Institute of Place Management

Manchester Metropolitan University

Vital and Viable Chorlton

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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 Chorlton.

Based on secondary data, a primary audit of Chorlton, meetings with Chorlton's Neighbourhood Managers and trader group, a workshop with 20 local stakeholders, and footfall data, this report explores Chorlton'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 Chorlton 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.

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Vital and Viable Neighbourhood Centres: Chorlton 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) within four place management pilot 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. Chorlton has been selected as one of these centres. This report details the outcomes of our work with Chorlton, 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 Chorlton's performance.

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

- Fourth, the key insights about Chorlton 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 Chorlton'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 Chorlton, 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, 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.

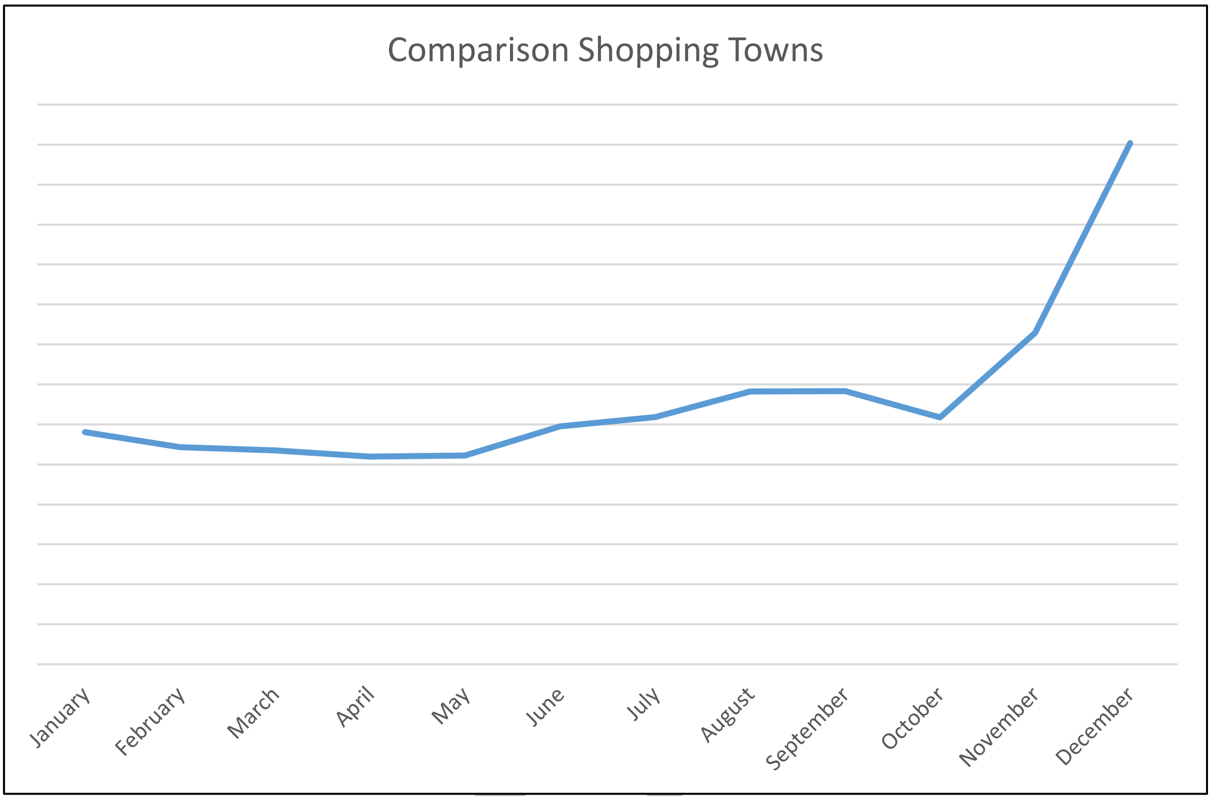
Analysis of this data has identified four basic patterns that have profound significance in thinking about the future of traditional retail centres. The patterns show usage of a centre by month over a twelve-month period. Whilst it had traditionally been assumed that most centres show an increase in 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:

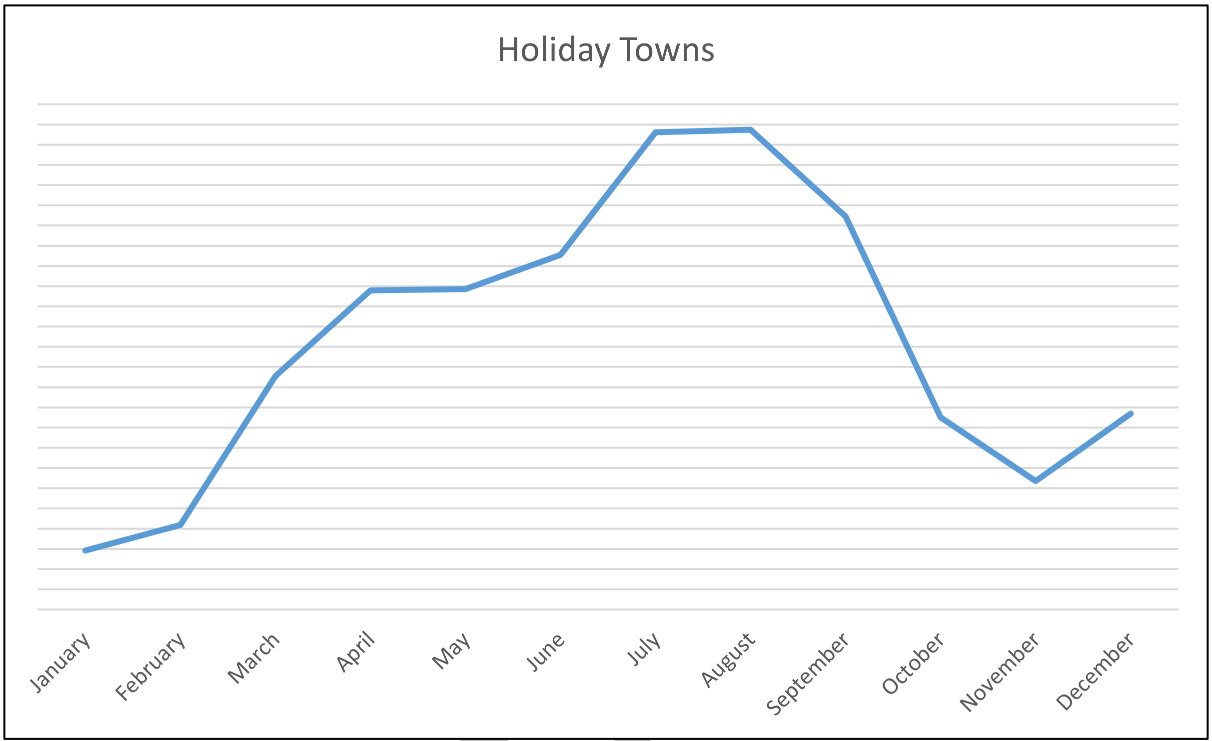
Comparison shopping towns

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.



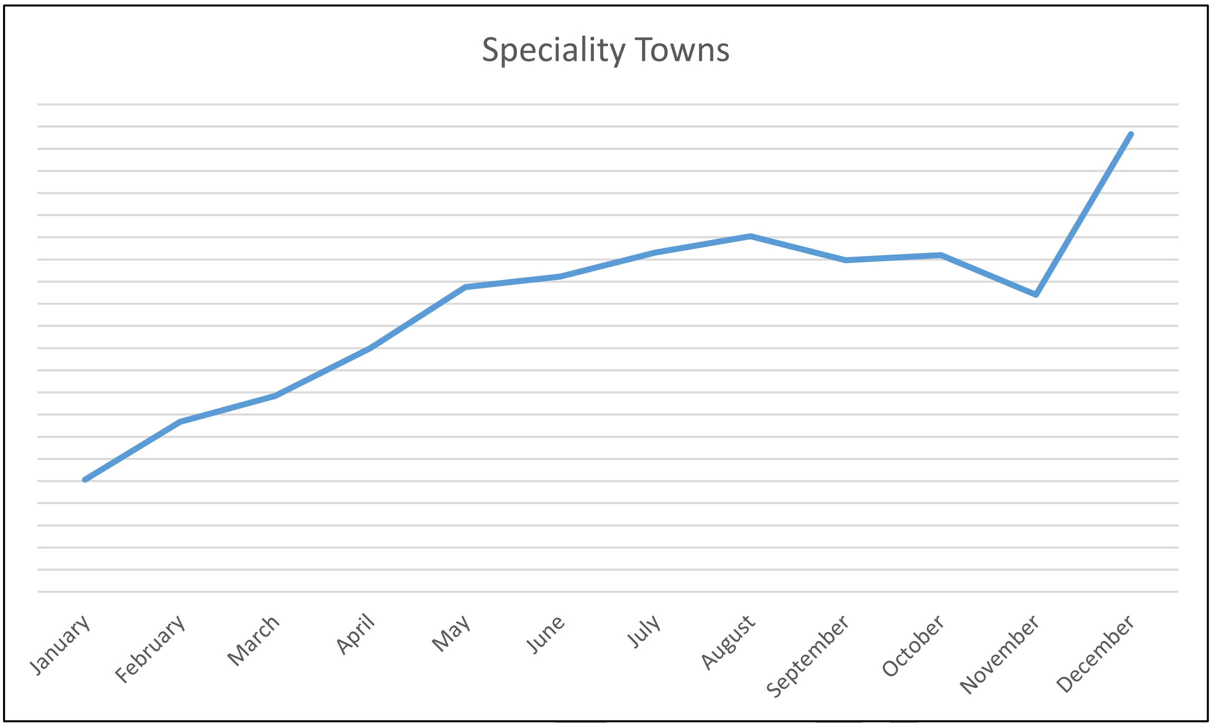
Holiday towns

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

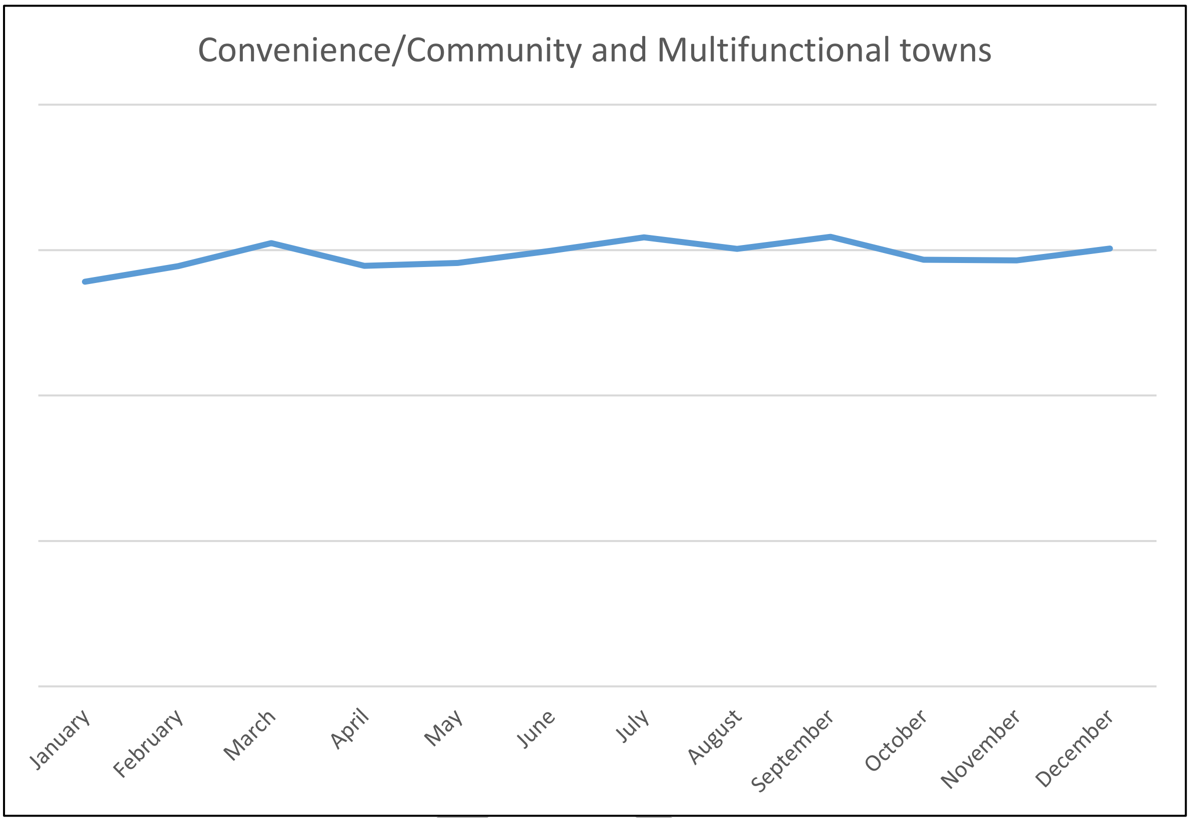
Speciality towns have a notable Christmas shopping peak, but they also attract visitors through the spring and summer (see figure below). They offer something unique and special that appeals to visitors from a wide area, in many cases including overseas visitors. Their anchor is not retail but perhaps 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 Chorlton'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 four 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.

The work we have undertaken that has led to this report was not an in-depth study of Chorlton. 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 Chorlton's Neighbourhood Team, the local councillors, and Chorlton Traders to learn a bit more about the centre, and also ran a development workshop with 15 local stakeholders.

We will now discuss what we learned about Chorlton 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 Chorlton'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 Chorlton's key strengths and weaknesses in terms of those factors which have the most impact on its vitality and viability. Four factors for which Chorlton is performing well, and four for which there is room for improvement, are detailed in the table below:

Key strengths	Key weaknesses
Factor 1. Activity hours - Whilst average business hours in the centre are 9-5, there are also a sizeable number of businesses with activity hours extending beyond the traditional working day with a range of shops and cafes opening at 8-8.30am; convenient for commuters. - There is an evident evening economy in Chorlton, with a range of bars, restaurants, and takeaways open until late, complimented by a cluster of businesses on Beech Road, situated just outside the district centre boundary.	**Factor 2. Appearance** - There are a range of quirky and trendy shops and bars in Chorlton, as well as a selection of community-feel independents, which together contribute to a sense of vibrancy and good appearance. - However, there are some notable issues with graffiti and litter elsewhere in the centre and the precinct shopping centre is dated. - There is also a lack of greenspace/quality civic space within the district centre boundary.
Factor 11. Diversity - There is a diverse range of retailers, bars, and restaurants in the centre, with a broad range of independents on offer (see Retailers; Appendix 2). - This diversity is further enhanced by regular markets, events, and festivals, many of which are held in nearby Beech Road, which add a sense of vibrancy.	**Factor 4. Vision and strategy** - A key challenge for the centre is the absence of leadership and a shared vision for the centre of Chorlton, other than the objectives set out in Manchester City Council's *Report for Resolution: Chorlton - New Development Opportunities* (25 July 2018). - There also appear to be some stakeholder tensions regarding proposals for the redevelopment of the Chorlton Precinct Shopping Centre and cycle lane proposals within the district centre. - Although Chorlton has a positive place identity, it is currently somewhat fragmented. A more consolidated and streamlined approach to communicating the offer is therefore needed to further protect and maintain this place image.

Factor 16. Accessibility	Factor 12. Walkability
- The centre is very accessible via a range of public transport options, with Chorlton tram stop and frequent buses to and from Manchester City Centre - The Morrison's car park provides 240 parking spaces for those travelling into Chorlton via car and parking is free for customers for up to 2 hours. - Currently, there are few bicycle paths in Chorlton; however, there is a consultation process taking place regarding a proposed Chorlton Cycleway.	- Chorlton is a large centre relative to other district centres across Manchester, meaning that it is not easily walkable. The pavements are also poorly maintained and uneven in places, resulting in further issues around walkability. - As the wider popularity of Chorlton has grown as both residential and leisure destination, an emerging issue is the connectivity within the wider district centre. Chorlton perhaps comprises four distinct centres and, although traditionally subject to separate local planning frameworks, it is perhaps timely to consider the linkages, signage and synergy between these centres – in terms of building and maintaining a consistent offer and identity.
Factor 23. Liveability	**Factor 20. Barriers to entry**
- There is a wide range of key services provided for the local community in Chorlton, including a doctors' surgery, health centre, three dentists, three pharmacies, a library, nursery, and physiotherapy centre. There is also a variety of nearby schools, and Beech Road Park lies just outside of the district centre boundary, which has a playground.	- There are a low number of vacant units in Chorlton, with the vacancy rate at just 8.5% in 2019, which is lower than the national UK average of 10.2% in May 2019. This, therefore, poses a key barrier to new businesses seeking to enter into the centre.

The research team also compiled a retail use type survey in May 2019 as part of the audit. Results of the survey are shown in the table below. Overall, Chorlton's performance seems to have a good balance between daytime and night-time economy, with a good mix of A1 and A3 to A5 provisions. A1 provision has remained steady, whereas A3, A4, and A5 provision has increased over the years, spearheaded by a 43.5% increase of cafés and restaurants in the area in the past five years. Also, Chorlton's retail vacancy rate has decreased by 2%, a positive change and well below the national average of 10.2% at the time of the survey.

Retail use type audit

Retail Use Values	Number of units (2019)	2019(%)	2017(%)	2015(%)
A1 - Shops	105	39.2%	39.6%	40.5%
A2 - Financial & Professional	26	9.7%	8.4%	8.8%
A3 - Café & Restaurant	45	16.8%	13.1%	11.7%
A4 - Bar/Pub	23	8.6%	6.9%	6.9%
A5 - Hot Food takeaway	27	10.1%	8.4%	8.0%
B1 - Office	1	0.4%	0.7%	1.5%
D1 - Non-Residential Institutions	8	3.0%	5.8%	5.8%
D2 - Assembly & Leisure	0	0.0%	0.4%	0.4%
Sui Generis	12	4.5%	6.2%	6.6%
Vacant Building	21			
Vacancy Rate (%)		8.5%	10.5%	9.9%
Total Business Units	268	100%	100%	100%

6.2. Footfall data

A footfall counter has been capturing around the clock footfall data in Chorlton since July 2018 (as seen in the image below).

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

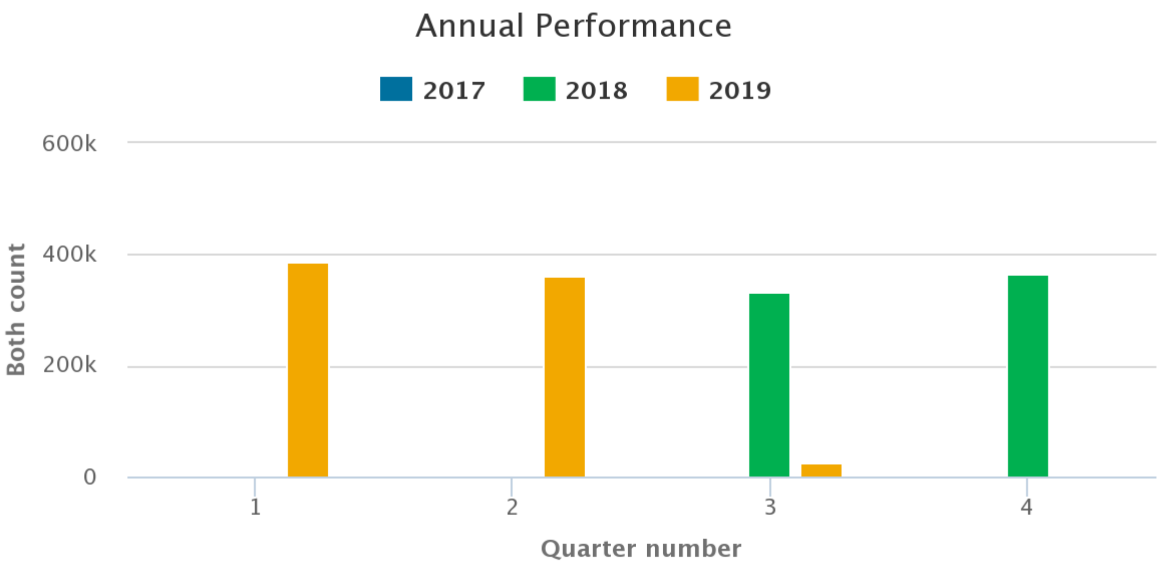
- **Providing data to existing businesses** in order to support business retention in the centre

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

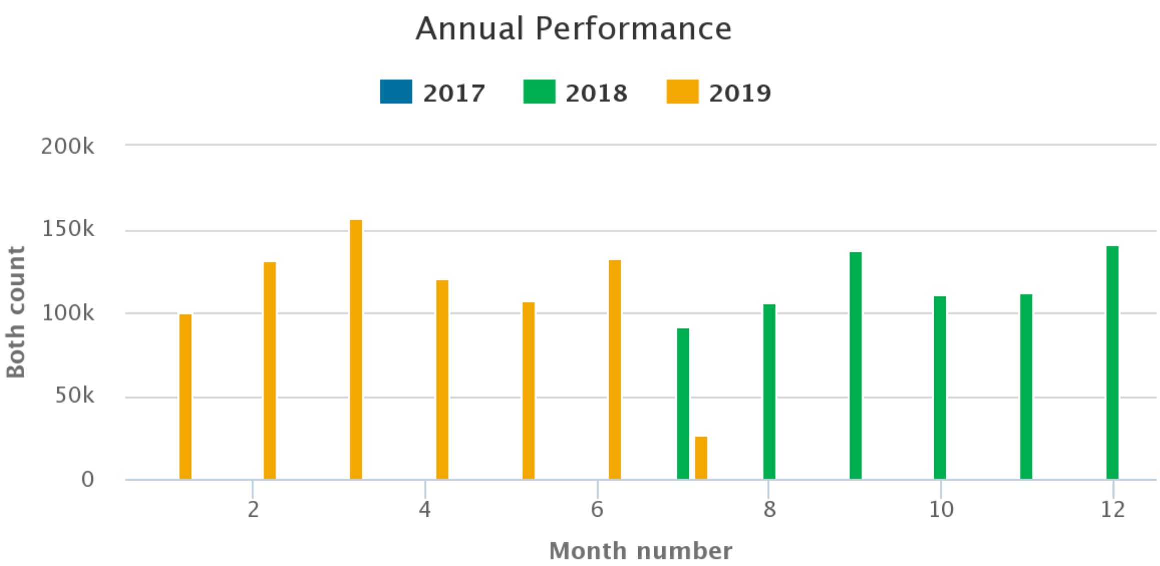
- **Identifying over or under-performance** by benchmarking against national and regional averages and peer groups to establish whether increases or decreases in footfall are in-line with general trends.

Chorlton's counter is located on Wilbraham Road, as seen below. This counter, installed in July 2018, has been recording footfall 24 hours per day. As such, we currently have just over 12 months of data that we can use to decipher how the centre is being used. 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.

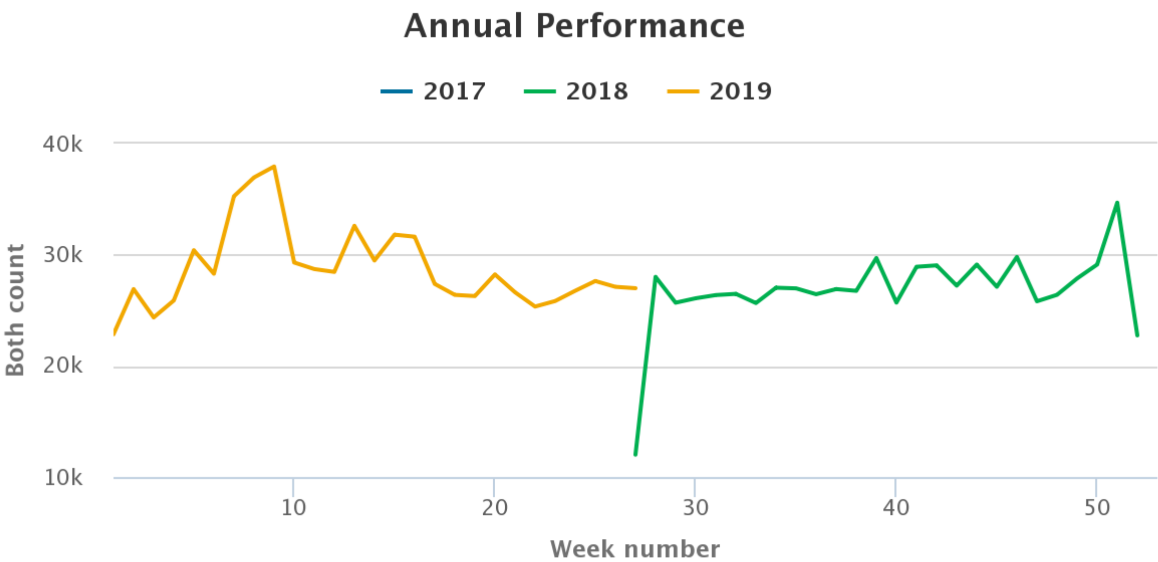
If we look at the data at the broadest level initially, by quarter, we can see that Chorlton's footfall recorded to date is relatively consistent. The counters have recorded approximately 350,000 movements on average per quarter, hence approximately 1.4 million movements per year.



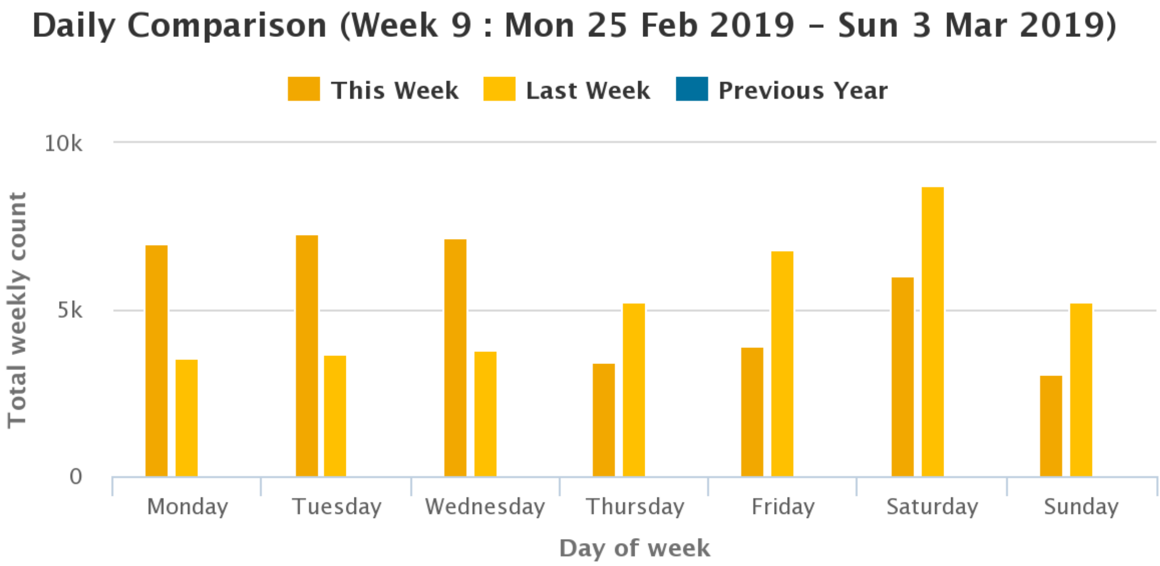
If we then look at the monthly data, we can see a broad consistency, within a range of just over 100,000 to around 150,000 movements recorded per month, with an average of approximately 125,000 movements. The data that we have recorded over the twelve months since counter installation indicates that the centre is performing as we expect, as a community/convenience centre – catering for the needs of the local population and largely unaffected by seasonal trends.



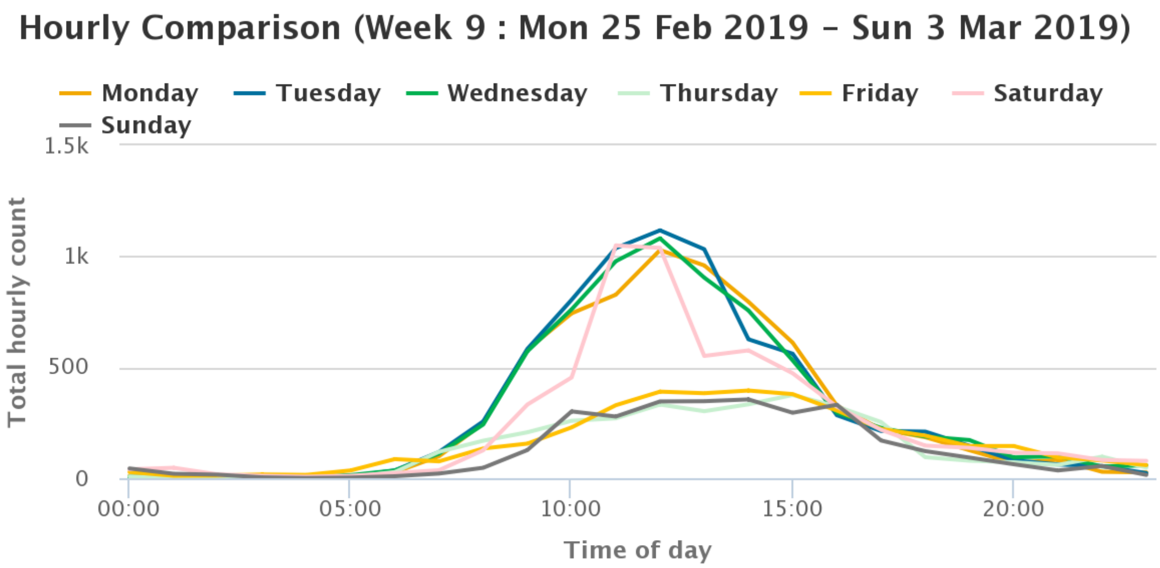
If we look at the weekly performance over the course of the last twelve months, again – with the exceptions of the odd peak and trough - there is a consistency, with the centre achieving an average of just around 30,000 movements per month. Again, this is symptomatic of a centre that is being utilised by the local population on a functional and habitual basis. The two peaks we can see, in December 2018 and towards the end of February 2019, can be reasonably attributed to people shopping for Christmas essentials and a short period of unseasonably warm weather, respectively.



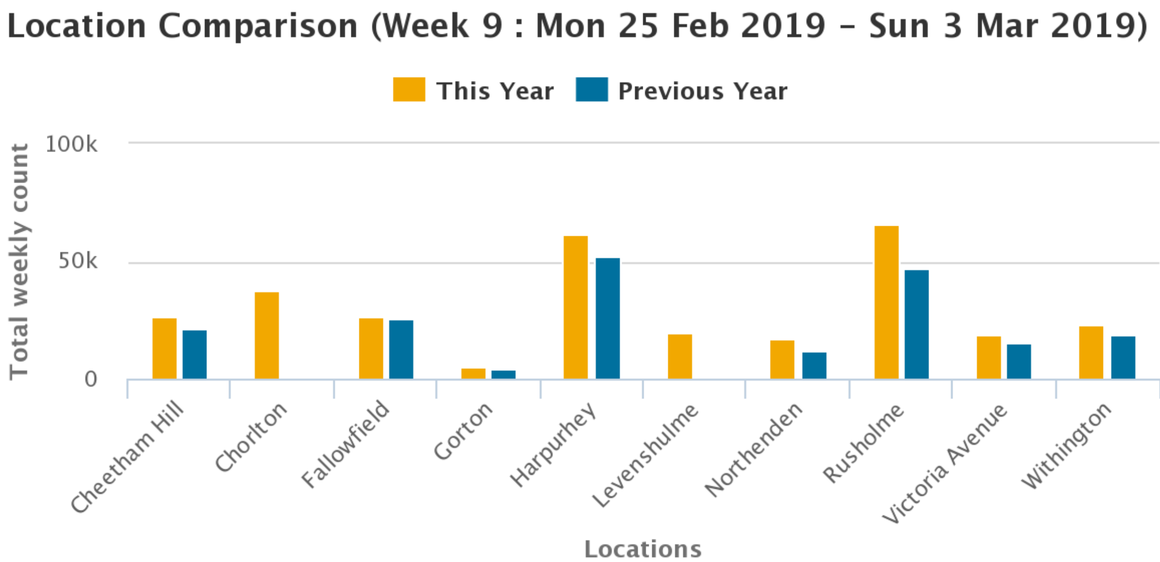
Looking at the daily footfall for the week of the workshop, we can see again that there is a level of consistency. The week in question was the week following the period of warmer weather mentioned above, which extended in to the first half of this week. As such the performance of the centre is skewed either positively or negatively against the same day the week before, dependent on if the weather was better or worse. For example, we can see that during the first part of the week, the centre achieved an average of just over 7000 movements per day, against an average of just under 4000 recorded the week prior. Conversely, the tail end of the week, when the weather began to turn to something more line with the season, we see that performance dipped. The Saturday, for example, achieved under 6000 movements, against almost 9000 movements the previous week.



Going into further detail, the counter's 24-hour recording allows us to break down the data into average hourly footfall. We can see that the footfall builds during standard business operating hours (9am-5pm), reaching a peak around midday, before gradually tailing off towards the evening. This is largely in-line with what we would expect to see in a convenience centre. What is perhaps surprising, and may be attributable to the week of the workshop only, and the change back to more seasonable weather as opposed to the week before, is the lack of activity during the evening hours, particularly for the Friday and Saturday evenings. We can see that from around 2pm onwards, footfall tails off quite steeply, before turning in to a gradual decline around 5pm. However, given Chorlton's array of bars and restaurants, it is unlikely that these results are indicative of a general trend in the centre, and reviewing hourly data longitudinally is likely to show a stronger evening economy performance over the longer term.



What this initial analysis of footfall in Chorlton 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, which is of course in keeping with the characteristics of a centre of this nature. What the data for the week of the workshop does not illustrate is Chorlton's strength as a leisure destination, particularly during evening economy/weekend hours. One would expect a longitudinal view to correct for this and demonstrate a stronger evening performance than other district centres in Manchester.



A comparison with other centres for the week of the workshop shows that Chorlton is achieving a higher than average level of footfall, with only two of the ten centres in the study attracting more visitors during that week.

Overall, the centre is performing largely as we would expect, with peak hours of operation during typical business hours. 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 Chorlton.

6.3. Stakeholder workshop

To further enrich our understandings of Chorlton, we also conducted a two-hour workshop with 15 key local stakeholders, including residents, business owners, and local councillors, at the local library on 28th February 2019. The workshop gave stakeholders an opportunity to meet each other, and voice their opinions on what makes Chorlton a great place to live, and the opportunities to make this even better. Within stakeholders' discussions of Chorlton, we were able to identify what they considered as being Chorlton's main positives, in addition to the key challenges the centre currently faces, as detailed in the table below.

Top factors activity

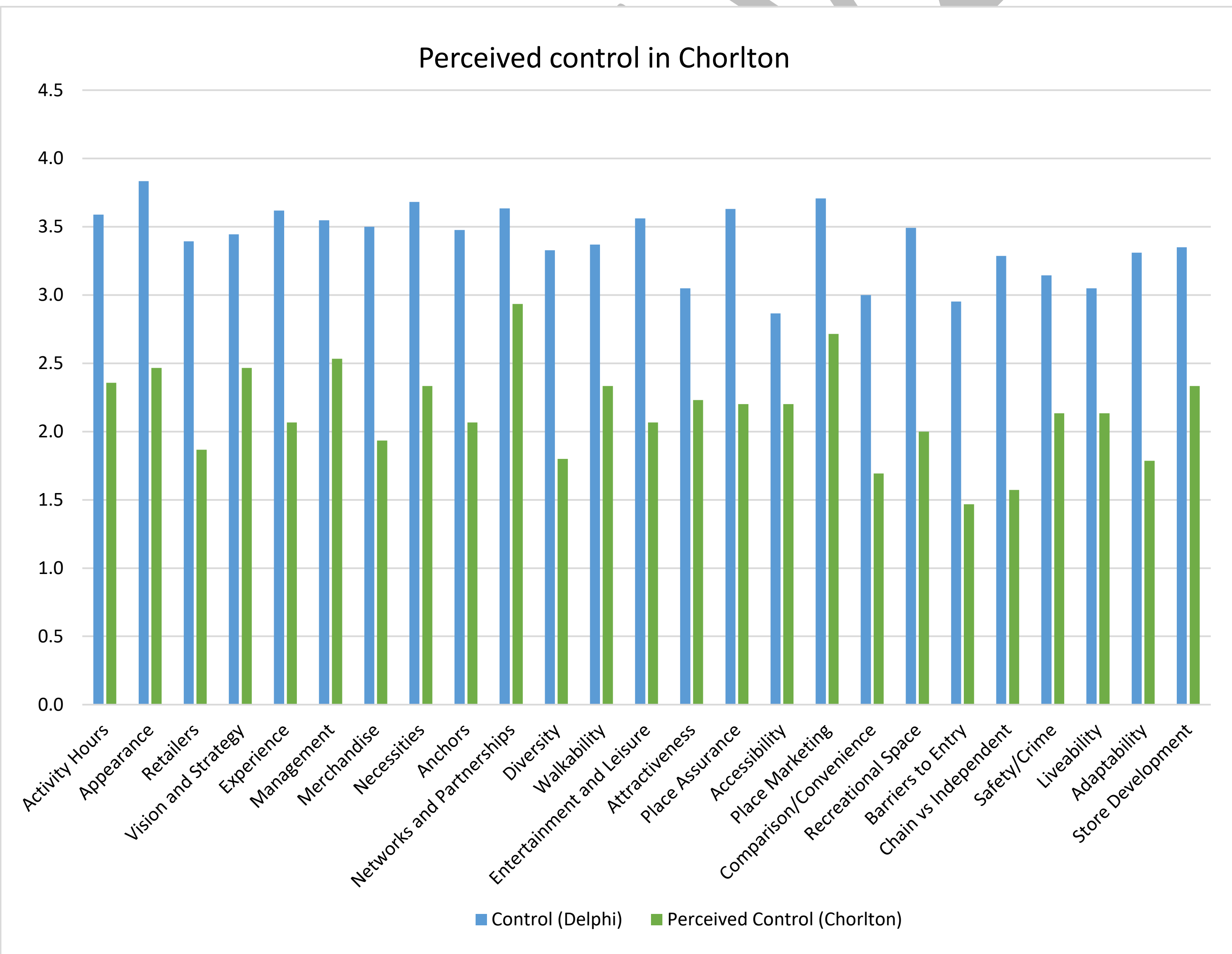
	Top factors
Group 1	1. Transport links (both positive and negative impacts) 2. High property prices 3. Lack of stakeholder collaboration around plans and strategies
Group 2	1. Traffic and congestion issues 2. Lack of shared community space 3. A vibrant arts, culture, and independents scene
Group 3	1. Traffic and congestion issues 2. Lack of attractive public realm 3. Negative appearance of the shopping precinct

We can see from the above table that, in terms of Chorlton's key positives, and in line with the centre audit, stakeholders identified that the centre has a vibrant arts, culture, and events scene, in addition to a diverse range of independent retailers, cafes, and restaurants, which contributes to a sense of place distinctiveness. Participants also believed there to be good accessibility to Chorlton due to regular trams and buses in operation.

However, in terms of areas to improve upon, stakeholders commonly identified that there are some challenges around traffic and congestion within the centre, causing issues with walkability. They also consider there to be a lack of attractive public realm for the community to socialise or work together, as well as some appearance issues within the precinct shopping centre. Moreover, participants suggested there needs to be further stakeholder collaboration in local plans and strategies, since currently various groups seem to operate somewhat independently. Finally, high rents were mentioned as a potential barrier to entry for both businesses and residents.

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 Chorlton to make it an even better place to work, live, and spend time.



7. Recommendations: What can Chorlton do?

Our engagement with local elected members, the Neighbourhood Team, the main workshop with local stakeholders, together with additional consultation with the Chorlton traders group, reveals a range of people with a vested interest in supporting the development of the district centre. The suggestion, therefore, is that Chorlton has the necessary capacity to work together more collaboratively.

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 replicated 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, Chorlton possesses many advantages in terms of the diversity and strength of the local offer, connectivity, and strong positive image. 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.

We recommend Chorlton should take into account the top 25 factors that impact on a centre's vitality and viability (as discussed in this report) and should start by tackling the weaknesses identified in Section 6.1. We recommend actions are drawn up to deal with each of the factors listed. Through our national research, we have identified each of these factors can be influenced to a considerable extent by local actors working in collaboration. It may be, however, that new 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, it is important to identify "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 Chorlton 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 functions well in terms of meeting basic needs of the community, as well as providing a strong leisure offer which also appeals to a wider a catchment**
- **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 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 Chorlton (see Section 6.1). Although the average business hours remain within the traditional 9-5pm routine, Chorlton is complemented by a significant number of commercial establishments extending into both the morning and evening economies. This includes key convenience anchors, together with a diverse range of cafes, bars and restaurants, complimented by other nearby clusters such as Beech Road. Consequently, the district centre is a place where people might dwell for longer periods, compared to other district centres. Chorlton and the wider district centre, therefore, is a functional centre fulfilling the needs of the local catchment in terms of both convenience and leisure.

There are weaknesses in Chorlton such as appearance (see Reinventing Below; Section 6.1), vision and strategy, walkability, and barriers to entry (see Restructuring Below; Section 6.1). 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. In terms of Repositioning Chorlton, a casual observer might ascertain the centre is already highly functioning; however, we would recommend against such complacency. Although Chorlton has grown over recent years to become a popular residential and leisure destination, connectivity within the wider district centre is an issue.

We would suggest Chorlton now comprises four distinct clusters of activity:

- a vibrant urban destination with elements of comparison-shopping in Chorlton centre
- a local retail service centre on Beech Road
- a traditional high street on Barlow Moor Road
- a diverse urban service centre on Manchester Road.

This understanding of the spatial structure of Chorlton is confirmed with reference to independent research conducted by Dolega et al. (2019). The focus of the IPM's work in Chorlton has been on the traditional centre, as the other sub-centres lie outside of the current local planning framework. We would recommend it is now timely to consider the linkages, signage and synergy between these centres, in terms of building and maintaining a consistent offer and identity for Chorlton's wider commercial centre as a place. Addressing the connectivity across this wider area is essential in terms of Repositioning Chorlton, but will require collaboration with stakeholders across the centre, as clearly places like a Beech Road are considered as part of the wider attractiveness of Chorlton, not just the district centre.

In addition, Chorlton is a relatively large centre relative to other district centres in Manchester, but it is not easily walkable, with noticeable evidence of poorly maintained and uneven pavements. This not only detracts from the appearance of the centre, but also raises challenges in terms of accessibility for those with restricted mobility. There is an opportunity to begin to address this through the remodelling of road layouts contained in the proposals to create new cycle lanes, together with plans to redevelop the shopping precinct, however, as we detected in our stakeholder consultations, these proposals have generated some tension amongst traders and residents. In order to move forward in a collaborative fashion, these issues must be addressed, with a plan to achieve progress (see Restructuring).

Quick win
In order to Reposition Chorlton, it is important stakeholders are engaged in a coordinated manner (this is explained in the Restructuring Section below). Once stakeholder capacity is in place, efforts should be made to share knowledge and generate ideas in order to enact interventions to improve the District Centre. One such activity is communicating a clear message about Chorlton's offer.

7.2. Reinventing

- **Chorlton is a highly liveable place, providing access to a wide range of services, including health, library, education, and nearby greenspace.**
- **Although there are many qualities apparent in Chorlton, issues concerning the visual appearance are of concern and need to be addressed**
- **Chorlton is a relatively large district centre, comprising four distinct clusters of activity (see above). Together, these clusters are all part of Chorlton's wider appeal, and could be managed together as one place in terms of marketing and promotion and physical connectivity.**

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 move about Reinventing). Any place, however, should understand seek to meet the needs of its catchment, and be sensitive to these insights when making any changes within a centre. As previously, footfall data analysed so far reveals Chorlton as the third busiest centre out of the 10 district centres in the project, however, the volume is much lower than expected. This reflects the location of the footfall counter, which is only measuring activity in the traditional centre, but as explained above, Chorlton has grown to encompass a much wider area. We anticipate visitor numbers are actually much higher, but are dispersed across the wider centre. This is an issue. For example, the Parlour Bar on Beech Road closed in September 2018, with the owner reporting local competition and a thinning of footfall amongst the reasons to shut down (see *Manchester Evening News*, September, 2018).

Whereas the spread of activity to places like Beech Road are clearly part of Chorlton's success over recent years, the example of Parlour begins to question the sustainability of the existing offer. It is important not to be complacent and to begin to consider how Chorlton's existing offer can be sustained and developed to meet the current and future needs of the catchment.

A clear starting point is defining and clearly communicating what Chorlton has to offer to both residents and visitors. This might be achieved through more strategic communication via social media, but there is also scope to improve the connectivity within the centre (see above). Place making interventions to improve the visibility and legibility of the wider centre offer through improved walkways and signage, should be considered in any wider regeneration of Chorlton, to help channel people using the centre to make linked trips and generate greater synergy between the four distinct centres.

Key to successfully consolidating Chorlton's current position is addressing the general appearance of the district centre. The centre benefits from a wide range of independent shops and diversity, in a traditional high street form, which collectively contribute to Chorlton's unique identity and is generative of vibrant feel. However, there are notable deficiencies concerning levels of graffiti and litter. This needs to be addressed; litter in particular as other IPM research has demonstrated, has a notable impact on a centre's attractiveness. The shopping precinct lying at the heart of the centre is also dated, although we are aware this is subject to redevelopment proposals. Although quality greenspace is available within the wider Chorlton area, the centre itself lacks any quality civic or open space. In addition, as we identify above, the quality of pavements also requires improvements. Whereas some of these interventions might be addressed quickly, e.g. regular organised litter picking, ideally these basics of place operation should fall under the remit of a place management structure, which requires us to consider restructuring (see below). In addition, the creation of quality public realm begins to move responses into the realm of physical regeneration, which also falls within restructuring.

The IPM is continuing to collect footfall data for Chorlton, and we suggest further monitoring of this data, certainly as we move into a second annual cycle, which will begin to reveal longitudinal trends. In addition, we also recommend monitoring footfall to measure the impact of any interventions to improve the centre, as well the potential negative impact of any disruptions to the centre, e.g. construction of new cycle lanes, or the proposed precinct development.

Quick win

In terms of low cost and quick interventions, we would advise concentrating on the basics to improve the appearance of the centre. Longer term, focusing on improving connectivity and legibility of the centre through basic placemaking interventions to improve navigability and route making. We would advise any longer term physical regeneration projects should contribute to enhancing the existing appeal of the centre, by making a strong contribution to improvement to walkways and public realm. The aim of these interventions would be to encourage greater synergy and linked trips across the centre, as well as encouraging dwell and linger times. As a longitudinal patterns emerge, the impact of these longer-term interventions can also be measured, to provide an even more useful data set.

7.3. Rebranding

- **Overall Chorlton possesses a strong and positive image, driving its popularity as a residential and leisure destination**
- **There is scope, however, to consolidate this strength by clearly identifying and communicating the centre offer to both existing and new audiences**
- **We would advise a collaborative approach to low cost digital marketing, together with materials such as a local independents map to consolidate and develop the centre's brand image**

Rebranding involves the application of branding, marketing communications, and public relations techniques on 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 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 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 Chorlton's place brand and appeal, both to those within and outside the catchment. Currently the image of Chorlton is strong and positive, evident in the transformation of the district into one of Manchester's most desirable residential locations, and as a place with an attractive leisure offer. The centre is well connected, benefitting from regular late-running bus and tram services, which clearly helps to sustain the centre's evening offer. The overall experience is also positive, with a unique independent identity and community atmosphere. From an online observation of Trip Advisor reviews for a varied sample of units in the centre, we find that visitors generally have positive perceptions of their experiences within Chorlton, especially of independents and bars. The centre also provides a range of markets, events, and festivals, which are integral to creating a sense of vibrancy and community spirit.

The primary audit, however, does reveal some inconsistencies in terms of experience, and one outcome of the stakeholder engagement event was concern about the clarity of what Chorlton has to offer. There are many organisations involved in promoting Chorlton online, but again there is no consistent message or identity. The growth of Chorlton into a bigger centre (especially when combined with the three other sub-centres), now presents a challenge in terms of marketing and branding. We would advise, therefore, some form of local collaboration to take responsibility for the deployment of a low-cost social media campaign, to begin to clarify and communicate a consistent message about the centre's offer, which is accommodative of recent changes, which has led to the expansion of the centre. This is quite pressing, given the footfall challenges identified above if the centre is to sustain itself in its current form.

Quick win
Although Chorlton's digital footprint is impressive, with many organisation, activities and events advertised online, no one single agency is taking responsibility for the generation of a cohesive brand identity for the centre. The marketing and promotion of Chorlton, however, provides an opportunity to encourage more local collaboration e.g. the traders group might establish a sub-group challenged within developing the Chorlton offer and brand. We would advise any attempt to brand Chorlton is done locally, and builds on existing strengths, to create authentic messages about the place.

7.4. Restructuring

- **One of Chorlton's key strengths is accessibility, with regular tram and bus services**
- **A key weakness is the lack of a locally produced vision and strategy for the centre**

Restructuring strategies relate to both governance structure and forms of management, and the physical structuring of place (Peek 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.

Comprehensive physical restructuring of Chorlton is not necessary given the centre is performing well and is one of Manchester's more attractive and liveable district centres. Clearly, the redevelopment of the precinct presents a major opportunity to enhance the appeal of the district centre through a mixed-use scheme, which could also contribute to addressing some of the centre's weaknesses identified in previous sections, although there are local tensions concerning this proposal. The same can be said about proposals to improve cycle-lane access to and within the centre, although again there are local concerns about the deployment of this scheme, its short-term disruption and potential long-term impact. Local stakeholders are also concerned about the lack of attractive public realm. The centre has already benefitted from substantial investment in the form of new tram stops, connecting Chorlton to the city centre and Salford Quays, and creating new connections to wealthy catchment areas in the south of the city, plus a direct link to the airport. The centre is also well-served by a range of bus services. Although local stakeholders remain concerned about local traffic congestion (see Section 6.3), Chorlton's accessibility is clearly a factor behind the revitalisation of the centre.

It also necessary to take into consideration the adaption of the centre to meet future needs by addressing issues raised during the stakeholder workshop concerning the wider structural changes affecting town centres and high streets in the UK. For instance, we are likely to see further restructuring of national multiple retailers together, and a growing significance of independent traders. Addressing barriers to entry for new businesses, especially young entrepreneurs, may well become an issue in the near future. From the Primary Audit (Section 6.1) we find Chorlton currently has a low vacancy rate. Whilst a cause for celebration, this also presents a barrier to entrants, restricting opportunities to diversify or complement existing services. In addition, respondents from the stakeholder workshop were also concerned about the high cost of commercial and residential space in Chorlton (see Section 6.3). These factors combined present an issue in terms of adapting the centre to accommodate missing services or to factor in future change, and certainly will detract younger people from establishing a presence in Chorlton.

With a large number of active businesses, and many other vocal and active local stakeholders, short-term efforts to improve Chorlton would involve working with existing structures and the layout of the centre, to produce a more cohesive vision and strategy. Again, engagement with a wide range of stakeholders is essential to this process, especially the views of younger people. However, lack of stakeholder collaboration was identified by stakeholders themselves during the workshop as one of the top factors presenting a barrier to future success. Although there are many voices speaking up for Chorlton, it is now necessary for the construction of local consensus about the future of the centre to sustain its current success.

How this is managed will need careful and sensitive consideration given local tensions concerning the precinct redevelopment and cycleway scheme. Engagement with local stakeholders also revealed other tensions regarding wider planning issues in Chorlton, but it is important that any future collaborative networks remain focused on the management of the district centre, and on interventions conducive to improving the centre. Engaging the right mix of stakeholders, therefore, is necessary to enable constructive conversation and positive action to take place. The role of the City and its neighbourhood teams must not be lost in this process, as we advise they need to play a crucial in coordinating and fostering participatory approaches.

Chorlton appears to have existing capacity in terms of stakeholders willing to engage in the process of improving the centre, however, they need to work in co-ordination with one another towards achieving mutually agreed and viable objectives. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, by instilling a sense of ownership, as well as building on existing strengths, there is strong potential to generate civic pride and foster a sense of responsibility for the centre within the community.

The IPM workshop in Chorlton, however, should be considered as the start of a process. Clearly, there is a desire to take Chorlton forward and so we would advise the Neighbourhood Team seeks to conduct similar meetings on a regular basis. As well as building a network, such meetings should also provide opportunities for sharing of data, especially the footfall data, which needs to monitored and reported to a wide group on a regular basis. We see this as important in terms of maintaining local interest in the centre.

Quick Win
Consolidate existing interested local stakeholders by establishing a district-centre stakeholder group, initiated by the Neighbourhood Team who will play an active role in the group. From this, form sub-groups to take responsibilities for specific interventions e.g. social media branding. The longer-term view would be to consolidate this group to create a joined-up and collective approach to centre management.

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 function and performance. IPM can provide further analysis, l 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

Conclusions
Chorlton is one of Manchester's more desirable district centres and a liveable place. Over recent years the centre has been revitalised through an extension of the leisure offer, notably through a diverse range of bars and eateries, which complement strong convenience anchors, and drive a discernible evening economy. The presence of a large number of independent traders provides Chorlton with a distinctive identity, with appeal to local residents and a wider catchment. In addition to a diverse range of services on offer, the centre possesses several other notable strengths, for example, it is highly accessible through multi-modal transport connections.

The expansion of the centre, whilst cause for celebration, however, now presents a challenge in terms of sustainability and resilience. Chorlton has expanded beyond the traditional retail heart, to encompass three smaller sub-centres. Collectively this expanded centre provides a very strong offer, securing Chorlton's status as a leisure destination, but these internal components are not well connected in terms of signage and walkability. Although the centre enjoys relatively high footfall, we might anticipate the footfall counter location to record much higher volumes of people. However, we would suggest overall footfall for the centre is much higher, but is becoming spread more thinly across the wider centre. This brings into question the wider sustainability of the centre, and elevates the need to improve the legibility and walkability of the district centre. In order to track this, consideration should be given to the installation of additional counters, placed strategically to best cover the wider centre area.

The brand image of Chorlton also remains unclear. Whilst subject to strong mediation through online advertising of events and businesses, there is a need to clarify and clearly communicate a stronger message about the centre and its offer.

Whilst trading on a reputation that is clearly attractive to higher-end consumers, there remain issues regarding the quality of the centre's appearance, notably the quality of public realm. Failure to address such basic component of place management may ultimately damage the reputation of Chorlton as a quality leisure destination, in relation to other emerging nearby district centres in Greater Manchester, which also aim to reposition themselves as quality leisure destinations. However, the centre's residential catchment is strong, and is likely to sustain the existing offer in the immediate future.

Given these strengths and weaknesses, it is now becoming essential to establish a place management structure, network or partnership in Chorlton. This should capitalise on already engaged local stakeholders who are willing to participate in such a network. It is necessary that this is driven by the Neighbourhood Team, who should initiate stakeholder n regular meetings and provide opportunities to share data. It is imperative, however, that leadership rests with the stakeholders. We would also suggest this network also forms sub-groups to take on-board responsibility for specific areas of interventions. We would advise continuing to monitor footfall data to keep check of the centre's performance, and also to monitor the impact of any future interventions.

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. Once established, this network should ultimately take responsibility for the management of the centre, to organise the basics of place operation such as improving and maintaining the basics of place appearance. Over time, such a network should develop to take on more strategic aims and objectives, although this may take several years to evolve.

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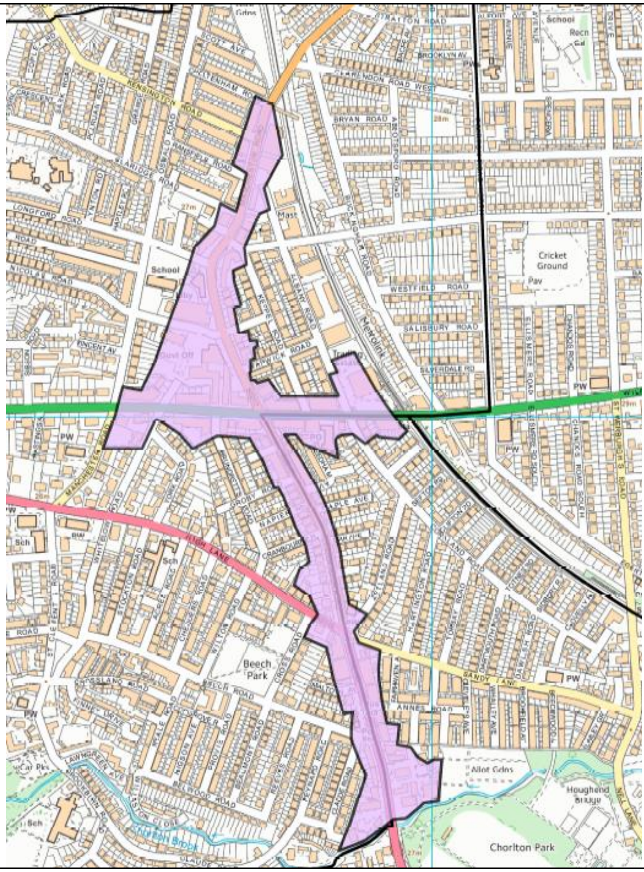
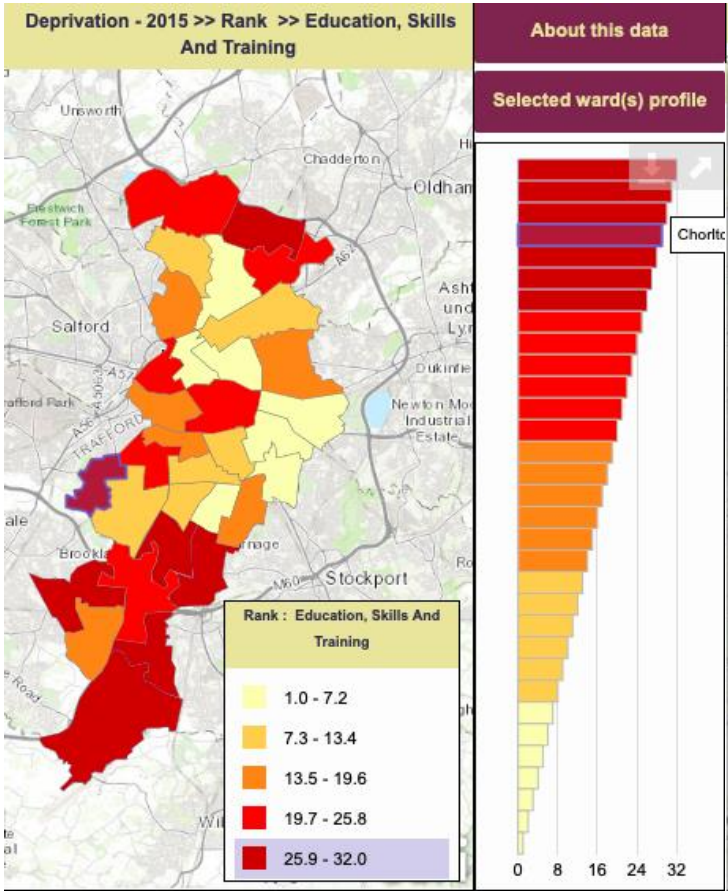
Appendix 1: Primary centre audit

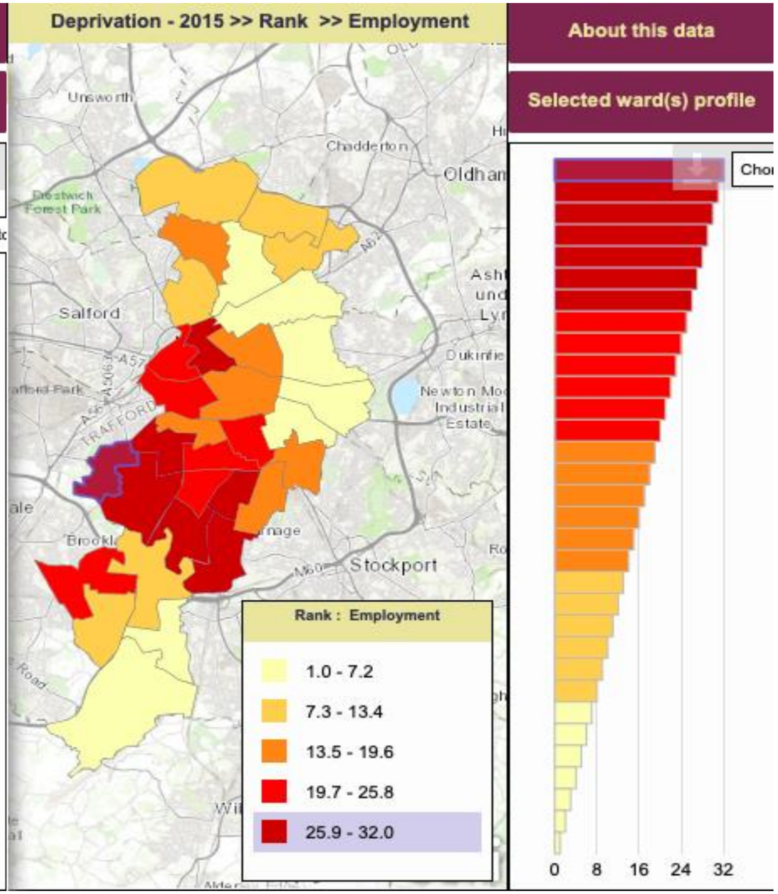
General centre overview

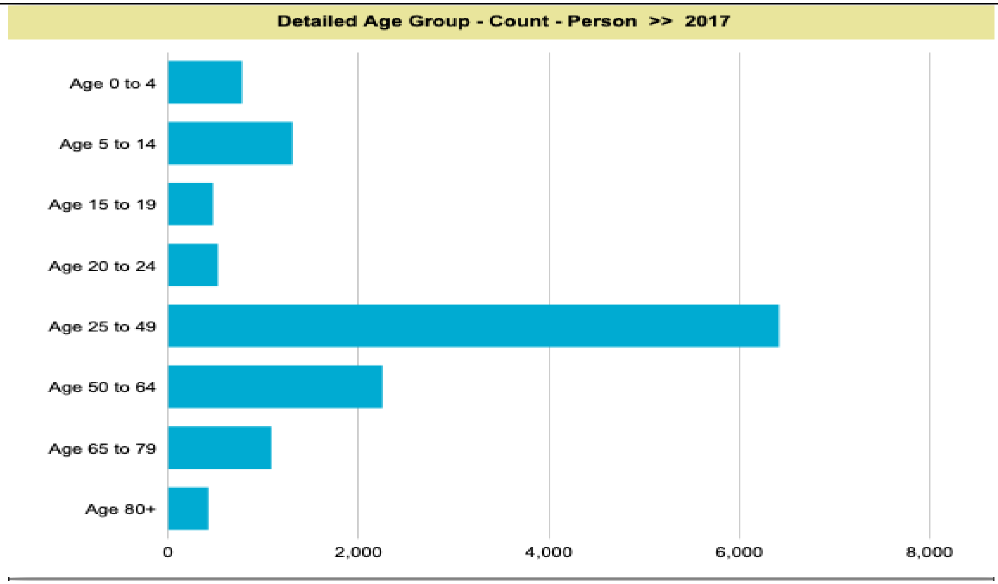
NAME OF CENTRE: Chorlton

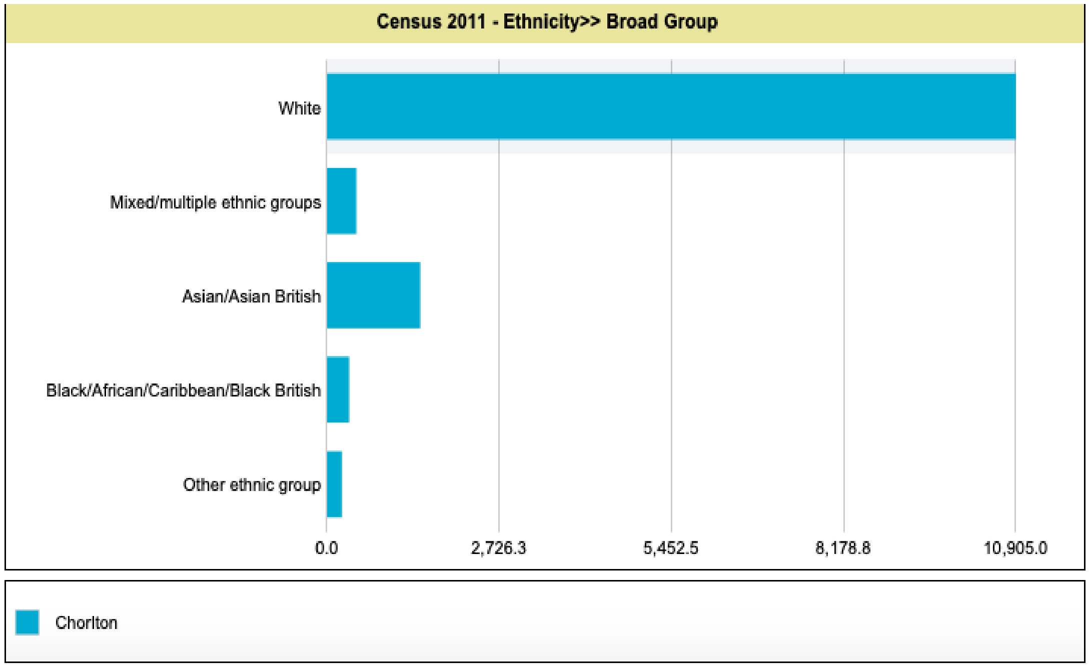
Identification of centre area	

Demographics of local population (population size, age, occupation etc.) Please provide a summary for your centre using the statistics available.	As seen in the graphs below, Chorlton has a relatively young population, with most residents in the 25-49 age band. The largest ethnic group in the centre is White British, although there is also a sizeable Asian population. The local catchment also enjoys the highest employment levels across all district centres in Manchester, as well as having some of the highest skills and education levels, indicating that the population also has relatively high levels of disposable income in comparison to other district centres with higher deprivation levels.









(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	From a varied sample of 40 businesses in Chorlton, the modal activity hours are 9.30am – 5pm, which is typical of district centres across Manchester. However, there are also a sizeable number of businesses with activity hours extending beyond the traditional 9-5 working day with a range of shops and cafes opening at 8-8.30am (e.g. Battery Park, Quality Save, Frost's Butchers, and The Tea Hive etc.). Such activity hours are convenient for those commuting into work and meet the needs of the local catchment, which has the highest employment levels across all of Manchester's district centres. There is also an evident evening economy in Chorlton, with a range of bars, restaurants, and takeaways open until late, complimented by a cluster of businesses on Beech Road, situated just outside the district centre boundary. Score out of 5: 4/5

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	There are a range of quirky and trendy shops and bars in Chorlton, such as The Font, Object, and The Drop (see audit photos), as well as a selection of community-feel independents (e.g. Chorlton Bookshop, Rodgers, and AJ Adams grocers), which together contribute to a sense of vibrancy and good appearance. However, there are some notable issues with graffiti and litter elsewhere in the centre (e.g. nearby key retail anchor Morrison's), and the precinct shopping centre is dated (see audit photos). There is also a lack of greenspace/quality civic space within the district centre boundary, although Chorlton/Longford and Beech Road parks, and the Eees Nature Reserve/Meadows are nearby. Score out of 5: 3/5

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 are a good range of retailers present in Chorlton meeting the basic household, grocery, and professional service needs of the local catchment (e.g. Morrison's, Co-op food, and Village Dry Cleaners). However, there are also retailers present which offer more than the necessities; providing higher quality merchandise and non-essential services, in line with the high income demographic of the local catchment (e.g. Object, Chorlton Bookshop, and Chorlton Art Market). Score out of 5: 3.5/5

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	A key challenge is the absence of leadership and a shared vision for the centre of Chorlton, other than the objectives set out in Manchester City Council's *Report for Resolution: Chorlton - New Development Opportunities* (25 July 2018). Whilst Chorlton is home to a number of active community groups, there appears to be little interaction between them, as such, collaboration is fragmented. Score out of 5: 2/5

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	Chorlton overall has a quirky and community atmosphere. From an online observation of Trip Advisor reviews for a varied sample of units in the centre, we find that visitors generally have positive perceptions of their experiences within Chorlton, especially of independents and bars (e.g. The Beagle; The Tea Hive; Font; Mary and Archie; Coriander; Jasmine; Benito Lounge; Proof; and Nom Noms etc.). However, more negative experiences are found to be the case in some of the chains, with less online visitor engagement for these businesses as well (e.g. Costa; Dixy Chicken; Dominos; and Pizza Hut etc.) This suggests that service levels can be inconsistent. However, the good range of markets, events, and festivals held in Chorlton (e.g. the Makers Markets, Chorlton Beer and Cider Festival, Bonfire Night etc.) are integral to creating a sense of vibrancy and community spirit. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

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	Despite an active traders association, there does not appear to be an effective place management structure operating within the district centre. Although there is communication between local stakeholders, this does not seem to result in effective strategic or operational collaboration in terms of centre management. Score out of 5: 1/5

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	There is a diverse range of merchandise provided in Chorlton which meets the basic household and grocery needs of the local catchment. There are also businesses providing more than necessities, offering high quality non-essential goods in line with the high disposable income of the local population relative to other district centres across Manchester. The markets held in Chorlton (e.g. Makers Markets) help to further enhance merchandise diversity. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

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	• Morrison's has 240 spaces and free car parking for customers for up to 2-hours (Parkopedia, 2019), and parking is also available on surrounding side-streets. • There is a large pay and display car park situated between Wilbraham Road and Nicolas Road, charging up to £3 per day, with reductions on Sundays and bank holidays. • The centre is well-served by banks and cash points in the centre (i.e. the notable 'four banks' area). • There are benches around the centre for people to sit down; however, there is a general lack of recreational space within the centre boundary. • There are public toilets available in Chorlton Library and Morrison's supermarket. Score out of 5: 4/5

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	There are a number of key retail anchors in Chorlton, including Morrison's, The Unicorn Grocery, and M&S. Beech Road, located just outside of the centre boundary, is also a notable attraction which conceivably has the power to attract people both from the local catchment and from further afield, especially on market days or during events and festivals. Other than the existing retail and commercial businesses operating in the centre, and the Graeme House office block housing some public service administrative businesses, Chorlton does not have a notable strong employment anchor within walking distance. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

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	There is a traders association within the centre, which appears to comprise a broad range of organisations, although not all of members might be considered traditional high street traders. Chorlton Traders appears to work informally with the Civic Society, Chorlton Arts, and organisers of a local loyalty card scheme, although it is not clear how closely these organisations work together at a strategic level. Interestingly, some members of the Association are either not businesses, or are not traditional traders with a high street presence. There is potential here for the formation of a retail sub-group to manage specific issues connected to the retail offer. There appear to be tensions regarding proposals for the redevelopment of the Chorlton Precinct Shopping Centre and cycle lane proposals within the centre. Score out of 5: 3/5

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	There is a diverse range of retailers, bars, and restaurants in Chorlton, with a broad range of independents on offer. This diversity is further enhanced by regular markets, events and festivals which add a sense of vibrancy, such as the Beech Road Family Fun Day, The Chorlton Beer and Cider Festival, The Christmas Lights switch on event, Bonfire/fireworks night, Chorlton Book Festival and Chorlton Arts Festival. The centre is lacking in leisure activities with the closure of the baths and leisure centre, although there are tennis courts at Chorlton and Longford Parks, and Hough End Leisure Centre a short drive away. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

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	Chorlton is a large centre relative to other district centres across Manchester, meaning that it is not easily walkable. The pavements are also poorly maintained and uneven in places, resulting in further issues around walkability (see audit photos). As the wider popularity of Chorlton has grown as both a residential and leisure destination, an emerging issue is the connectivity within the wider district centre. Chorlton perhaps comprises of four distinct centres (a vibrant urban destination with elements of comparison-shopping in Chorlton centre, a local retail service centre on Beech Road, a traditional high street on Barlow Moor Road and a diverse urban service centre on Manchester Road). Although traditionally subject to separate local planning frameworks, it is perhaps timely to consider the linkages, signage and synergy between these sub-centres – in terms of building and maintaining a consistent offer and identity for Chorlton's wider commercial centre as a place. Score out of 5: 2/5

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	In addition to the events and festivals outlined above, Chorlton possesses a strong entertainment and leisure offer for a district centre. The numerous bars and clubs host themed nights/live performances regularly. Chorlton Irish club is home to a regular comedy night, as well as a popular club night (Bop Local). The closure of the leisure centre/baths is tempered by other leisure facilities such as the free to use tennis courts at both Chorlton and Longford Parks. Perhaps most notably, the nearby Chorlton Ees nature reserve/Meadows offer access to fantastic greenspace and a route to the Chorlton waterpark. 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	In addition to providing very well for the basic needs of the local community, Chorlton also possesses attractions and anchors to pull people from further afield. Beech Road, located just outside of the centre boundary, is particularly notable in this regard, offering a range of well-respected bars and restaurants (e.g. Bar San Juan), as well as hosting a range of market days, events, and festivals (for example the regular farmers market and the annual Beech Road Family Fun Day). There are also a range of quirky independents and bars within the centre boundary itself, which contributes to the bustling evening economy observable in Chorlton. Score out of 5: 4/5

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	As mentioned above (see Experience), visitors to Chorlton generally perceive there to be good customer service levels, especially in the local independents. There are, however, more mixed perceptions of chains in the centre, suggesting some inconsistent service levels. There are, however, a range of key services for the local catchment (see Liveability), as well as good perceptions of safety (see Safety/crime), together contributing to an overall positive sense of place assurance. Access to significant green space is an added benefit in this regard. Score out of 5: 4/5

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 very accessible via a range of public transport options, with Chorlton tram stop and frequent buses to and from Manchester City Centre (see audit photos). The Morrison's car park provides 240 parking spaces for those travelling into Chorlton via car (Parkopedia, 2019), and parking is free for customers for up to 2 hours. There is also the large car park behind the Precinct. Currently, there are few bicycle paths in Chorlton (though there is a connection to the Fallowfield Loop); however, there is a consultation process taking place regarding a potential Chorlton Cycleway. Score out of 5: 4/5

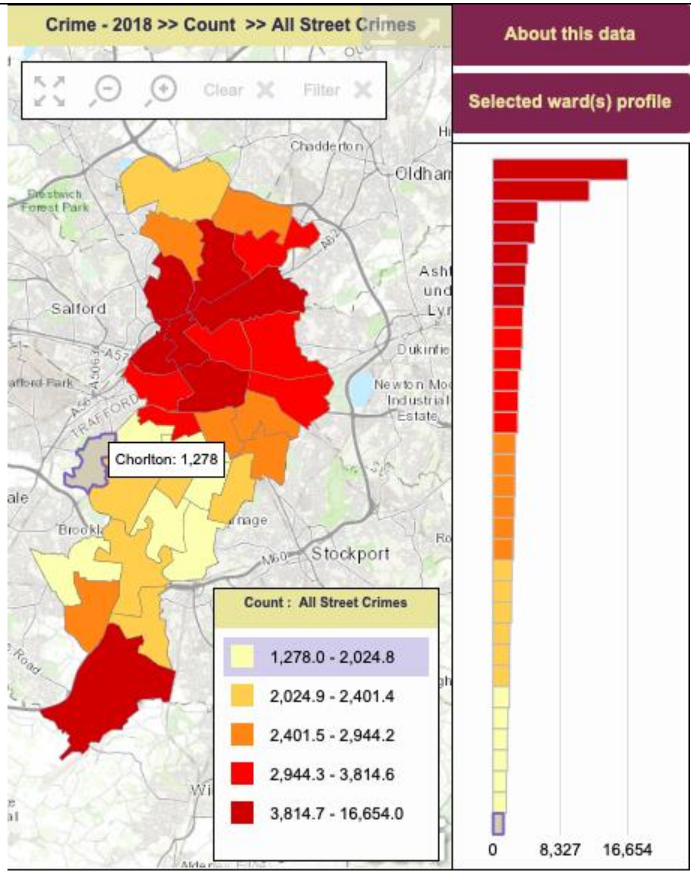
17. Place marketing	**Response**
How does the centre market and promote itself? Do enough stakeholders communicate in a way that builds a coherent place brand image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow with signage and guides? Repositioning Rebranding	The Chorlton Traders Twitter account, which has nearly 5,000 followers, regularly promotes local events and businesses. Likewise, the What's On Chorlton twitter account, which has over 1600 followers, regularly tweets about the diverse events going on in Chorlton. There is also good online engagement by some of the local service providers, bars, and restaurants, with regular activity on Twitter by businesses such as McCrory Hair, Mary and Archie, The Beagle, and The Font regarding events and offers. Other businesses appear to post less regularly, or in some cases have no apparent social media presence (e.g. The Chorlton Tap, The Drop, The Chorlton Eatery etc.). There does not seem to be a unifying place marketing narrative around Chorlton as a place. Coupled with a lack of integration between the four disparate districts within the centre, this results in a somewhat incoherent place identity. There is also a mixed representation of Chorlton in online news stories; with some celebrating its unique identity and cultural activities, whilst others focus on issues around crime. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

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 provides a greater range of convenience goods than comparison shopping opportunities, for instance in retailers such as Quality Save, The Co-operative food, and Morrison's; however, this is in line with its community/convenience function and footfall signature type. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

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	The centre itself is lacking in recreational and greenspace, with nowhere in particular to dwell without spending money. However, adjacent to the centre is a large amount of exceptional green space (Beech Road Park, Chorlton Park, Longford Park, and the Chorlton Ees/Meadows). Score out of 5: 4/5 (Scored on wider area rather than centre boundary area)
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 a low number of vacant units in Chorlton, with the vacancy rate at just 8.5%, which is lower than the national UK average of 10.2% in May 2019 (BRC, 2019; Springboard, 2019). This, therefore, poses a key barrier to new businesses seeking to enter into the centre, coupled with high property prices/rents in the area, as identified in the stakeholder workshop. Score out of 5: 2.5/5

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 good balance between chain and independents in Chorlton, with the chains providing basic necessities for the local community (e.g. M&S, Co-op, Morrison's, Boots etc.), and an abundance of independent retailers, bars, and restaurants (e.g. Tea Hive, Barbecue, Object etc.) providing Chorlton with a sense of character and place distinctiveness. Score out of 5: 3.5/5

<table>
<tr><th>22. Safety/crime</th><th>Response</th></tr>
<tr><td>What are the actual reported crime figures and resident/visitor perceptions of safety in the centre?

Restructuring</td><td>

(Source: MCC, 2019)
As seen in the graph above, Chorlton had the lowest levels of reported crimes in 2018 across all district centres in Manchester. There are also good perceptions of safety when visiting the centre due to generally good appearance levels (see Appearance) and community-feel (see Experience), despite some notable issues with begging around the Morrison’s car park area which negatively impacts overall experience.

Score out of 4: 4/5</td></tr>
</table>

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 is a range of key services provided for the local community in Chorlton, including a doctors' surgery, health centre, three dentists, three pharmacies, a library, nursery, and physiotherapy centre. There is also a variety of nearby schools (e.g. Chorlton High School, William Hulme, Chorlton Park Primary School etc.) and Beech Road Park just outside of the district centre boundary. Score out of 5: 4/5

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	The low number of vacant units in Chorlton (see Barriers to Entry) poses a key barrier to future development in the centre. The plans around re-developing the precinct shopping centre, however, provides future opportunities to refresh the offer and general appearance levels in Chorlton. 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	There is a Chorlton Traders Association, which helps to enhance the coordination between local traders; however, other than organising meetings, engaging in planning consultation, and doing some promotion, the group does not appear to be working strategically or in collaboration with property owners to consider store development. Score out of 5: 2.5/5