place can improve its performance.

7.1. Repositioning

- **The centre has a credible evening economy, with extended activity hours**
- **The student population is well-served by the offer in Withington, however, there are opportunities to reposition the centre to increase its appeal to a wider local catchment**
- **Temporary events, markets and pop-ups have proven effective in widening the appeal of the district centre**
- **Reviewing and interpreting footfall data is key to tracking the effectiveness of any future interventions in the district centre**
- **Facilitating knowledge exchange around this data is recommended (for example, sharing the footfall data with key local stakeholders)**

Repositioning is a strategy that involves clearly identifying and communicating a place's market position (Millington and Ntounis, 2017; please click here to read more about repositioning). Repositioning is necessary to counteract decline, and enables a centre to identify potential competitive advantages. The starting point requires an understanding of the forces of change, and the value of interventions that uniquely reposition centres. While such responses should build on a place's distinct capabilities, they must also accommodate future trends in order for a centre to become resilient. Knowledge exchange between stakeholders is also crucial in such strategies to generate a shared understanding of a centre's identity and function.

From the primary audit, we identified **Activity Hours** as a key strength in Withington (see Section 6.1). Although the average business hours remain within the traditional 9-5pm routine, several commercial establishments extend their trading into the evening. Consequently, the district centre is a place where people might dwell for longer periods after 5pm, compared to other district centres. Withington, therefore, appears to be a functional centre fulfilling the needs of the local catchment in terms of both convenience and leisure.

There are weaknesses in Withington such as appearance (see Reinventing below), weak local anchors (see Rebranding below) walkability and public realm (see Restructuring below). As stated in the overall conclusion, many of these factors are inter-linked, and to maximise the impact of any responses, all require solutions delivered through effective local collaboration. The evidence from Withington, however, suggests there is existing local capacity, which provides a solid basis through which to tackle these issues.

In terms of Repositioning Withington, the district centre lacks diversity. The centre possesses a narrow range of basic retailers and services, serving everyday convenience of the local catchment. There are several establishments which underpin the evening economy, but one concern arising from our engagement with local stakeholders, is that the existing offer focuses on younger people, notably students, which does not necessarily appeal to older residents, or professionals in employment. That said, Withington possesses a number of heritage buildings and attractors, which lie outside of the local planning framework, such as Withington Baths, an emerging significant community hub. Clearly, from a local community perspective, Withington Village is a place extending down both Wilmslow and Burton Roads. In addition, local stakeholders identified connectivity to neighbouring residential catchments within walking distance as an issue, notably the Old Moat estate, with concerns about how well the district centre serves this particular community. In addition, according to the IPM audit conducted in May 2019, there is a 14% vacancy rate within the centre itself. Although on first appearance this figure seems high, we would suggest vacancy rate by itself is not a reliable indicator of centre performance (due to issues such as sticky leases). Instead, we would suggest the re-use of empty units provides an opportunity to diversify the centre offer. We would advise, therefore, Withington needs to account for both traders and local stakeholders currently operating outside, but adjacent to the district centre, in terms of defining what the current offer is. Furthermore, we suggest efforts are made locally to guide the re-use of empty units in alignment with the perceived needs of the existing local catchment. We recommend the continuation of pop-up shops, markets and events, which have so far proved to be an effective mechanism in terms of communicating the potential of extending the diversity of offer. Finally, we advise the existing network of local stakeholders continue to focus their discussions on improving the connectivity and linkages between the district centre and the attractors lying just outside the district centre, together with discussions concerning the improvement of pedestrian links between the district centre and adjacent residential areas within walking distance.

Quick win

Withington benefits from an existing network of local stakeholders who are in communication with one another and actively collaborating. We say more about how this network might develop in the Restructuring Section below. However, in the short-term, we would advise that the engaged local stakeholders continue to share knowledge and generate ideas in order to enact interventions to improve the District Centre. One such activity is sharing footfall data with local stakeholders on a regular basis, with a view to creating a better alignment between trading hours and hours of usage e.g. by collectively changing opening times. This level of co-ordination is important to protect Withington's existing offer, which we feel is strong and positive.

Longer term, we advise the existing network of local stakeholders continues to focus on improving the connectivity and linkages between the district centre and the attractors lying just outside the district centre, together with further discussions concerning the improvement of connectivity between the district centre and adjacent residential areas within walking distance. Finally, we suggest efforts are made locally to guide the re-use of empty units in alignment with the perceived needs of the existing local catchment. We recommend the continuation of pop-up shops, markets and events, which have so far proved to be an effective mechanism in terms of communicating the potential of extending the diversity of offer to property-owners and developers.

7.2. Reinventing

- **Withington is a liveable place, providing access to a wide range of services, including health, library, education, and nearby greenspace, and the district centre provides everyday necessities and convenience, augmented by an established evening offer**
- **The centre, however, currently lacks strong local anchors**
- **Although there are many qualities apparent in Withington, issues concerning the visual appearance are of concern and need to be addressed**
- **Although recreational and greenspace is accessible from the district centre, the centre itself lacks sufficient public space which might encourage people to dwell and linger**

Reinventing strategies relate to the activities undertaken to revitalise a place's identity and offer (Theodoridis, Ntounis, and Pal, 2017; please click here to read more about Reinventing). Any place, however, should understand and seek to meet the needs of its catchment, and be sensitive to these insights when making any changes within a centre. Over recent years, Withington's reputation as one of Manchester's more attractive neighbourhoods has grown. According to the Primary Audit, for example, the area is becoming more attractive to incoming professionals in employment. The centre has traditionally attracted significant numbers of students, although less marked than, for example, Fallowfield. Whereas this has been beneficial in terms of attracting younger people to the high street, and undoubtedly helps to drive the evening economy, there remains concern as to what extent newer residents are attracted to the existing offer. We might draw a distinction, for example, between Withington Village and the nearby Burton Road/West Didsbury area, where the revitalisation of the district centre has been driven by a higher end food/drink offer. As identified above, there is local concern the Village also underserves older established residents. An important, but perhaps overlooked user group are staff and visitors to the nearby The Christie Hospital, a significant employment anchor in the district. However, local engagement also revealed some tensions regarding the relationship between the hospital and the Village, which will require sensitive management. Reinventing Withington, therefore, should begin to focus on the needs of the existing catchment by diversifying the offer, with consideration of how the centre might adapt to the current and future needs of its diverse community.

Our engagement with local stakeholders, however, reveals a number of interventions, which have sought to define and communicate what Withington Village has to offer to residents, for example, the production and dissemination of a History and Landmarks Map, events and activities connecting Withington to Manchester's recent popular cultural history, and a maker's market and temporary bars. Locally, therefore, there appears to be a strong sense of identity shared between key local stakeholders, together with evidence of stakeholders willing to become engaged in improving and communicating a positive image of the district centre. There is an opportunity, however, for a strategic approach towards place communication, for example, through a consolidated social media presence for Withington Village. We would also advise the existing local networks to engage further with local traders concerning the alignment of the current offer with the potential needs of a wider catchment audience. This could, for example, include taking full advantage by giving more prominence to the centre's existing evening economy offer, through evening events and promotions.

Key to successfully developing Withington's current position is addressing the general appearance of the district centre. The centre benefits from a range of independent shops, in a traditional high street form, which contribute to Withington's unique identity. However, as revealed through the Primary Audit and local workshop, a key barrier is the appearance of the district centre (see Sections 6.1 and 6.3). This results from a combination of factors, vacant units, poor quality storefronts, litter/graffiti, poor quality public realm and open space, compounded by the busy road running through the centre of village, which detracts further from the quality of experience. Again, local networks are making efforts to tackle these issues, for example, through schemes to create shutter art and a pocket park. Although small-scale, such interventions are important in terms of contributing to an incremental improvement of the centre's appearance. Longer term, we would advise place making interventions to improve the visibility and legibility of the wider centre offer through improved walkways and signage, and improved civic space should be considered, to encourage greater synergies between adjacent neighbourhoods and anchors and the district centre. We would advise local stakeholders to continue with their current approach, however, the larger concerns about the public realm will require a more formal strategic approach (see Restructuring below). The IPM is continuing to collect footfall data for Withington, and we suggest further monitoring of this data. We recommend monitoring footfall to measure the impact of any interventions to improve the centre.

Quick win

In terms of low cost and quick to enact interventions, we would advise concentrating on the basics to improve the appearance of the centre. In addition, another quick win is the consolidation of digital branding to communicate strong and positive messages about activities and the offer available in the centre. Longer term, we advise focusing on improving connectivity and legibility of the centre through placemaking interventions to improve navigability and route making. The aim of this would be to encourage greater synergy between the district centre and surrounding residential neighbourhoods within walking distance. In addition, we would advise promoting greater synergy and linked trips between key attractors such as the Baths and The Christie. Longer term, improved public realm, including new civic space is required to encourage users to dwell and linger within the centre.

7.3. Rebranding

- **Overall Withington possesses a strong identity, but the district centre currently lacks a strong attractor, although there is scope to capitalise on the success of recent temporary interventions, which suggests potential to diversify the centre's offer to appeal to a wider local catchment**
- **There is scope to consolidate this strength by clearly identifying and communicating the centre offer to both existing and new audiences**
- **However, before rebranding, the centre needs to address issues regarding appearance and the quality of public realm**

Rebranding involves the application of branding, marketing communications, and public relations techniques in order to deliver a consistent message about place identity, which relates to the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions in the minds of potential consumers of a place (Ntounis and Kavaratzis, 2017; please click here to read more about place rebranding). Successful place brand management can lead to positive word-of-mouth, and assist in the transformation of previously negative, or just as problematic, non-existent images of place. However, any place branding process should involve local stakeholders. Indeed, participatory place branding processes can flourish when place stakeholders are engaged in the right context and are encouraged to work together collaboratively. However, before any form of place branding can take place, it is vital some of the fundamental issues are addressed (as set out in the other sections of the 4Rs framework).

As the IPM's previous research has shown, the development of a coherent place brand that is representative is difficult to achieve. However, by following the interrelated stages of research, deliberation, consultation, action, and communication, it is well within the capabilities of local stakeholders to drive forward a process that will produce or consolidate an attractive brand proposition for the centre. This, coupled with a change in image facilitated through the measures set out in the other three sections, will help to build Withington's place brand and appeal to the local catchment.

Key to the rebranding of Withington is to build on established strengths. Withington's reputation is generally positive, with a significant number of independent traders playing a vital role in generating a unique identity for the centre. With links to Manchester's popular culture heritage, together with an offer attractive to younger people, Withington is able to capitalise through the construction of a more cosmopolitan and 'trendy' image compared to other district centres. A number of events, festivals and pop-ups also contribute to a sense of vibrancy. There remains concern, however, as to how well the centre communicates its existing offer to potential users of the centre within the local catchment, and longer term, how Withington as a destination might be promoted to a wider audience. We would suggest a key potential user group that is over-looked are the employees and visitors to The Christie hospital. We would advise, therefore, a collaborative approach to low cost digital marketing, certainly the creation of a consolidated brand for the Village, which more effectively promotes independent traders, with specific targeted interventions for different potential user groups. Special offers and promotions to encourage NHS staff to use independent traders might form part of this campaign.

A key challenge, however, is the longer term needs to diversify the existing offer and improve the appearance of the centre. As an exercise in the stakeholder workshop, we allocated people into three sub-groups and asked them to identify their top priorities, and all three identified general appearance as a key barrier to vitality (see Section 6.3). General appearance is also highlighted as a concern in the IPM's Primary Audit (Section 6.1.)

Quick win
We would advise a collaborative approach to low cost digital marketing, which aims to consolidate and promote Withington's unique offer through a focus on independent traders. This should involve local traders in the process and ideally become the responsibility of a sub-group operating as part of the existing network of local stakeholders. There needs to be local agreement on what Withington's consolidated brand might look like, although it must be acknowledged this can never fully represent the local area. It is important local businesses get involved in the process and particularly the dissemination of positive images of the brand. Longer term we advise the centre begins to diversify its existing offer. Fundamental, however, is the need to improve the appearance of the centre, to match any increased expectations of Withington as a place. However, this will require more strategic interventions, which we discuss in the next section, Restructuring.

7.4. Restructuring

- **Withington possesses an existing collaborative network of local stakeholders, with a proven record of achievement, which is working well in terms of building a shared vision or consensus about a future vision for the Village**
- **The centre is accessible via multi-modal transport options, with several parking options**
- **The general appearance of the centre, lack of quality pedestrian realm and civic space, however, are currently barriers to the development of the district centre**

Restructuring strategies relate to both governance structure and forms of management, and the physical structuring of place (Peel and Parker, 2017; please click here to read more about restructuring). The first requires the cooperation of all place stakeholders and creation of strategic networks and public-private relationships that will nurture conditions for the sustainable development of a place, in contradistinction to top-down approaches. The second requires the proper use of current infrastructure, in addition to the development of new retail, business and leisure spaces to enhance place attractiveness and place development.

Our engagement with local stakeholders in Withington reveals a strong and emerging narrative of effective local collaboration. Driven by the local community, the revitalisation of Withington Baths as a recreational centre and co-working space has proved to be a catalyst for bringing together a network of enthusiastic local stakeholders, including the City's Neighbourhood Team and elected members, who are committed to improving the district centre. This has led to the creation of the Withington Village Regeneration Partnership, comprising members from the public, private and community sectors. It has become a mechanism through which to engage local traders and other stakeholders, such as The Christie Hospital, and a local housing association. The group has proven effective in facilitating events and drawing from small funding pots to improve the public realm.

Importantly, the network has proven effective in building local consensus about the future improvement. We would suggest, therefore, Withington now possesses sufficient local capacity to engage with the local authority and other partners to achieve more strategic regeneration objectives. As such, Withington provides a model of district centre collaborative working in the city. We advise that the City continue to support this approach through local planning policy.

In terms of physical regeneration, the IPM's Primary Audit and engagement with local stakeholders revealed a number of restructuring challenges in Withington. The centre is well-connected with frequent public transport options by bus and a nearby connection to the tram system (with three tram stops within a reasonable walking distance). The centre benefits from ample parking options; indeed, we would suggest some of the areas given over to parking are currently under-utilised. However, the scope for cycle-lane development within the district centre is perhaps limited given the narrow carriageway. As discussed above, a particular challenge is the general appearance of the district centre. This is compounded by poor quality public realm and lack of open space. The centre is also challenged by the heavy traffic on Wilmslow Road, which detracts from the experience of the centre. Narrow pavements along this strip, combined with traffic noise and pollution, limits the possibility of outdoor pavement use on Wilmslow Road. The car parking area to the rear of the shops on the western side of Wilmslow Road is also used as service and waste area for local businesses. The carpark, however, also provides a principal walking route into the district for pedestrians from the Old Moat, but currently links are poorly defined. For both pedestrians and car drivers, the car park provides an unwelcoming experience to Withington. Finally, as we have identified earlier in the report, the pedestrian links between the district centre and adjacent neighbourhoods require improvement, especially the walking routes to The Christie Hospital. After that, the scope for comprehensive redevelopment appears to be limited by lack of site availability and the importance of retaining Withington's architectural qualities and traditional high street form, which combine to give the centre its unique identity. It is also important to acknowledge that much of the district centre currently lies within a conservation area. The problem of traffic will continue, and is something that in the meantime the centre will have to live with. However, long term planning might begin to assess the potential of traffic calming measures to help alleviate the problems caused by the roadway. Addressing these issues are long-term objectives, as some require significant investment and more formal partnership arrangements to deliver. The forthcoming local plan provides the opportunity to promote solutions that would reduce traffic and improve public realm.

Based on the IPM's Primary Audit and engagement with local stakeholders, we advise the continuation of small-scale interventions to progressively improve the appearance of the district centre, which might include additional planting/landscaping to improve unkempt sites, extension of the shutter art scheme and additional murals to enhance the character of the place. We would also advise basic place-making interventions and improved signage to create clear pathways into and within the district centre from adjacent neighbourhoods, with a particular focus on the connections between The Christie and the Village. Longer term, this may involve more substantive planting and landscape, together with improved pathways into and within the centre. The creation of additional space is more difficult to achieve, but there are options which might include the frontage of the public library, car-parks and possible traffic calming, perhaps even pedestrianisation, of Copson Street – to provide new spaces for outdoor events and markets.

Quick Win
We would advise nurturing and developing existing local networks, for example, to include local independent traders, and raising local capacity to address more strategic goals and ambitions. Future decision making needs to consider the linkages and connectivity between the district centre and important attractors which currently sit outside of the local planning framework, such as The Christie Hospital and the restored Withington Baths, together with local connectivity to nearby residential catchment areas. Longer term, we would advise on a programme of physical regeneration to substantially improve the quality of public realm in Withington. Understanding and sharing the analysis of footfall data may offer an opportunity to engage a wider group of stakeholders by developing a mutual understanding of centre functionality and performance. IPM can provide further analysis, but we would recommend stakeholders in centres start to analyse the data themselves and share this information so that more informed and collaborative decisions can be made.

8. Conclusion

Withington is emerging as one of Manchester's more desirable district centres. It is considered a liveable place, with a good mix of convenience and leisure. The centre is well connected, and possesses a unique identity and heritage, which should be conserved, but there is need for investment in Withington. Currently, Withington is an active and functional centre, complemented by a discernible evening economy. A key component of the centre's distinction is a significant number of independent traders. However, there is scope to widen the diversity of the offer and broaden the appeal of the district centre to a wider audience. The centre currently possesses a number of vacant units, which provide an opportunity for adaption. We suggest careful management and monitoring of activities to bring these units back into effective use, which align with broader ambitions to diversify the offer and will help prepare the centre for future change.

In this report, however, we have also outlined some of the main challenges facing Withington. We would advise, therefore, that future interventions continue to focus on improving the appearance of the district centre, both incrementally and through more strategic plans. The centre currently lacks a strong anchor; therefore, developing connectivity to the nearby attractors such as The Christie Hospital is important. Future place interventions also need to acknowledge the proposed development of Withington Baths as a community hub, which offers the potential to become an additional attractor. Despite the Baths and the hospital lying outside the boundaries of the district centre, symbolically and functionally they are part of it, and should be planned as such. Longer term, we would advise major improvements to the public realm, and again this should be incorporated into revised local planning frameworks. The centre should become a place which will encourage people to dwell and linger for longer times. In addition, connectivity and synergies in terms of walking routes into and within the district centre should be prioritised, to encourage residents within walking distance to actively visit the centre more often.

As IPM research has demonstrated, centres which are well-managed, with local stakeholders working together in collaboration towards a shared vision, often out-perform those centres where place management structures are either weak or absent. Withington benefits from a strong and active local network of engaged stakeholders, which has already generated effective intervention. The support and development of this partnership is crucial, especially going forward. Whilst it is important the centre continues to improve through small-scale interventions, the opportunities arising through a new development plan should assist Withington to achieve targets that are more ambitious. However, it is essential centre management and operational day-to-day activities continue to be managed. It also important events and temporary activities continue to be organised. The existing network should continue to meet regularly, possibly expand the level of representation, establish sub-groups to take on responsibility for specific areas of intervention, and importantly continue to monitor and share footfall data amongst engaged stakeholders. Indeed, in particular we would advise continuing to monitor footfall data to keep check of the centre's performance, and to monitor the impact of any future interventions.

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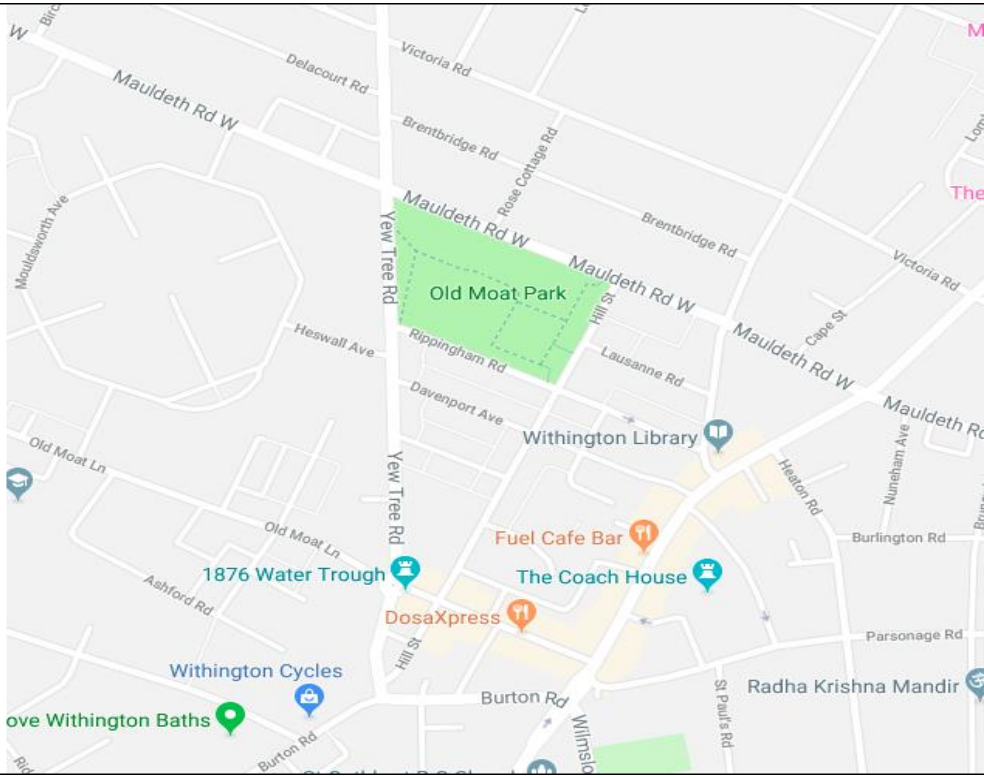
Appendix 1: Primary centre audit

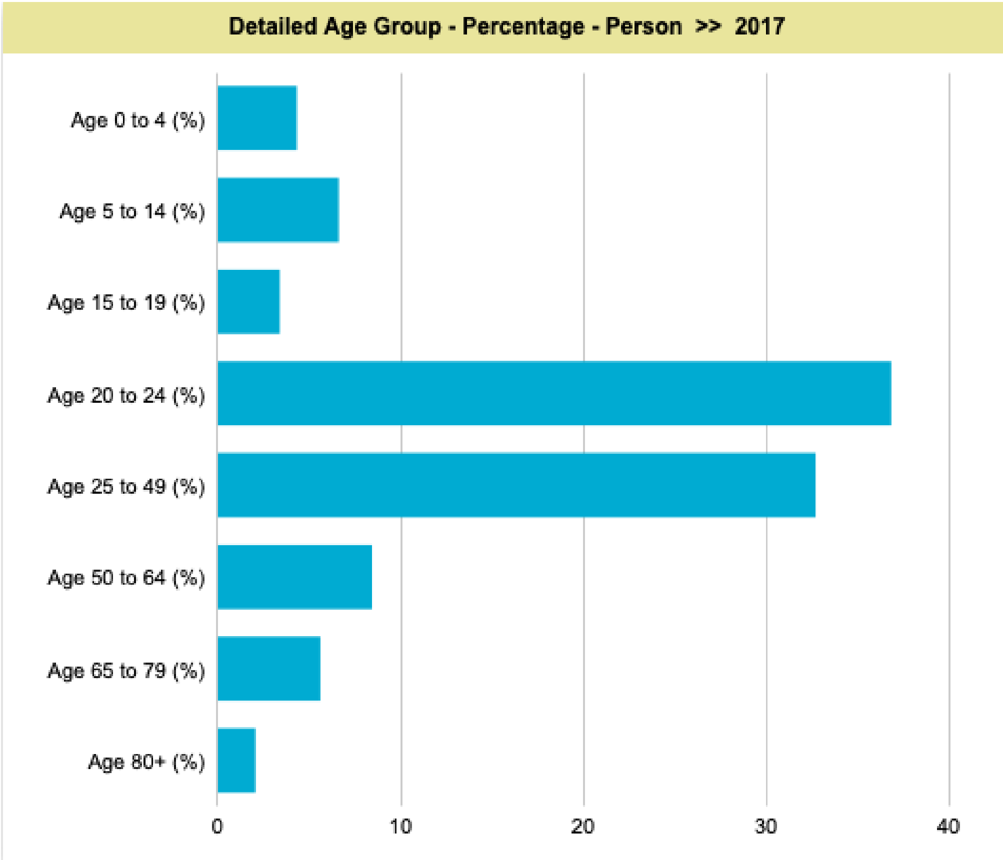
Institute of Place Management

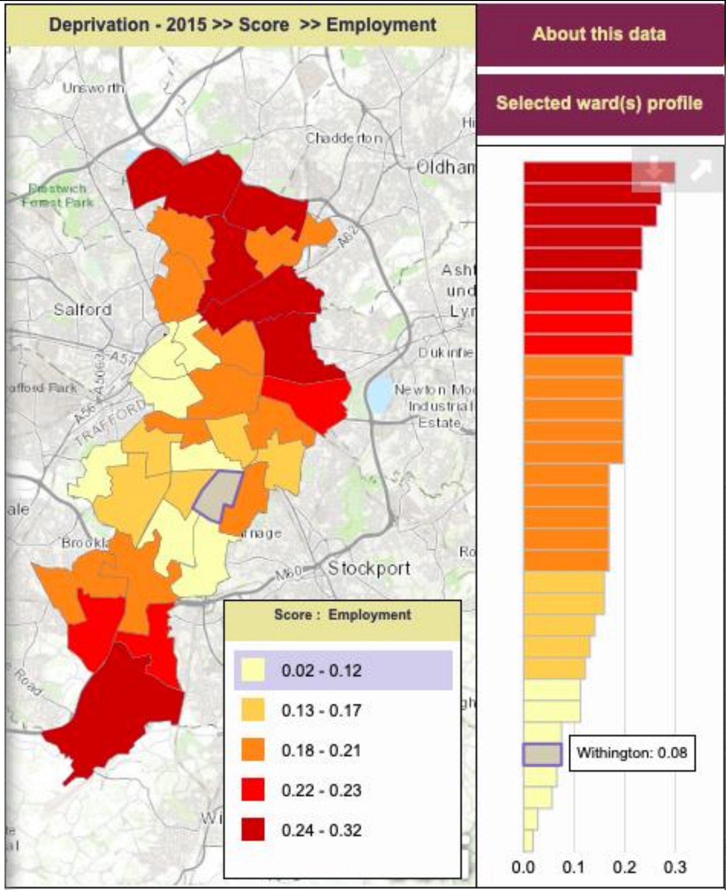
Manchester Metropolitan University

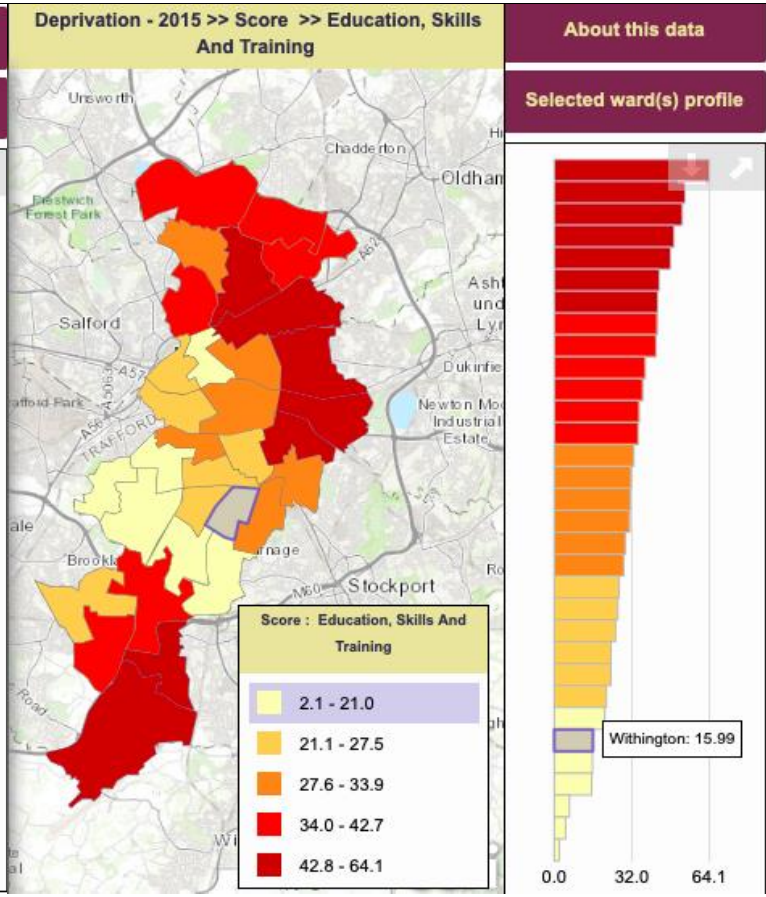
General centre overview

NAME OF CENTRE: Withington

Information required	Response
Identification of centre area	

Demographics of local population (population size, age, occupation etc.) Please provide a summary for your centre using the statistics available.	**Withington population statistics** 





Total population size estimated in 2017: 16,038 (Male 52%; Female 48%)

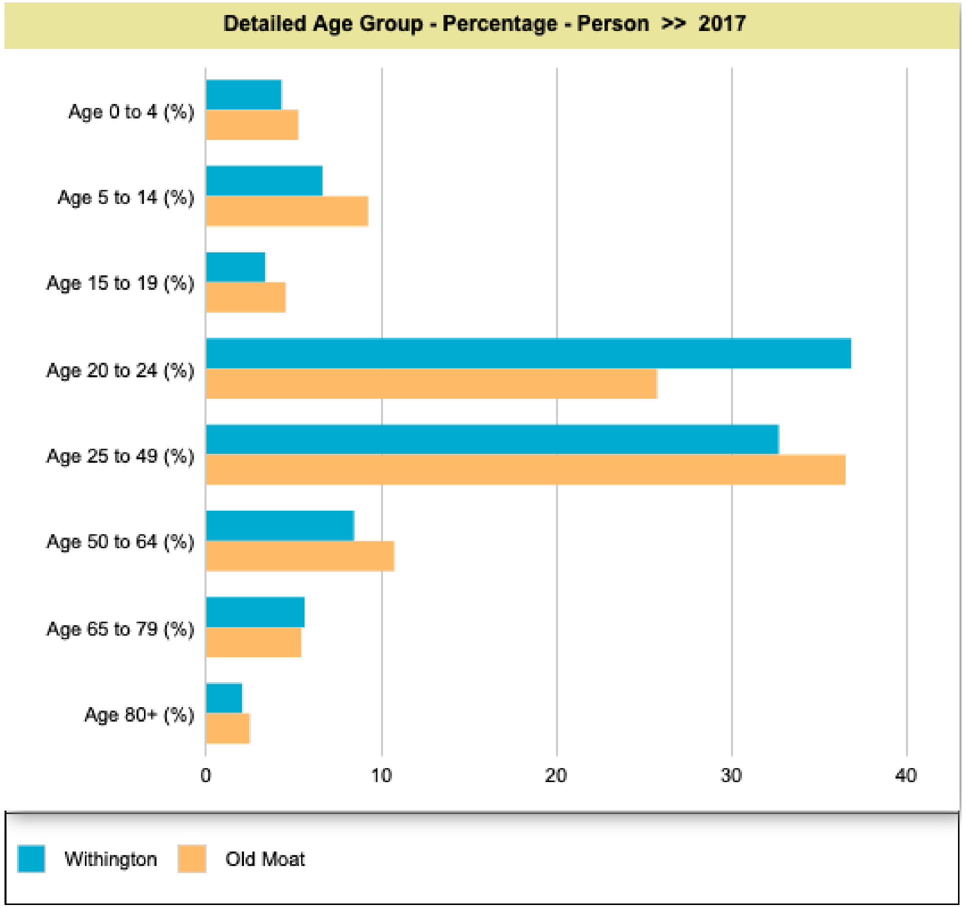
White (77%); Mixed (4.3%); Asian (12.8%); Black (2.7%)

No cars/vans (39.7%); 1 car/van (40.1%); 2 cars/vans (14.9%); 3 cars/vans (4%); 4+ cars/vans (1.4%)

High transient student population.

Low deprivation score relative to other Manchester wards, as seen in the two graphs above.

Old Moat population statistics

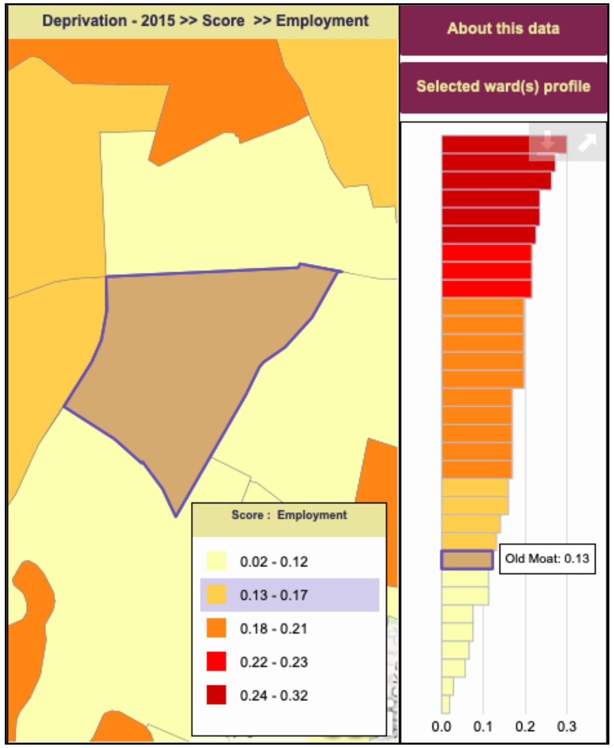


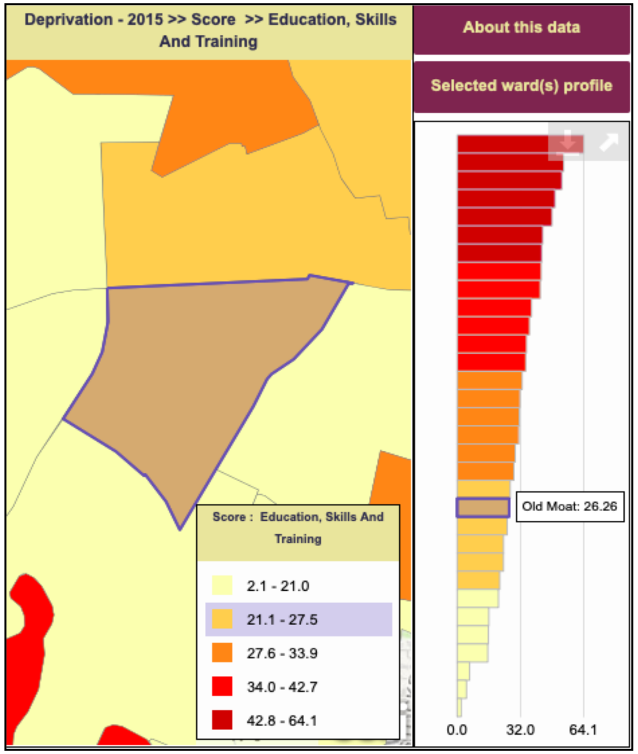
Total population size estimated in 2017: 15,504 (Male 50.77%; Female 49.23%)

White (73.4%); Mixed (5.7%); Asian (11.9%); Black (4.9%)

No cars/vans (40.9%); 1 car/van (41.3%); 2 cars/vans (13.6%); 3 cars/vans (2.8%); 4+ cars/vans (1.4%).

Lower deprivation scores relative to other Manchester wards, as seen in the two graphs below, although faring a bit worse on these aspects relative to Withington.





[Sources: MCC, 2019; ONS, 2011]

TOP 25 PRIORITY AREAS *(scores 1= poor - 5= excellent)*

1. Activity Hours	**Response**
The centre's hours of operation should meet the needs of the local catchment. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment? Repositioning Reinventing Rebranding Restructuring	In general, the businesses in the centre have convenient opening hours, extending beyond traditional 9-5 working day (the modal activity hours of a varied sample of 30 units in the centre is 9am-6pm). There were a couple of cafes open on the morning of the audit visit (Friday) for those commuting into work (Toast and the Coffee House); however, most other units were closed, which made the centre on the whole feel a bit empty on a weekday morning. There remains concern, therefore, regarding how well the centre caters for older local residents during the day, together with professional people in employment in the evening. Relative to other district centres in Manchester, however, Withington has a notable evening economy, as reflected in the footfall data. There are a few pubs and bars in the centre which are open until late and appeal to the high student population in the centre (e.g. Fuse and Solomons), as well as takeaways. If the planned market was to have evening opening hours, this could further contribute to the evening economy by attracting the local catchment commuting home from work/university, akin to Levenshulme Market. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

2. Appearance	**Response**
How clean is the centre? What is the quality of the public realm? What does the façade of the retailers look like? Are the shops well-maintained? Are there any noticeable litter issues? Reinventing	The centre in general looks a bit untidy (see Audit photos). There are some daytime appearance issues due to noticeable graffiti around the centre on both walls and shutters (although there are notably plans in place for a Shutter Art scheme to address this). There are also quite a few vacant units which contribute to a bit of a disheveled appearance, such as the Butchers, Al Jameirah, and Electronics Repair Shop (see Retail Audit; Appendix 2). However, there are some planters around the centre (e.g. opposite the library), as well as several more modern-looking units (e.g. Toast, Shakedown, and Mockingbirds) which help to promote a better appearance. Pedestrian access from the Old Moat is particularly unappealing, especially the parking and service area behind the shops on the west side of Wilmslow Road. The centre currently lacks any significant quality civic space. Furthermore, whereas there are plans in place to enhance the appearance of the road leading from The Christie to the centre via planters/trees, pedestrian links to other neighbouring districts will have to be considered in terms of improving the appearance of the centre. Score out of 5: 2/5

3. Retailers	**Response**
The retailers in the centre should meet the needs of the local catchment. What retailers are represented (this includes retailers of products and services)? Repositioning Reinventing	There retailers in the centre largely have a functional purpose, providing basic groceries, food/beverages, and household items for the local catchment (see Retail Audit; Appendix 2) in line with its community/convenience centre type, with the Sainsbury's and Co-op as the main retail anchors. There are also many basic services in the centre, such as repairs, opticians, health care, pharmacy, and dentists. The vacant units in the centre could provide an opportunity to diversify the offer in the centre; and proposals for a market will help to enhance retail diversity, especially if offering something not currently provided (e.g. Butchers, fishmongers etc.) Score out of 5: 3/5

4. Vision and Strategy	**Response**
Having a common vision and some leadership is important in centres. Do the high street stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans? Is the vision adopted in stakeholders plans? Restructuring	The Withington Village Regeneration Partnership brings together a range of passionate stakeholders on a monthly basis around a shared vision to regenerate the centre, with shared ambitions to create a cultural hub in the future. Whilst this group could be expanded, there is effort being made to engage a wider range of stakeholders in centre plans, such as The Christie and a local housing association. There is also a Civic Society and recently created Traders Association in the centre. There are some suggestions, however, that some of the landlords in Withington are absent and disengaged when it comes to centre visions and strategies. Score out of 5: 4/5

5. Experience	**Response**
Considering the quality of the experience within the centre. What is the overall image provided by the centre? How are customer service levels perceived? What are residents'/visitors' overall levels of satisfaction with the centre? Repositioning Rebranding	The centre feels quiet on weekday mornings and afternoons; lacking a sense of vibrancy. The appearance issues in the centre also negatively affect the experience. However, there are suggestions that there have been a range of pop-up festivals in Withington which have driven footfall into the centre and created a sense of experience (e.g. Factory Records event, craft ale festival, and a pop-up market), as well as there being an apparent evening economy. A proposed market feature will imaginably help to further enhance the experience in Withington, coupled with the potential to draw inspiration from the Teenage Market model to attract the young catchment and contribute further to the existing sense of community. Score out of 5: 3/5

6. Management	**Response**
Is there effective management of the centre? What management structures are in place for managing the centre? Is there effective collaboration between centre stakeholders in managing the centre? Restructuring	Manchester City Council and the Withington Village Regeneration Partnership currently lead the strategic and operational sides of place management. To date, these partners have begun to foster more effective collaboration to bring about place improvement e.g. pocket park and shop frontage schemes. Score out of 5: 4/5

7. Merchandise	**Response**
The merchandise on offer in the centre should meet the needs of the local catchment. What is the range and quality of goods on offer? Repositioning Reinventing	The centre caters well for the basic needs of the local catchment, providing a range of basic groceries and household items. It has less in the way of comparison shopping, and the retailers on the whole lack diversity of merchandise. However, the proposed market feature will imaginably provide the local catchment with a greater variety of merchandise. Score out of 5: 3/5

8. Necessities	**Response**
A centre should ensure that basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking, toilets, and places for people to sit down in the centre? Reinventing	- There is a Lloyds bank cashpoint on Wilmslow Road - There is parking along the side of Copson Street, as well as 30 minutes free parking for Co-Op customers, Gledhill Street car park (which is not well-maintained), and, for staff and patients, The Christie multi-story car park nearby (a new multi-storey car park for The Christie staff will be built in the near future close to the junction of Cotton Lane and Wilmslow Road). The public toilets are closed but there are some available in the public library. - There are some benches outside of the library but the centre on the whole lacks places for people to dwell. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

9. Anchors	**Response**
Is there an anchor in the centre which has pulling power and drives footfall into the area? This could be retail (like a department store or large supermarket), a busy transport interchange, or a large employer. Rebranding	The centre lacks any clear anchors to drive footfall into the centre apart from The Christie Hospital, which itself possesses several retail/food outlets that may deter people from venturing in to the district centre. Generating closer synergies and linked trips between the hospital and district centre, therefore, provides a unique opportunity. The Sainsbury's and Co-op could function as retail anchors, although these seem to mainly cater for the basic grocery needs of the local catchment, rather than having the power to pull people from further afield. There are also several bars to drive people into the centre during the evening. A market might prove to be an important future anchor, and the swimming baths are an important hub for the local community. Score out of 5: 2.5/5

10. Networks and partnerships	**Response**
Are there strong networks and effective formal/informal partnerships in the centre? Are there any traders' associations or community groups? Do centre stakeholders communicate and trust each other? Or are there any apparent stakeholder tensions? Restructuring	The Withington Village Regeneration Partnership brings together a range of passionate stakeholders on a monthly basis around a shared vision to regenerate the centre, with ambitions to create a cultural hub in the future. Efforts have been made to engage a wider range of stakeholders in centre plans, such as The Christie and a local housing association. There is also a Civic Society, as well as a recently formed Traders Association. There are some suggestions, however, that some of the landlords in the centre are absent and disengaged within centre visions and strategies. The vital and viable workshop should help to bring a wider range of passionate stakeholders together, especially local traders, who need to be brought into the existing local network. Score out of 5: 4/5

11. Diversity	**Response**
How diverse is the offer provided in the centre, for both retail (types of retailer/multiples/SMEs etc.), and non-retail (leisure activities, events etc.)? Repositioning	The centre possesses a relatively narrow range of basic retailers and services for the local catchment, providing basic groceries, food/beverages, household items, and healthcare services. There is more variety in terms of entertainment and events, with a range of pop-up events recently creating a sense of vibrancy in the centre (e.g. craft beer nights). The proposed market will help to enhance retail diversity in the centre, as well as the planned cultural hub. One concern is that the centre over-services younger students, which does not appeal to older residents, or professionals in employment. Score out of 5: 2.5/5

12. Walkability	**Response**
Are linked trips between areas possible, or are the distances too great? Are there other obstacles that stop people walking through and around the centre (e.g. potholes, bollards, cars etc.)? How easy is the space to navigate with pushchairs/wheelchairs etc.? Repositioning Reinventing	The centre is quite compact, with linked trips between the units easy to make. The pavements, however, are quite narrow, blocked by bollards and parked cars in places (see Photos). There are some discussions around making the pavements more age-friendly in the future to appeal to the older population living in the Old Moat area. There are also suggestions that better signage is needed to encourage people visiting the The Christie Hospital to explore the district centre more fully, together with improved synergy with the services and attractions on the edge of the district centre such as the baths. Score out of 5: 3/5

13. Entertainment and Leisure	**Response**
What is the entertainment and leisure offer provided in the centre? Does this appeal to the local catchment? Are there any festivals, fairs, and events held in the centre? Reinventing	It has been observed by the Withington Village Regeneration Partnership that, whilst Withington used to be known for pubs, good customer service, and the cinema, entertainment and leisure provision in the centre has dwindled over recent decades. However, efforts have been made over recent years to create this sense of experience again, although this could be further enhanced in the future (i.e. via the planned cultural hub). Recent pop-up events have been driving footfall into the centre and created a sense of vibrancy (e.g. Factory Records and beer events). The swimming baths are also an important community hub, hosting a variety of events, both fitness-related and community-focused, as well as providing a co-working space. There are also a few bars and pubs in the area to offer entertainment in the evenings for the student population. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

14. Attractiveness	**Response**
Is the centre able to attract visitors from a distance; or does it primarily serve the needs of the local community? What is there in the centre which might make it a visitor attraction? Rebranding	The centre primarily serves the needs of its local community, with a lack of anchors to attract people from further afield. However, it is suggested recent temporary events have been integral to instilling a sense of vitality into Withington, such as the Factory Records event and pop-up craft ale bar (footfall data would help to evidence this). The proposed permanent market might also prove to be a visitor attraction. Score out of 5: 2.5/5

15. Place assurance	**Response**
Does the centre offer a basic level of customer service; is this consistent? Or do some operators, or parts of the offer, let this down? Is the centre getting the basics right for their local community? Restructuring	The centre offers basic goods for the local community (see Retailers), as well as a range of services, such as solicitors, dentists, estate agents, repairs, and pharmacy (also see Liveability). The independents in Withington also provide a good level of community-feel customer service (e.g. Toast). However, the vacant units in the centre and appearance issues reduce the sense of place assurance. Score out of 5: 3/5

16. Accessibility	**Response**
How convenient is the centre to access? What modes of transport are available to access the centre? Are there any cycle lanes? What car parking options are available? Are there clear pathways to walk to and through the centre? Restructuring	The centre is easily accessible via a range of public transport options, including frequent bus routes from/into Manchester City Centre and the University area, and is within walking distance of the Withington/West Didsbury/Burton Road tram stops. There are also multiple car parks in the centre for those accessing via car (see Necessities). Score out of 5: 3/5

17. Place marketing	**Response**
How does the centre market and promote itself? Do enough stakeholders communicate in a way that builds a coherent place brand image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow with signage and guides? Repositioning Rebranding	The Withington Baths regularly provides updates about their events on their Twitter account. A range of retailers in the centre also have Twitter accounts, although these seem to be updated relatively infrequently (e.g. Ice Shack, Fuel Bar, and Solomons Café Bar). There is also a Withington Twitter hashtag which generally has positive updates about the place. News coverage about the place online generally focuses on either Withington as an upcoming cultural hotspot to rival Chorlton and Didsbury, or more negatively about crimes in the area. Score out of 5: 3/5

18. Comparison/convenience	**Response**

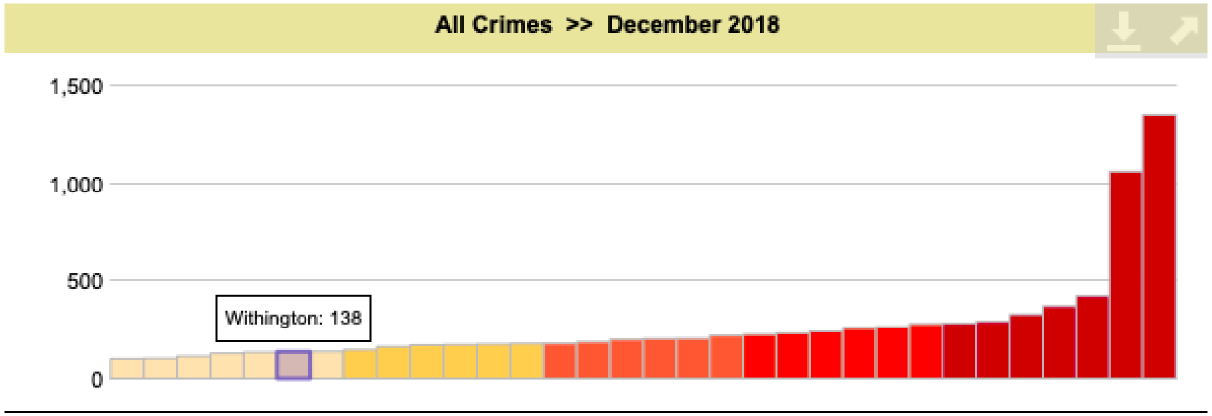
What comparison shopping opportunities are available in the centre? What convenience shopping is on offer in the centre? What is the ratio of comparison shopping compared to convenience? Repositioning Reinventing	The centre is very convenience-based in line with its convenience/community function, with most retailers providing for local residents' everyday needs, such as food, groceries, and household items (see Retail audit). There is less on offer in terms of comparison shopping in Withington. Score out of 5: 3/5

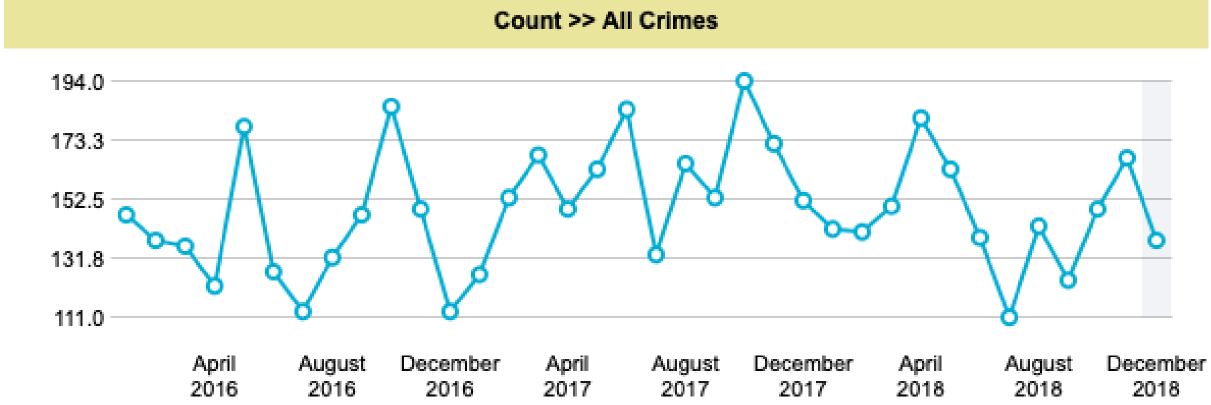
19. Recreational space	**Response**
Are there areas in the centre where people can enjoy spending time without spending money (e.g. parks)? What is the quality of the recreational areas and public space/open space in the centre? Reinventing	Old Moat Park is within walking distance of the main district centre; however, the centre lacks public spaces for people to dwell. However, the Withington Village Regeneration Partnership have successfully had a bid accepted to fund the Parsonage Pocket Park scheme to address such concerns around a lack of recreational space in the centre. Score out of 5: 2.5/5
20. Barriers to entry	**Response**
What obstacles are there which make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the local market? What is the location doing to make it easier for new businesses to enter the centre (if anything)? Restructuring	There are quite a few vacant units in the centre (see Appendix 2) which provide opportunities for new entrants/ re-purposing of these units. For instance, Costa has recently got planning permission to take over the ground flood of an apartment block on Wilmslow Road Score out of 5: 3/5

21. Chain vs Independent	**Response**

What chains are on offer in the centre? What independent stores are there in the centre? Is this suitably balanced, and does this provision meet the needs of the local community? Reinventing	There is a mix of chains and independents in Withington, with the balance in favour of independents (see Retail Audit), which helps to create more of a community feel. The proposed permanent market will further add to the number of independents in the centre, potentially helping to replace those that have been lost (e.g. the community butchers). Score out of 5: 3/5

22. Safety/crime	**Response**
What are the actual reported crime figures and resident/visitor perceptions of safety in the centre? Restructuring	As seen in the charts below, Withington has lower levels of reported crimes relative to other district centres in Manchester, accounting for 1.59% of total crimes in Manchester in December 2018. Reported crimes in the area have also generally fallen since 2017. The general appearance issues and poorly maintained alleyway from the carpark into the centre, however, negatively contribute to perceptions of safety in the centre.





(Source: MCC, 2019)

Score out of 5: 3/5

23. Liveability	**Response**
Does the centre offer the services/environment that meets the needs of the local community (e.g. doctors, schools, playgrounds, etc.)? Reinventing Restructuring	There are a range of services on offer in Withington, although these are not located in one central hub for the local community to access. These include: dentists; opticians; pharmacy; GP surgery; The Christie Hospital; Library; Churches; Primary Schools; and Old Moat Park (which has a playground). Score out of 5: 3/5

24. Adaptability	**Response**
How flexible is the space/units in a centre for new development opportunities? Are there any inflexible and outdated units that are unlikely to be re-let or re-purposed? Restructuring	There are quite a few vacant units in the centre which provide opportunities for new developments. There is also the potential for building on low-down units in the centre, such as residential to densify the local population. There are also some discussions around flattening and extending Rutherford Square outside of the library to create a café culture and more spaces for people to dwell. Score out of 5: 3/5

25. Store development	**Response**
Are retailers and property owners in the centre willing to coordinate/cooperate in updating activities? Or do they act independently (or not at all)? Reinventing	The stakeholders in general seem to operate relatively independently in their activities, rather than coordinating in terms of store renovations/updates. There are discussions around whether a shop front design-guide is needed to create a more consistent image in the centre. Greater collaboration between traders and communication with property owners is now required, which the recently created Traders Association might aid. Score out of 5: 2.5/5

Withington audit photographs

Some evident appearance issues in the centre

Appearance issues being addressed in some pockets (planters, modern units, and art)

Obstacles to walkability

Events in Withington

Key community hub (Withington Baths)

Vacant sites and units providing development opportunities

Appendix 2: Retail use survey

Retail Use Values	2015	2019	Change	Change(%)
A1 - Shops	51	47	minus 4	-8%
A2 - Financial & Professional	18	12	minus 6	-33%
A3 - Café & Restaurant	8	10	plus 2	25%
A4 - Bar/Pub	4	4	no change	0%
A5 - Hot Food takeaway	6	8	plus 2	33%
B1 - Office	1	1	no change	0%
D1 - Non-Residential Institutions	6	5	minus 1	-17%
D2 - Assembly & Leisure	0	0	no change	
Sui Generis	6	5	minus 1	-17%
Vacant Building	7	15	plus 8	114%
Vacancy Rate (%)	6.5%	14%	up 7.5%	
Total Business Units	107	107	no change	
Business Turnover (against previous use list)	24	21	minus 3	-12.5%

The research team updated Withington's 2015 retail use type survey during the audit visit. Results of the survey are shown in the table above. Overall, the performance over the last four years has been negative. There is a substantial loss of A1 and A2 provision in the area, highlighted by the closure of NatWest and RBS that probably created repercussions on the district centre. There is a slight increase in A3 and A5 provision, but not enough to strengthen the offer in these categories. Overall, Withington's retail vacancy has increased by 7.5%, and is now above the national average of 10.2% (14%).