



North Tyneside Council



WHITLEY BAY
chamber of trade



**PROXIMITY
FUTURES**
Decisions through Data

**& PEOPLE
PLACES**

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Revitalising
Whitley Bay
town centre;
*a forward
framework*



Planning Partners

This study has been produced by the People & Places Partnership working with Proximity Futures for North Tyneside Council & in association with Whitley Bay Chamber of Trade & VODA. It has received support from the European Regional Development Fund through the Department for Communities and Local Government.



HM Government



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

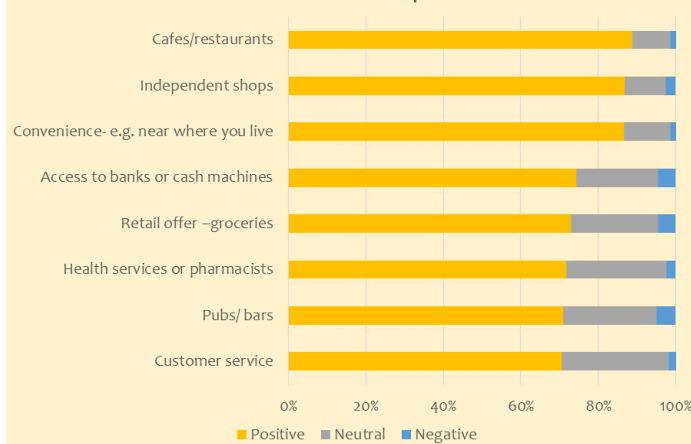


Understanding a town centre is about people & place.
 About the customers & the businesses based there.
 About the built fabric & sense of community created.



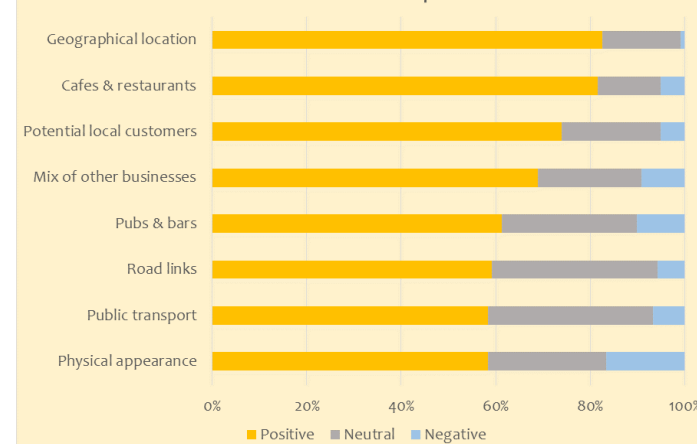
Positive local perceptions

Customers' Perceptions



When we asked 1,326 customers about their perceptions of Whitley Bay town centre or seafront, cafes/restaurants (89%), independent shops (87%), convenience (87%), access to banks (74%), comparison retail (73%), health services (72%), pub/bars (71%) & customer service (71%), were its most highly valued qualities.

Businesses' Perceptions



When we surveyed all Whitley Bay businesses, the responses indicated that location (83%), café/restaurants (82%), local customers (74%), business mix (69%), pubs/bars (61%), road links (59%), public transport (58%) & appearance (58%), were the most positive aspects of being located in the town centre or seafront.

The big picture

To get the 'big picture' & understand the wider context of Whitley Bay town centre, we used a tried & tested process of bringing together existing local research, surveying local stakeholders & collecting a suite of key performance indicators. Our approach has been adopted by the [Local Government Association](#) as national good practice for revitalising town centres. In understanding Whitley Bay we turned first to analysing existing strategies, population data & indicative performance measures.

Multipurpose centres

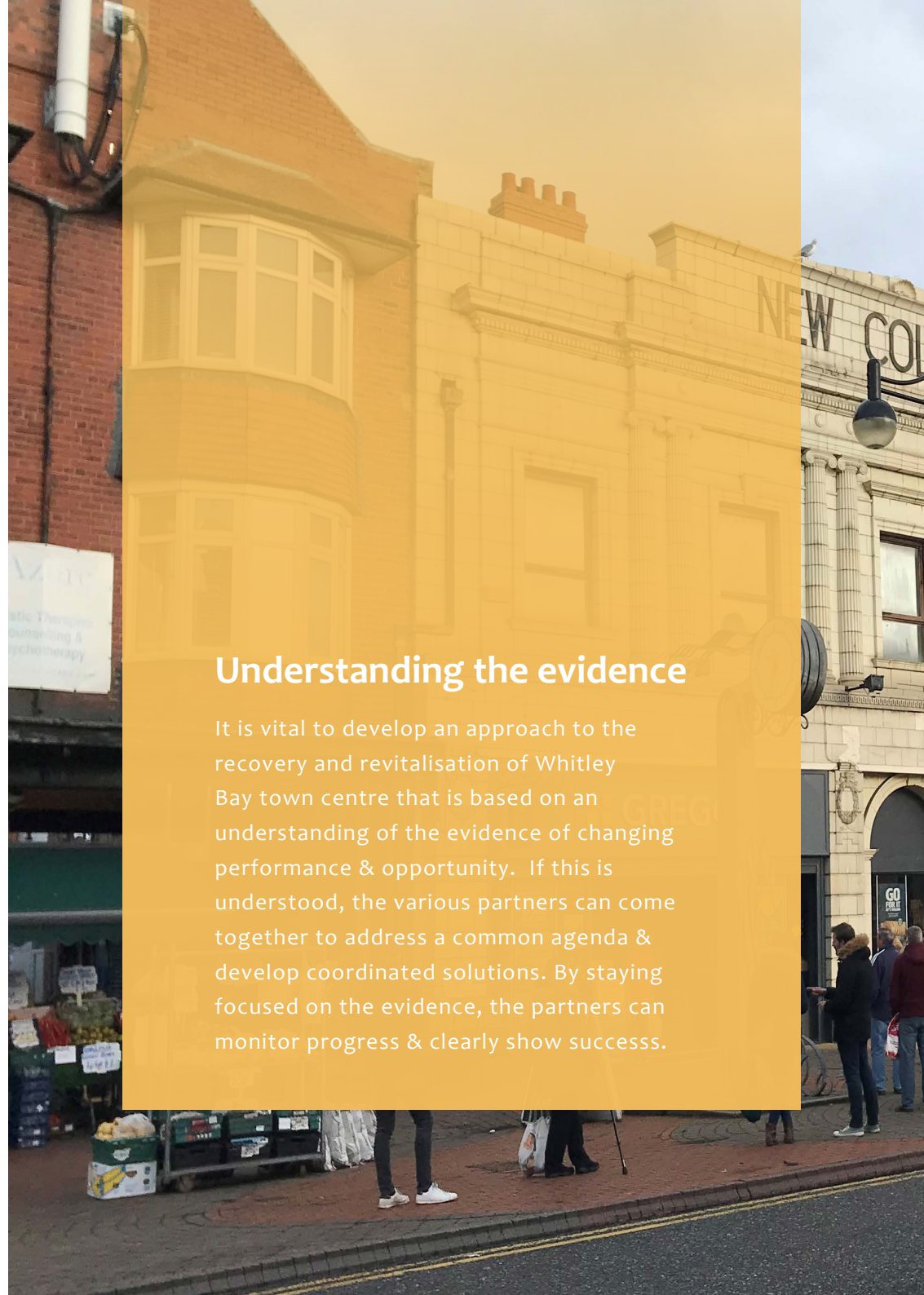
The North Tyneside Local Plan's policies focus on enhancing town centres' viability, cultural heritage, retail offer, services & public transport. The Our North Tyneside Plan extends the focus to encouraging sustainable travel, creating dementia friendly places & reducing disorder.

Linking coast & town

The Coastal Sub Area Strategy & borough Tourism Strategy, focus on maximising the potential of the North Tyneside coastline & links to the town centre. Proposals include creating shared urban spaces, improving access to public transport & maintaining adequate car parking.

Understanding the evidence

It is vital to develop an approach to the recovery and revitalisation of Whitley Bay town centre that is based on an understanding of the evidence of changing performance & opportunity. If this is understood, the various partners can come together to address a common agenda & develop coordinated solutions. By staying focused on the evidence, the partners can monitor progress & clearly show success.





Improving access & foot-flow

Planning & tourism policies calling for improved movement around town are backed-up by footfall monitoring & assessing the town-wide business mix.



Building Whitley Bay's brand

Whilst customers' images of Whitley Bay are broadly positive & 82% would recommend visiting the town, 14% of users think their experience is worsening.



Enhancing character & appeal

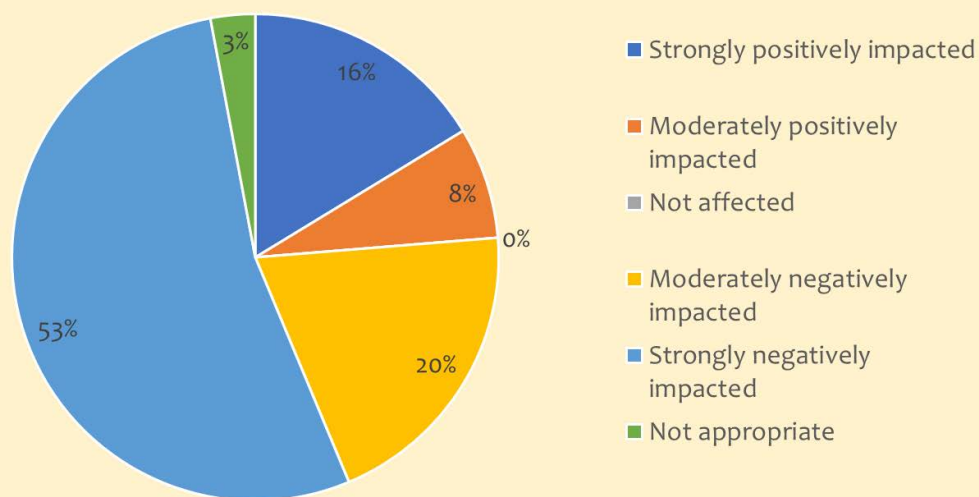
Pedestrianisation & cycling (29%) were dominant amongst customers' priorities followed by the combination of physical appearance & cleanliness (18%).



Boosting town's online profile

There is a high customer demand for more digital services promoting Whitley Bays' businesses, including through social media (72%) & targeted marketing (66%).

Impact on Business Profit in last 12 months %



BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

In terms of recent business performance in Whitley Bay during the pandemic, a massive 73% said they had been negatively impacted, whilst nearly a quarter (24%) reported that they had prospered.

BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

It is encouraging that businesses have a slightly more positive future outlook, with only 17% of them expecting a strongly negative impact in the next 12 months and 22% predicting an overall positive impact.

BUSINESS PRIORITIES

When businesses in Whitley Bay were asked what two things would improve the town centre, the top priority was parking, vehicle access and pedestrianisation issues (38%), followed by the visitor economy, promotion and events (18%).

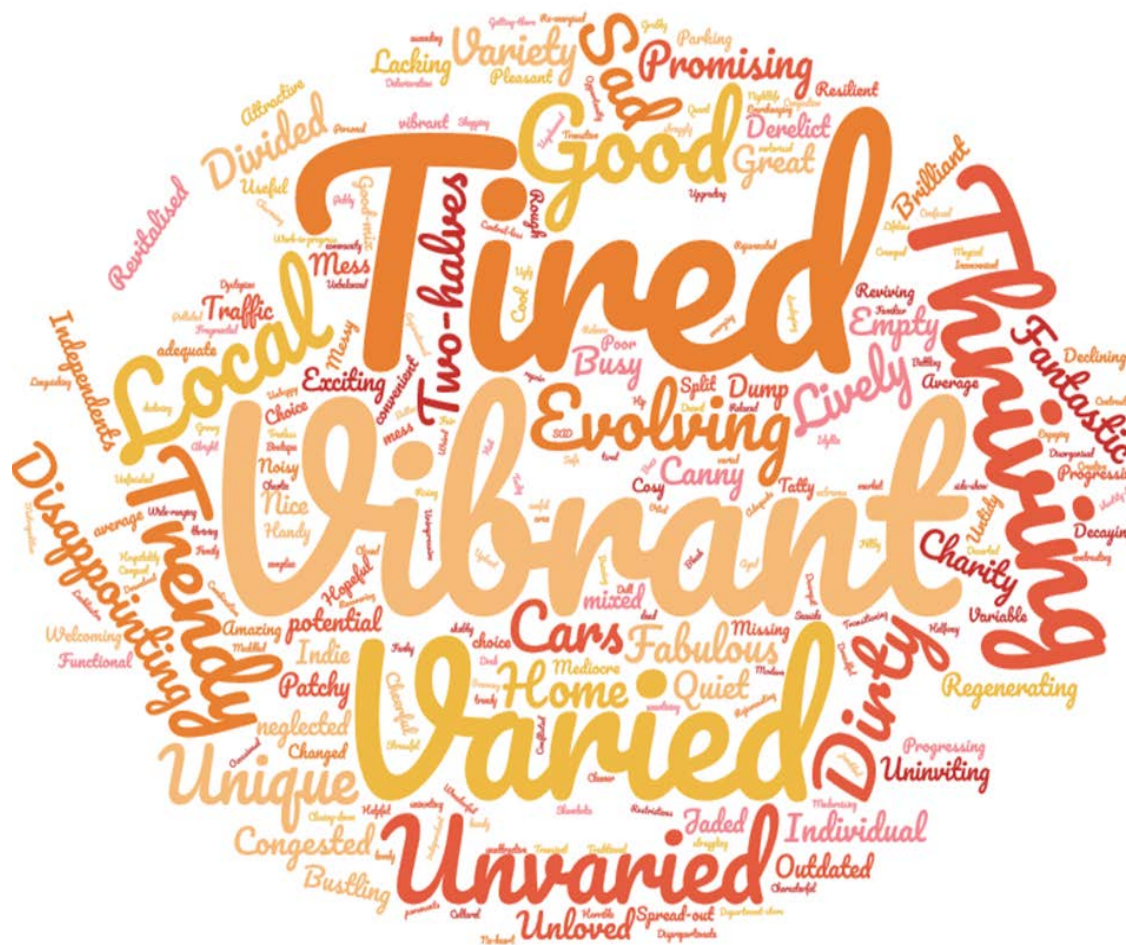
When asked to give a single word that summed up the town centre or promenade, there was a notably mixed response reflecting different areas of Whitley Bay. Many of the most words were positive & included vibrant, varied, calm and trendy. Tired, unvaried, & dirty are the negative sentiments expressed.

Asked if they would recommend a visit to Whitley Bay town centre, a high proportion of existing customers (82%) said 'yes', compared to 72% for towns nationally.

In terms of negative perceptions of Whitley Bay town centre, traffic (43%), car parking (29%), a lack of national chains (31%), cleanliness (28%), appearance (28%), the grocery retail offer (18%) & public spaces (18%) were amongst the key concerns.

When asked how their experience of the town centre had changed recently, 53% of town users said it had improved, whilst 14% said their experience had worsened.

When customers of Whitley Bay were asked what two things would improve the town centre, the three main themes were parking arrangements & the town's travel provision (40%), the retail, hospitality & general business mix (23%), & the general appearance & public amenities of the town (22%).



Moving between town quarters

An important part of helping residents and visitors to get more out of Whitley Bay in future will involve understanding the character & function of distinctive town ‘quarters’ & how customers readily move between them.

Enhancing character

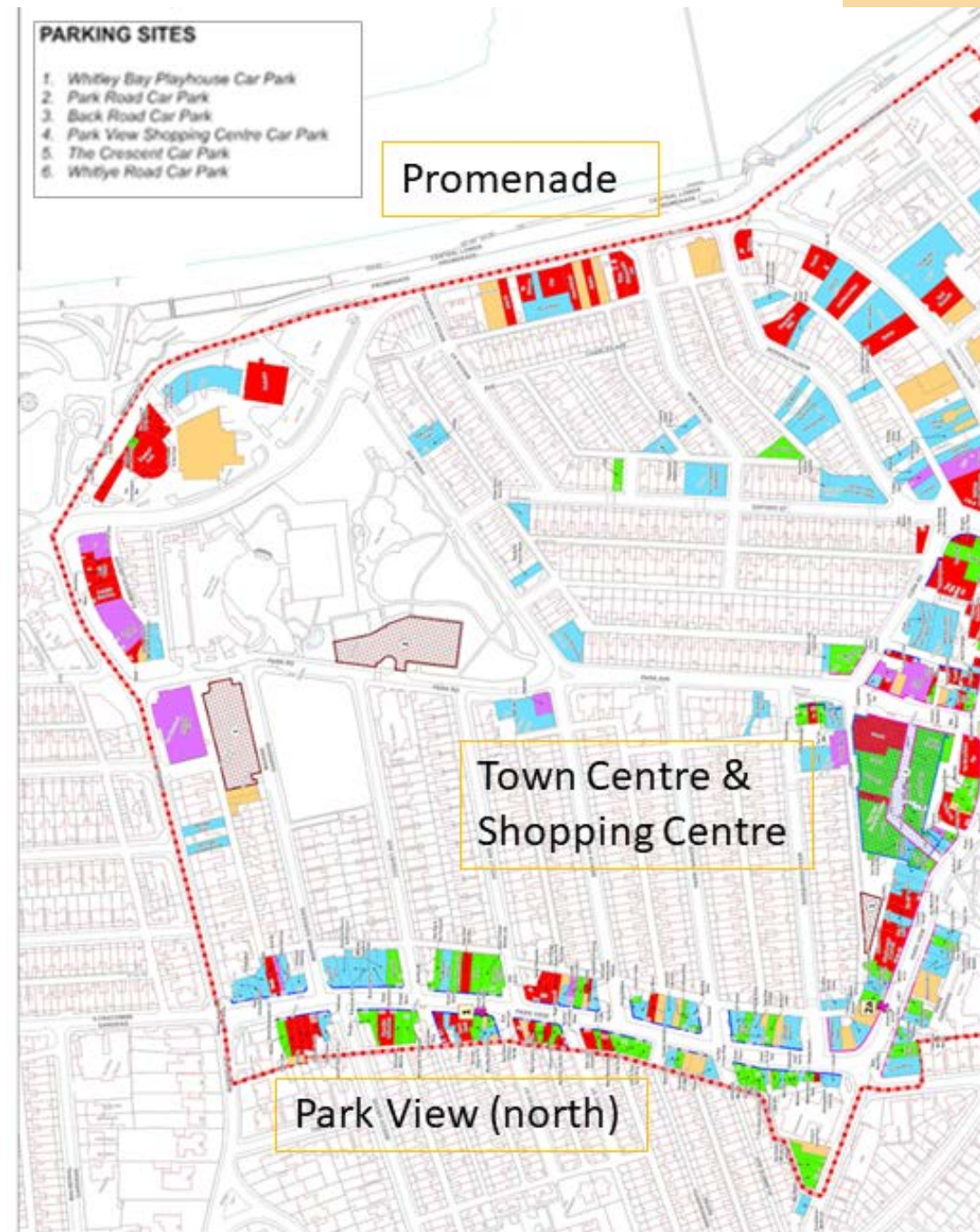
Initial analysis of the businesses, functions & heritage of different parts of Whitley Bay, identifies four distinct quarters:

1. Town Centre & Shopping Centre
2. Park View (north)
3. Promenade
4. Whitley & Station Roads

It will be important to enhance the distinctive character of each quarter.

Improving accessibility

Enhancing the character & identity of Whitley Bay’s distinctive quarters, can be a first step to improving accessibility & movement between them. To help achieve this, it will be necessary to understand the needs of their different customers; each quarter’s appeal; promotional prompts; arrival points & the physical improvements, signage & sight-lines that enable exploration.





Moving around town

Existing Local Plan policies promoting movement between the Promenade & town centre could be extended to increase foot-flow to other areas. This should include the village-like, northern part of Park View & the western end of Whitley Road, which both have high concentrations of suitably appealing hospitality businesses.



Taking town online

New customers can be attracted by a place & its products. Continued support to assist businesses in collaborating to promote the town & each other online is an important part of digital development. From the surveys we know that 69% of businesses & 72% of customers see improved promotion through social media as an early priority.



Sharing streetspace

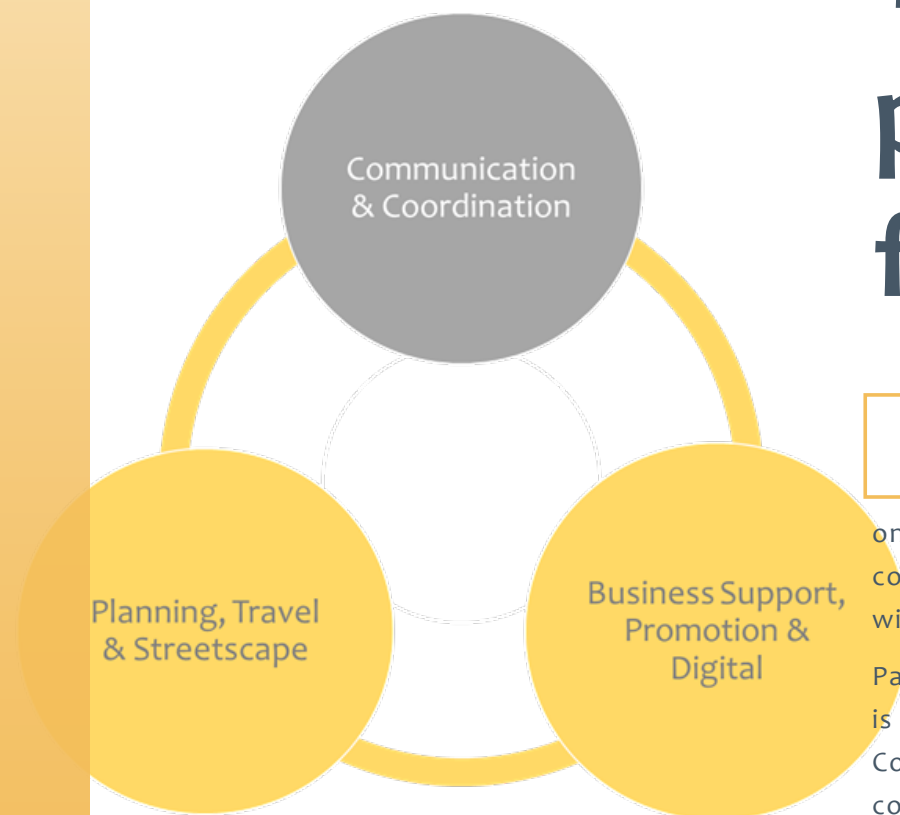
The combination of existing policies, available learning from recent temporary road closures & the high customer priority given to active travel and pedestrianisation, point to a need to better understand the long-term potential of measures such as shared-space based on investigations of business & customer needs.

Three broad themes

Work to revitalise Whitley Bay town centre could be organised as two distinct themes linked by effective coordination.

1. Planning, travel and streetscape enhancement to boost foot-flow.
2. Business support, place promotion and digital development to boost appeal.

Work to address these two themes needs to be connected by effective coordination & clear communications with the wider community.



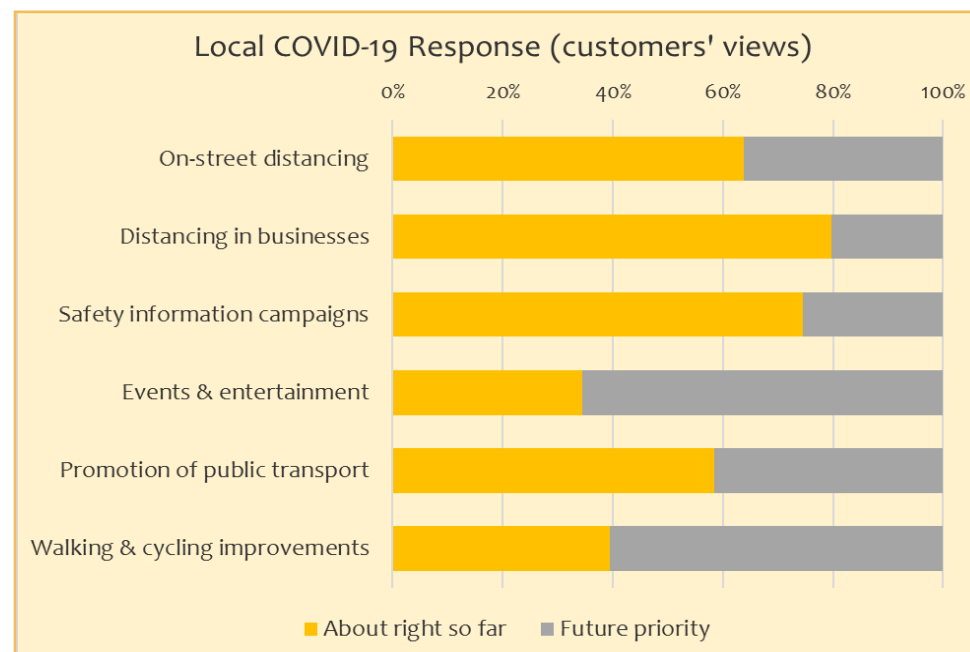
Taking the partnership forward

It is important to have a clearly-focused partnership in place to drive things forward. This could focus separately on key physical and promotional themes with a coordinating 'hub' communicating & engaging with the wider community.

Partnership working is effective when effort is put in to get it right. In this way, Borough & County Councils, the chamber of trade & key community groups, can all play to their strengths to improve the town centre. A 'forward framework' formalises this thinking with a business plan defining how partners will work together & an action plan of agreed projects.

Understanding COVID's continuing impacts

An important part of the stakeholders' surveys was understanding the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on town centre business performance & customer perceptions. Such information helps understand how customers need to be reassured about visiting shops, using public transport & being in crowded streets. Local leaders can respond accordingly to provide a warm & safe welcome back to town.



Customer behaviour

With high proportions of Whitley Bay customers always or frequently avoiding shops (50%), public transport (88%) & crowded areas (81%), it is important to put reassuring measures in place.

Tailored local response

Customers said that they valued existing safety measures such as distancing in businesses and on-street, whilst giving a higher future priority to promoting events & public transport.



Creating a collective Forward Framework

Tackling town centre issues can be organised in different ways. It is important to plan now to build on Whitley Bay's track record in regeneration in ways that will serve the town for a decade ahead.

Getting organised

A 'forward framework' helps everyone 'row in the same direction' by defining the 'how' & the 'what' of future activity. Successful delivery of a town centre framework depends on 'how' this is organised by understanding the foundations that bring

stakeholders together; the appropriate organisational form; finances; & forward planning that defines the commitment, communication & coordination of partners with the wider community. This enables partners to 'play to their strengths'.

Coordinating delivery

Delivery of a successful town centre action plan involves the coordination of a range of functions including 'place-shaping'; planning & property; business support; community & culture; marketing & events. This is achieved by locally-led action.



Next Steps

Evidence-led

1 The evolution of a town centre forward framework needs to continue to be evidence-led through gathering data, monitoring impacts, understanding business performance & consulting customers.

Engaging partners

2 A coordinating partnership can play an important enabling role in engaging partners, agreeing priorities, coordinating activity, involving stakeholders, securing new resources & communicating progress.

Effective actions

3 Delivering successful town centre change involves developing solutions to address identified needs, clarifying roles, coordinating activity & monitoring impacts through routine surveys.

Delivering joined-up solutions

Creating a 'can-do' attitude with measurable change

Delivering successful town centre change is a long-term venture involving vision, ambition, a broad approach & coordinated delivery amongst local partners. Here are some suggested building blocks of successful action planning focused on measurable targets for tracking change. It is vital for local partners to keep focused on such outcomes.

It can
be done!

Increased movement around town

Target: Measurable increases in foot-flow around town & dwell times amongst local residents & visitors. Such improvements should be mirrored by improved business confidence across Whitley Bay.



Enhanced character & appeal

Target: Measurable increases in customer satisfaction, experience & footfall across different character areas of the town. This should be mirrored by improved cross-town business confidence.



Strengthened identity & experience

Targets: Improved local customer & visitor's perceptions of their changing experience reflected in continued positive perceptions about the town centre & increased business confidence.



Positive online engagement

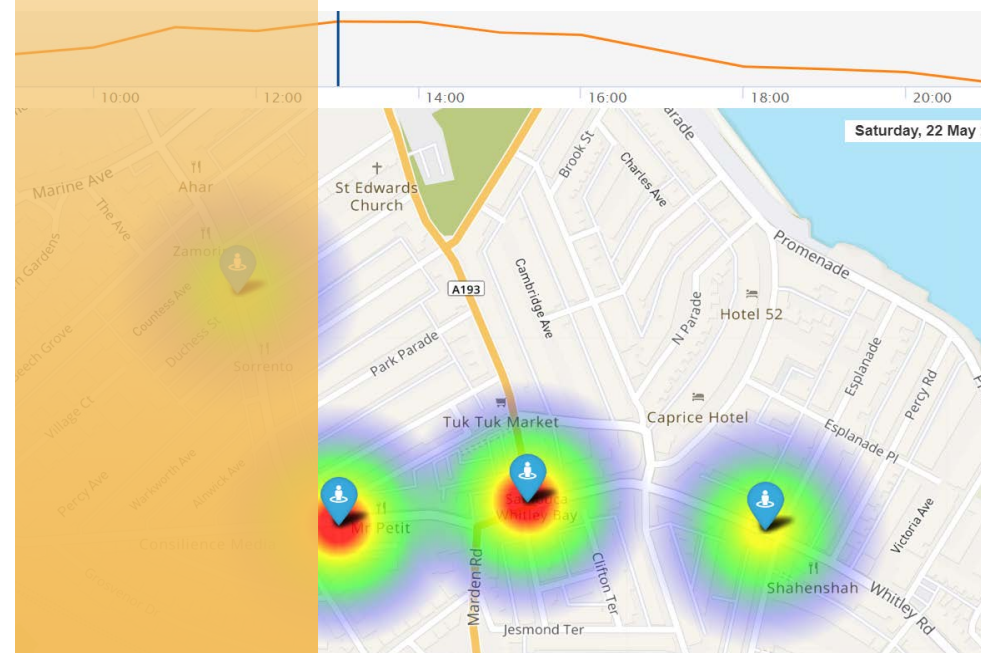
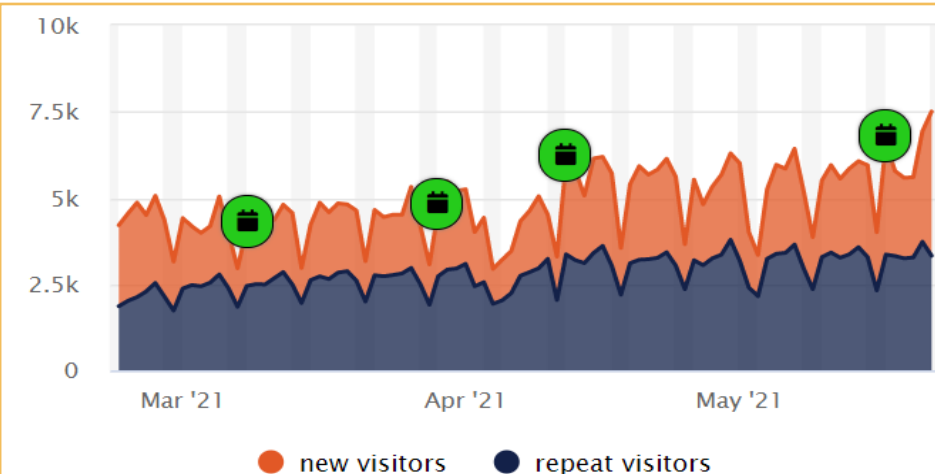
Target: Evidence of increased digital marketing by businesses & community groups; greater customer engagement; improved perceptions of the retail & services mix; boosted business confidence.



Monitoring customers' return

North Tyneside Council has invested in leading footfall monitoring technology to help monitor customers' return to town post-pandemic & guide long-term improvements that help them get more out of visits.

The detailed data provided by Proximity Futures' GEO-Sense system gives a day-to-day picture of footfall peaks & troughs as well foot-flow patterns of how visitors are moving around town. The Government-backed High Street Task Force recognise that counting footfall in such ways has increased in importance as a way of understanding & leading local town centre recovery.



New & repeat visits

As the town centre reopens, recovers & is revitalised, the footfall monitoring system in Whitley Bay, is able to distinguish between regular, repeat users & new visitors reassured by safety measures or attracted by an event.

Flow across town

The new footfall monitoring system in Whitley Bay, can help the Council, businesses & community groups to understand customers' foot-flow around town and find new ways to encourage them to explore & linger more.



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