



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# The Future of High Streets

Progress since the Portas Review

© Crown copyright, 2013

*Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.*

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/) or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This document/publication is also available on our website at [www.gov.uk/dclg](http://www.gov.uk/dclg)

If you have any enquiries regarding this document/publication, email [contactus@communities.gov.uk](mailto:contactus@communities.gov.uk) or write to us at:

Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU  
Telephone: 030 3444 0000

For all our latest news and updates follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CommunitiesUK>

July 2013

ISBN: 978-1-4098-3946-0

# Contents

Introduction	4
Progress since the Portas Review	5
The next phase	11
Annex A – Reflections on the Portas Pilots' experiences	13
Annex B – Useful links and resources for helping High Streets	21

# Introduction

Eighteen months ago, Mary Portas completed her review into the future of the nation's high streets. The Prime Minister then asked the Department for Communities and Local Government to lead the Government's response to her recommendations, including setting up the twenty seven Portas Pilots and 333 Town Team Partners to test different approaches to revitalising the high street.

All of us in Government recognise and applaud Mary's tireless commitment to Britain's high streets: evident not just in her comprehensive report but in the efforts she has put in to ensure that the future of our high streets continues to be a high profile national issue. Over the last year, the Government has worked hard to help communities across the country boost their high street, in particular supporting the Portas Pilots and Town Team Partners as they brought together local councils, retailers and businesses to try out new ideas to drive their local economy. We have taken action to tackle the problems Mary identified. We have lifted planning restrictions, cut small business' rates and given councils a financial incentive to support high streets. These changes will help town centre landlords make better use of their empty properties, get more start-up businesses set up in the high street, and see a third of a million small businesses paying no rates at all.

This report outlines both what the Government has done in response to Mary's report, and how the Portas Pilots and the Town Teams have acted to tackle the challenges she identified. Case studies from the Portas Pilot areas show what can be achieved with commitment, creativity, innovation and determination from all the partners involved. Of course, the Portas Pilots are just that, and they will not be the complete solution to the problems faced by the high streets, but they have been a valuable testing ground for ideas and actions which other areas can learn from. They are long term projects which can help spread best practice.

Neither the Government nor Mary Portas set out to preserve a historic or stereotype of the high street, dominated by the butcher, baker and grocer. Instead, we want to enable people to create public spaces which work for local economies and societies now and in the future. Neither internet shopping nor out of town retail are going away, and both have an important role to play in offering consumers choice and competition. But the high street can offer so much more: a bustling centre to a community, where people can gather for cultural, entertainment and social activities as well as shopping, eating, and evening activities.

Each high street is as different as the community it serves and that is very much a strength and a virtue. High streets must adapt to survive, and councils, businesses and communities must work together to deliver that. As Mary said in her original report, what's needed is for everyone with an interest in the future of the high streets to communicate, collaborate and compromise, in order to achieve their shared aims.

I would like to thank Mary for everything that she has done in support of this programme and to pass on my appreciation to the members of the Future High Street Forum and its sub-groups who are taking the work forward.

# Progress since the Portas Review

The UK retail sector is undergoing fundamental change, responding directly to what consumers want, including when, where and how they buy. The UK has some of the most competitive and innovative retailers in the world, and it is right that they are free to deliver what customers want, and retailers who are not responsive to that will struggle.

But high streets offer far more than just retail. People care about high streets because they are the centres of their community. The successful high streets of the future will be where people live, use services, and spend their leisure time, including in an evening economy, as well as shop. Even the nature of retail on the high street is changing, with successful retailers mixing and matching online shopping with traditional shopping. The key to success and securing the long term future of the high street, therefore, is for communities to strike the right balance between traditional retail and other uses for high street property – include markets and pop up shops, housing, community and social uses and entertainment and cultural activities. It will take creativity and imagination to enable high streets to adapt to this new environment.

So the Portas Pilot scheme was set up to enable local councils, residents, retailers and other businesses to try out new ideas to secure a sustainable future for local high streets in response to local circumstances.

Twenty seven Portas Pilots were set up last summer, twenty four supported by Government and a further three backed by the Mayor of London. Government gave £2.3 million to the areas involved in the programme as well as a package of support.

In addition to receiving funding of up to £100,000 each Pilot has had access to:

- free mentoring and support from retail industry leaders including Mary Portas's own team and from the retail industry;
- valuable access to a range of sector and industry experts, such as the Arts Council, National Association of British Market Authorities, the Local Data Company and Springboard
- opportunities to meet and discuss with fellow pilots to share their experiences and lessons learned;
- a dedicated contact point in Government to provide advice and support in identifying and overcoming challenges to local business growth.

Areas who were not selected to become a Portas Pilot were given the opportunity to kick start activity in their area by becoming a Town Team Partner, with funding of £10,000 and a package of support from the Association of Town and City Management. This included guidance and advice, events to learn from other town teams, support from industry experts, and help to raise finance themselves.

Government also set up the High Street Innovation Fund worth £10million to help those councils with the highest incidence of empty properties and those most affected by the 2011 riots. The hundred councils who received this money have used it, for example, to offer discounts on business rates or allow businesses to use properties for different

purposes than they were designed for, to attract new businesses and bring empty properties back into use.

*Wolverhampton is both a Portas Pilot and a recipient of the High Street Innovation Fund. It ran a competition to attract entrepreneurs to the city and fill empty shops by offering a prize worth up to £50,000 worth of business support, including a shop rent-free for six months and a contribution to business rates as well as help for running costs and a package of training support and mentoring. The successful businesses include a fish store, a bistro and a Polish delicatessen, as well as a clothing retailer which has been online only since 2002 but has taken advantage of the scheme to expand onto the high street. The competition attracted dozens of entries and shortlisted entrants are also being given some help to get their ideas off the ground.*

The High Streets Renewal Awards gave £1 million seven local areas delivering the most effective and innovative plans to bring their town centres back to life. Two of these – Market Rasen and Rotherham – are Portas Pilot towns. They have demonstrated inspirational leadership in bringing change to their high street, and have exciting plans to continue their work and the ability to deliver. Government will support the winners to take forward their proposals, spread best practice and ensure other towns can benefit from their great ideas.

*Altrincham is a winner of the High Street Renewal Award because of the impressive and innovative way its landlords and retailers have been working together to bring empty shops back into use. The council is complementing these efforts by lowering parking charges to encourage more people to visit the high street.*

## Businesses improving their local areas

Business Improvement Districts allow the business community and local authorities to work together to improve the local trading environment. Local businesses come together to deliver a joint plan, funded by an increase in the business rates they pay. There are more than 150 now operating in England. Government has:

- Committed half a million pounds for a loan fund to support areas which want to become Business Improvement Districts: details of how to apply for this fund will be published over the summer;
- Consulted on changes to allow Business Improvement Districts to operate across a wider area. We will be implementing the necessary regulations shortly;
- Brought industry and councils together to discuss how they can work together more effectively; and
- Worked with industry and partners on the merits of a new model for Business Improvement Districts, led by property owners: we will be formally consulting on proposals shortly.

## Encouraging shoppers to the town with markets

Identifying that markets are a fantastic way to bring a town to life, the Portas Review recommended setting up a National Market Day and removing the unnecessary regulations which inhibit people from setting up as market traders.

Going beyond a National Markets Day, Government has lent its backing to and helped fund the Love Your Local Market campaign, run by the National Association of British Market Authorities. The objective of having the campaign is three-fold:

- to encourage people, and in particular young people, to take the first step on the entrepreneurial ladder, in a cheap and supportive environment - the market stalls are free or subsidised; market managers and fellow traders offer support and advice, and the National Market Traders Federation offers free insurance;
- to support local growth by increasing footfall to local markets and town centres;
- to encourage the local community to make the most of their local market and town centre, and to "use it or lose it".

This year's Love Your Local Market fortnight ran from 15-29 May 2013. Just under 700 places ran 3,500 markets during the fortnight, and almost 3,000 free or subsidised pitches were taken by new traders. This builds on the success of last year when almost 400 markets and 2,200 new traders were involved.

The National Market Traders Federation has also launched initiatives such as market apprenticeships and new markets to get hundreds of young people taking part in trading for the first time, and there has been an increase in the diversity of organisations running markets, with farmers' markets, community and social enterprises and independent operators taking the place previously held by councils.

Nearly half of markets participating in 2012 believed that Love Your Local Market had made their markets 'more vibrant', and footfall in participating towns was up by nearly 4 per cent against a fall of 6 per cent nationally<sup>1</sup>. The National Association of British Market Authorities will continue this campaign and will run another Love Your Local Market fortnight from 14-28 May 2014.

## Providing Accessible and Affordable Parking

The Portas Review highlighted the role parking has in successful high streets. Councils need to decide the best way to offer, manage and enforce parking in ways which make sense for their area. Government has supported this by:

- changing planning rules so that councils are free to offer as much parking in town centres as appropriate;
- scrapping minimum charge rules and issued guidance which encourages councils to set competitive parking charges;
- removing regulations which restricted supply of local car spaces;
- making data generated by local authorities (including income generated from parking fees and charges) available and accessible to the public.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://loveyourlocalmarket.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LYLM-2013-Best-PractCB3B72.pdf>

## Providing support through business rates

The Government has doubled small business rate relief and extended it for another year – making three and a half years so far – and we have made it easier for businesses to access the rate relief they are entitled to. Half a million small and medium sized businesses in Britain are expected to benefit, with a third of a million paying no rates at all.

We are also allowing councils to keep more of the rates that are generated in their area, so they have a strong financial incentive to back business and go for growth. Councils can introduce and fund business rates discounts as they see fit in ways which will benefit small businesses and retailers. Under the business rates retention scheme, Government will fund 50 per cent of discounts granted. This represents a fundamental shift in the way that local authorities are funded and will enable councils to fully play their part in creating the right conditions for local economic growth.

The Portas Review recommended reviewing whether the Retail Price Index should be used in decisions about up-rating business rates. This will be considered once the Government has fully implemented its fiscal consolidation plans. The Government has postponed a business rates revaluation until 2017 so businesses have stability and confidence over the long term, and has guaranteed that businesses will see no real terms increases in business rates.

The Government's support for business and small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) goes far beyond business rates:

The Government has run a 'red tape challenge' to cut down the burdens on business more generally and as a result of consultation with retailers, has removed more than 250 rules which affect retail businesses from the statute book.

The main rate of corporate tax has been reduced from 28 per cent to 23 per cent and will fall further, to 20 per cent from April 2015. This is the lowest rate ever in the UK, by far the lowest rate in the G7 and the joint lowest in the G20.

From April 2014 every business and charity in the UK will be entitled to a £2,000 Employment Allowance to reduce their employer National Insurance contributions (NICs) bill each year. This allowance will reduce the costs of employment, supporting small businesses aspiring to grow by hiring their first employee or expanding their workforce, which is especially helpful to retailers.

To support small businesses in particular, Government is:

- Providing over £150 million to boost enterprise through start-up loans;
- Supporting [Mentorsme.co.uk](http://Mentorsme.co.uk) - the national mentoring portal operated by the British Bankers Association; and
- Funding the Get Mentoring initiative which aims to recruit and train 15,000 volunteer business mentors from Small and Medium Enterprises.

The National Skills Academy for Retail is also rolling out a national mentoring scheme for retail Small and Medium Enterprises, throughout its network of over 50 Skills Shops.



## Designing High Streets to Attract People

The Portas Review stressed the importance of making high streets accessible, attractive and safe. Government is committed to giving councils and their partners the powers and support to do this. For example, councils can introduce a Late Night Levy which they can charge to places selling alcohol after midnight to cover the cost of late night policing. Government is also actively promoting good town centre design and has published a guide to developing urban spaces to revitalise high streets.

The Department for Transport is giving £1.8 billion to local authorities to improve transport infrastructure, including roads, pathways and cycle routes, with a further £560 million for sustainable transport and £15 million for cycle routes and facilities.

## Recognising High Streets as the heart of the community

Government has made 'town centre first' explicit in the national planning policy framework. It is the responsibility of councils to promote a competitive town centre, actively managing the high street and supporting it to be sustainable, offering choice and diversity based around the strength and individuality of the high street.

*As one of the High Street Renewal Award winners, Ipswich impressed the judges because it focused on delivering a large-scale master plan, completely reorienting the High Street from East-West to North-South. This is to better link up the retail shops with new facilities being established in the new Waterfront development, regenerating the area in between these two hubs, attracting new investment and creating new employment opportunities. The partnership between the Borough and County Councils, University and the Business Improvement District is expected to deliver strong long term results.*

## Giving Communities a Greater Say

Government is absolutely committed to enabling individuals and community groups to have a greater say over every aspect of their area, including their high streets. Neighbourhood planning is enabling communities to come together and decide for themselves where new houses, businesses and shops should go, and more than five hundred Neighbourhood Plans are being developed. One of the first Plans to be approved, in Thame, has a specific focus on supporting the town's high streets and markets, by attracting people to the town centre, allocating central space for parking, protecting existing retail frontages and supporting new offices and shops on upper floors. This is an approach which could be adopted elsewhere by other communities keen to develop their high streets in the future.

Government has introduced a number of ways in which communities can make better use of empty properties on the High Street, including encouraging 'meanwhile use' and the Community Right To Bid. It has set up a £19 million fund to support community groups who take on the responsibility for ownership and management of assets of community value – including support for local groups who want the opportunity to buy and run their local pub or shop. More than 300 assets have already been listed under the Community Right to Bid.

## Getting Empty Properties Back Into Use

There are a number of drivers increasing the pace of change for high streets, and the rise in the number of empty properties is a symptom of this. A property may be empty on account of various issues, and the Government has brought increased flexibility to open up options to landlords and prospective tenants.

The recent changes to planning rules mean that it is now easier to change the use of buildings to support our high streets and businesses, help brownfield regeneration, and increase opportunities for housing. Government is supporting those who are looking for premises to try out new business ideas which will play a part in supporting our economic recovery. The new changes will mean people can bring empty properties on the high street back into use for a wide range of new uses.

Businesses will be able to quickly find premises and open up, and landlords can be flexible in accommodating businesses and offering shorter leases, and they also have the potential to increase housing on the high street. Last year Government increased the permitted development for flats created above shops. Together these reforms provide a substantial opportunity to bring more life into town centres and increase footfall.

A minority of empty shops may still have a paying tenant; this presents a challenge for those who would like to see that property put to meaningful use. Where a lease is no longer required, it is normally possible to assign the lease to a new tenant.

The Government has committed £235 million of direct funding, to help local authorities, housing associations and community groups tackle the most problematic empty properties, which would not otherwise come back into use. The last funding round had a particular emphasis on refurbishing former commercial and high street properties.

We are also supporting local authorities to take a lead. Under the New Homes Bonus local authorities earn the same financial reward for bringing an empty home back into use as building a new one.

*Pop-Up Britain set up a pop-up shop in DCLG's headquarters to demonstrate how a small and underused space can support start-up businesses and encourage greater consumer footfall to a broader area. In doing this over 50 local businesses have been supported in trialling selling their products. Pop-Up Britain offers practical help and advice to towns who want to adopt the same approach.*

# The Next Phase

The enthusiasm of those involved in the Portas Pilots and the Town Teams demonstrates the commitment there is around the country to our high streets, and shows that it is only when local authorities, businesses and communities work together that things will happen on the ground. Their experiences over the past year have informed the Government's plans for the next phase in this work. At the forefront of this is the new Future High Street Forum, jointly led by the Local Growth Minister Mark Prisk and Alex Gourlay, Chief Executive of the Health and Beauty Division at Alliance Boots. This complements a programme of support to the hundreds of town teams across the country, including the Portas Pilots, and further Government action to enable local communities get their high streets onto a sustainable long-term footing.

## The Future High Streets Forum

The Government has launched the Future High Streets Forum to build on the learning and experiences from the Pilots. The Forum brings together leaders from retail, property, business, academics, third sector, civil society and government to better understand the competition town centres across the country face and to drive forward new ideas and policies to help the high street compete and adapt.

Aiming to support the current work of members, such as the support ATCM is delivering to the Portas pilots, and complementing the work of other groups such as the Distressed Property Taskforce, the Forum has set up three Task and Finish Groups, which will lead more detailed and practical work in areas such as:

- Engaging with the Portas Pilots and other towns to identify what is needed to put good local leadership in place, bring together the wide range of information on what help is available, and make it easier for people to access support and advice;
- Looking at the barriers and enablers for success, including business rates, property-ownership and management, accessibility and parking, and planning;
- Consolidating the research currently available on high street trends; and
- Building a picture of what the future high street will look like, and templates that can be used and built on by the different models of high streets.

Further information on the work of the Forum can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policy-advisory-groups/future-high-streets-forum>

## Strengthening the Town Teams

The Government is working closely with the Association of Town and City Management and Business in The Community to support the Portas Pilots and other Town Teams over the next two years. ATCM is making use of £1 million to provide practical assistance to improve leadership, town team capabilities and partnership working, to share learning and spread best practice, with each area of work broken down into a range of activities including one-to-one guidance, regionally based workshops, training, webinars, 'How To' guides, study visits, conferences and seminars.

To give dedicated support to the Portas Pilots on business engagement and mentoring, Business in The Community (BITC) has set up a High Street Champions programme. This is where businesses with a commitment to town centres are being asked to provide support and encouragement for a Portas Pilot to help them achieve their objectives. The High Street Champions are working with their Town Teams to deliver positive change in their towns. 20 of the 27 Pilots have already been matched with a Champion with the remaining being matched shortly.

Further information on the High Street Champions initiative and updates on their progress can be found here: <http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/high-streets-and-business/high-street-champions>

## Removing barriers

Government is continuing to take action to enable local communities to tackle some of the problems faced by high streets and make the conditions right for businesses to thrive.

Over the next six months, we will be:

- Launching the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Loans Fund, which will provide assistance to towns wishing to introduce a new Business Improvement District;
- Implementing the necessary regulations to allow Business Improvement Districts to operate across a wider area, and with a consultation happening soon on a new model for Business Improvement Districts led by property owners;
- Consulting on further relaxation of planning regulations to help communities consolidate high streets through conversions from some retail to residential property;
- Publishing responses to our consultation on the transparency code for Local Authorities;
- Looking at what more we can do to enable and encourage a more flexible approach to parking provision and enforcement in local areas; and
- Continuing to explore ways of making the most of flats above shops: whether to increase the supply of housing or to change these into offices, whatever best suits local needs.

# Annex A

## Reflections on the Portas Pilots' experiences

### Introduction

The Government has given the Portas Pilots a share of £2.3million to improve their high streets and encourage residents to shop locally. The main aim of this scheme has been to harness the energy and enthusiasm of local people to breathe new life into the town centres and make them the hearts of their communities once again.

These are long term projects, and teams are taking a strategic approach that is consciously trying to deliver on their Portas Pilot proposals, many of which are not quick fixes. Each plan to rejuvenate a high street will be different. Therefore the way, speed and manner that local teams spend money will be different. The Government supports this approach rather than encouraging them to spend it as quickly as they can.

Pilots up and down the country are already successfully delivering their proposals, from Rotherham helping local businesses expand and develop, to Loughborough bringing students and local residents on board with a loyalty scheme and Market Rasen creating an award-winning local market. Berwick is testing restoring short term parking to their main high street and Bedminster has successfully campaigned to establish a Business Improvement District. These are just a few examples; all of the Pilots have been active since their launch.

The future of high streets is not just about retail. People care about high streets because they are the centres of their community. Government wants to see vibrant, viable high streets where people live, shop, use services, and spend their leisure time, including in an evening and night time economy. For those Pilots looking to move the focus of their high-streets towards a more sustainable and balanced offer, this will take time to realise. The important thing is that the Pilots are trying to secure the long-term future of their high streets.

Facing very different challenges from very different starting points, the Portas Pilots have inevitably varied in what they have done, how they have gone about it, and how quickly they have delivered results. However, there are a number of common lessons and themes from the past year which will be useful for any area aiming to make the most of their high street. One of the key things learned is that local businesses, residents and councils need to pull together to be able to make a difference to their high street. It does not matter who leads the charge, so long as there is commitment, capacity, agreement and vision.

The Pilots tested a number of ideas, and a selection of their experiences is given below.

## Using Markets to Bring the Town to Life

Markets are an excellent way of bringing people to a town, and enabling new traders to test out their idea before committing. Most of the Pilots introduced new markets, or expanded or improved existing ones. These worked particularly well when supported by other initiatives such as reduced price or free parking, or evening markets tying in with the night time economy and other events.

*Liskeard is now running an evening market every two months, complemented by late opening hours among other retailers. The aim is to attract people from around the region as well as local shoppers and to change the perception of Liskeard, making it an attractive and fun destination for shopping. Each market has a different, seasonal theme reflected across the publicity, stalls, decoration, refreshments and music. Around forty volunteers have helped with organising and promoting the markets, and the publicity emphasises the ongoing attractions of Liskeard rather than the markets as one-off events.*

*Ashford has been offering aspiring business owners the chance to start their businesses off in the weekly market with low costs and risks by offering market stalls for a tanner, with additional support such as free car parking and public liability insurance for the traders and mentoring from the National Market Traders Federation. Ashford has recently run its first Food and Drink Festival, where street food from around the world will be offered alongside local produce, highlighting the best that local farmers, producers and restaurants have to offer.*

*Nelson has based their markets around a vintage theme in order to attract new and younger shoppers. There are also creative activities in the market, such as a dress up photo-booth, pottery wheel, art, photography and jewellery making demonstrations and lessons in knitting and crochet to encourage people to stay longer and enjoy a fun day out. Volunteer students from the local college got involved in marketing and publicity for the event as well as running pop up shops and putting on a fashion show. Empty shops are being used as pop up shops for each market and the goal is that these will become permanently used by some of the new businesses.*

*Croydon has recognised that the local market has a fading reputation which is having a knock on effect on the rest of the Croydon Old Town Portas Pilot area and has made overcoming this obstacle the focus of their work. They have developed a clear vision for regenerating the market, with a business plan involving local residents, which refocuses the market around different themes, such as vintage clothing or street food. Croydon Council, in partnership with the Town Team is about to tender for a professional operator to run the market.*

## Using parking initiatives to bring more people into the High Street

Many Pilots are testing parking initiatives, including Braintree, Tiverton, Berwick, Loughborough, Stockport and Lewisham. In some Pilot areas, parking is already provided at no or low cost. Tackling parking by itself will not fix the high street, but it is a helpful thing to look at when considering what would bring people to the centre.

*Braintree has introduced parking charges of 10p after 3 pm and 10p all day on Sunday. They chose 10p rather than free parking in order to better monitor how the scheme was being used. Figures showed more than 44 000 extra cars took advantage of this over the course of the year, representing a significant increase in footfall in the late afternoons.*

*Loughborough is trialling a 'free after three' initiative one day a week to encourage people into the town centre during the quieter period of the day. Every Friday through the summer, as part of their 'Fabulous Fridays' project, they aim to entice people from the villages who pick their children up from the town's schools to then pop into town afterwards instead of going straight home, as well as employees around the town to stay after work. Another scheme offering free Sunday parking will start in July.*

*Tiverton is attempting to capitalise on its location as the gateway to Devon and proximity to other tourist destinations by offering parking for coaches. Currently Tiverton is missing out on this potentially valuable market for lack of facilities. They are working with local residents and businesses to identify where land could be turned into coach parking and will be monitoring town centre footfall and vehicle traffic. They have also introduced a parking charge of just £1 for five hours in the town centre multi-storey and are helping get an unusual 'tuk tuk' scheme in place to attract shoppers.*

*Stockport's town team set up a sub-group to challenge the council on parking and come up with suggestions for improvements. For example they found that shoppers were put off making short trips by the cost of parking so the council are bringing forward proposals to move to hourly charging across all car parks. Shoppers often cut short their trip because the time on their pay and display ticket runs out, so the council are introducing more flexible ways of paying, including smartphones. To further improve the attractiveness of Stockport's parking offer, as some car parks were in poor condition and needed improvement £2 million is currently being invested to improve the lighting, security and the look and feel of the car park.*

## Using Business Rates Schemes to Support Business

Some Pilots' local councils have been offering business rates discounts. These have been used to help both start-ups and existing businesses, and can be seen as an investment made by the council in order to get more businesses operating in an area.

*Stockton has introduced a discounted business rates scheme for businesses who want to take over a vacant shop in the Stockton Town Centre. It is open to professional service companies, restaurants, cafes and offices as well as retail units. The team expects that around thirty five new businesses will open up over the next two years in previously empty shops as a result.*

*Margate offered all town centre retailers a 15 per cent drop in business rates when the local shopping centre expanded in order to help them remain competitive. They have adapted several of their empty shops into shared retail spaces, so that new businesses could benefit from business rates relief. The number of empty properties on the high street has fallen from 26 to nine.*

## Transforming Empty Properties

A key project among the Pilots has been tackling empty properties. These may be long- or short-term and in either case, temporarily filling empty properties through getting a 'meanwhile use' in place can help give an area more vibrancy and interest, and potentially stop a spiral of decline.

*Market Rasen has turned over an empty property to be used as the base for a thriving community enterprise called 'Greens of Lincolnshire' providing local growers, bakers and artisan foods with a new market for their goods. Greens offers locally sourced fresh produce and the best of Lincolnshire artisan foods as well as vegetable boxes for those unable to visit the high streets. Greens is run by a mixture of employees and volunteers and the plan is that now the business is up and running it will be sold on as a going concern.*

*The team in Forest Hill, Kirkdale and Sydenham have had significant success in using 'meanwhile' leases to get empty shops back into use, using short term leases in between long term tenants, through a project called 'The Shop Revolution'. An eclectic variety of tenants have been able to use these as 'pop up shops' to test the market and develop their business skills before committing for the long term. Seven out of ten empty properties on the high street have been used in this way, and are advertised on their website for easy access. One of the shops has already been taken on a permanent basis.*

Some Pilots are looking to move the focus of their high streets away from retail and towards a more sustainable and balanced offer. This takes time to make happen but is important for the Pilots trying to secure the long-term future of their high streets.

## Developing Skills and a Consumer Focus

Pilots can help their retailers and other businesses by bringing in training and skills development. For example, Braintree's Portas Pilot-started pop up shop is supported by the neighbouring Enterprise Agency, who provide business training.

*In Dartford, recognising that talented, enthusiastic and skilled employees are critical to business success, they have partnered small and medium enterprises and market traders with larger retailers and Bluewater shopping centre in order to train up new employees. This means that apprentices have the opportunity to gain skills in a variety of different retail sectors and gain all the necessary experience to one day run a store themselves.*

*Bedford is spending its Portas Pilot funding on offering training and support for local businesses to help keep them professional, competitive, sustainable and profitable. They are offering a range of courses on the use of social media, online marketing and developing successful shop window displays. The next round of training will involve marketing, sales, finances and book keeping as well as pairing up larger businesses with smaller retailers for mentoring.*



## Building on a Unique Selling Point

Towns and high streets need to be different in order to compete with what's available online and outside towns. Finding and building on a unique selling point – a “USP” – can give a town a reason for people to still want to go there.

*Rotherham – a High Street Renewal Award winner as well as a Portas Pilot – are determined to set themselves apart with the quality of their customer service, by offering customer service training to local businesses, supported by a mystery shopping scheme to check the impact. From their wide range of independent and imaginative retailers who offer a distinctive and unique mix, the Town Team has been investing in supporting ambitious local businesses. Help is available for those who want to expand and to encourage new entrepreneurs to set up in the town, particularly in pop up shops which also make the most of empty property on the high street. The idea is that Rotherham stands out because of the quality of customer service in independent retailers who offer expert knowledge and go the extra mile in order to encourage repeat business over the long term.*

*Newbiggin by the Sea is very close to a national cycle route which is used by thousands of people every year but so far this has been an untapped resource for the town. They are investing in clearer signs and better paths to attract these cyclists to the town centre. Rio Tinto are providing financial backing to support this initiative. Cyclists will now have better access along the promenade to the Maritime Centre and back up onto the cycle route taking in local attractions and artwork. They are also converting an empty property into an arts hub for local young people where they can learn new skills in photography, graphic design and film production, giving them more opportunities for positive recreational activities.*

## Using the High Street to Benefit the Community

High streets are the centres of communities, places where people can meet, spend time, learn new things, share experiences and much more. Some Pilots are focusing on community and ‘public good’ aspects of high streets.

*Hatfield are opening a Community Hub shop which will be a key information point for members of the public, where they can pop in for information and advice about the town. There will be representatives from the police, the university and other local organisations on hand and the Hub will also have space for other projects such as pop-up shops for local businesses.*

*The Tower Hamlets Portas Pilot seeks to bring together a healthy food offer along with projects for the sustainable growth of Chrisp Street Market and Whatney Market. The aim is to develop the markets by supporting new locally-driven businesses that increase the supply and production of healthier food. This is to meet the demands of a changing population in the area.*

*The London Road town team in Brighton have worked up a programme shaped by the priorities agreed with the local area. This includes community events, improvements to*

*night time safety, a website and pop up shops. They also agreed to take forward ideas for branding London Road so that it reflects the area's history as a food quarter. The team's projects will continue respond to feedback from local stakeholders to ensure that their Portas Pilot has the best possible impact on the London Road retail area.*

## Improving the Public Realm

Unpleasant or unkempt areas can fuel a cycle of decline, so many Pilots are looking to address issues such as the safety, accessibility and pleasantness of their town centre.

*Lowestoft has introduced a Street Ambassador scheme to improve customer service in the town, deter troublemakers and to act as a first point of contact for any concerns among the community. They are security and first aid trained and connected to the town radio at all times, to help make sure that visitors are safe and enjoying their visit. The town has also invested some of their money in hanging baskets to make the town more attractive, a mystery shopper scheme and a discount voucher scheme.*

*Berwick is aiming to become 'the hub' for north Northumberland and the Borders. Part of that offer is to capitalise on local tourist attractions by offering boat trips up the river from the Berwick quayside, in the hope that visitors will also stay and spend their time and money on the high street. To make Berwick a more attractive jumping off point into the surrounding countryside, they have been cleaning up their town centre and are setting up an arts and culture trail around the town centre.*

*The appearance of Old Town Leamington has been brought down by disused railway tracks which give the area an air of neglect. The Town Team is working towards turning these into a positive asset for the area, turning the track areas running through Leamington Old Town into decorative gardens and wildlife sanctuaries, using the bridge plinths for decorative arts works and using bridge pillars for decorative signage which reflects the town's history and character. They also plan to create gardens at a height which can be seen from the train line in, encouraging visitors and wildlife, and lifting the spirit of the area.*

## Maximising Volunteer and Community Involvement

The Portas Pilots have demonstrated the value of involving residents, charities and not-for-profit groups into the town team mix. The areas which have attracted most volunteers to their projects have been most successful and in many cases, volunteers have been the driving force behind their project. Many have expertise in different areas which the project can capitalise on: such as building websites or marketing, where others can help out with essential tasks such as cleaning up neglected areas or putting up posters.

Having the right people around the table is crucial and needs to include representatives from the community, retailers and other businesses, and the council. In some places, there may be existing structures in place which can form the basis for this new partnership, otherwise anyone can suggest these parties convene to discuss the future of their town centre and high street.

*In Liverpool's Lodge Lane they are involving young people in designing, creating and then running a public square which will be used for social and cultural events for the community*

*as well as markets and training opportunities. The square will offer young people a whole range of opportunities to get involved: not just in helping to run the square but also to set up their own entrepreneurial activities: whether growing produce, selling food or running their own market stalls. Many volunteers were also mobilised for the 'Loving Lodge Lane' clean-up of the street, which had additional benefits of a formerly riot-hit community coming together.*

*Morecambe's 'MoreCanBeDone' branding has been popular and caught the local imagination. The town team has had a good amount of 'in kind' support from businesses and others, including college students designing the campaign, and help with getting flyers printed and distributed.*

*The Store Manager for Wilkinsons has supported the Nelson Town Team from the start through the Business In The Community High Street Champions programme. They have provide store space for an art project during the Lancashire Day and for artwork from the local college art competition. They have also supported the Council to engage with the landlord of several empty shops in town, making it possible to use these spaces as pop up shops.*

## Having a governance structure and generating income

Many Pilots and other town teams are made up of volunteers who have come together to create and deliver short-term projects with a 'just-do-it' philosophy. That flexibility and spontaneous enthusiasm is a strong asset, however there are limitations to relying on this over the longer term. To have sustainable impact, there are various governance structures that may suit a town team's aims. Approaches to consider include: Business Improvement Districts, which guarantees funding through business rates for a number of years; Community Interest Companies; or even becoming a company or charity. There is no 'one size fits all' approach.

A formal structure may also help town teams seeking funding. For example some Pilots have bolstered their funds by approaching charities and trusts, obtaining match funding from councils or private sources, and fundraising from the local community. One innovative idea was to develop the town's website and produce an app to generate funding through advertising.

Some of the Portas Pilots were already established Business Improvement Districts when they applied, such as Bedford and Loughborough. Others used their Portas Pilot funding and status as an opportunity to seek and secure Business Improvement District status, as happened in Bedminster and Lowestoft.

*The Portas Pilot in Bedminster established a Business Improvement District covering around 450 businesses of many sizes and sorts. The emphasis across the area is on independent shops and businesses in the creative industries. 85 % of local businesses that voted agreed to join the Business Improvement District and they have guaranteed £400 000 to fund collective improvements over the next five years, funded by most businesses agreeing to increase their business rates by 1.5 %. This money is being spent on improving the street scene, marketing the area, making the area greener and establishing community projects around street markets and arts events.*

*The Business Improvement District in Loughborough aims to improve the trading environment in the town and particularly to improve the attractiveness of the high street. 'Love Loughborough' Partnership (the town team) launched with genuine buy-in from partners. Projects delivered include "Trial a Trade" scheme launched for new businesses, and 1400 University and College students signed up to a loyalty card scheme through attendance at Freshers' Week and Open Days. The town team has improved the environment in the town centre and trading prospects for businesses by investing in hanging baskets, offering free business recycling and negotiating free parking on Sundays. The overall priorities for the programme are to keep spending local and develop the evening offer.*

*Waterloo Quarter Business Improvement District is running the Portas Pilot in Lower Marsh and the Cut. Their plans include partnerships with local college and schools to give young people the opportunity to sell goods, partnerships with landlords to make the most of empty space, and the creation of some satellite market stalls. There is a strong emphasis on social and cultural activities in this area, including art and dance, reflecting the heritage of the area.*

These are just a few examples of what the Pilots have been doing. The case studies in this report are supplemented by more information available on the online map of the Portas Pilots: <http://bit.ly/14XC2Iz>

Finally it is worth remembering that the Portas Pilots are not - and were never designed to be - the solution to the high street. These are pilots - they will have successes and failures that we will all learn from. It is only when local authorities, businesses and communities work together to use the support and funding available that things will happen on the ground.

# Annex B

## Useful Links and Resources for Helping High Streets

What to do for high streets:

- The Association of Town and City Management have produced “100 Ways to Help the High Street”: [www.100ways.org.uk](http://www.100ways.org.uk)
- Action for Market Towns provide practical ideas in “21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Centres” in <http://towns.org.uk/2011/10/13/new-21st-century-town-centres-report/> and also have a toolkit to look at the strengths and needs of your town team: [http://towns.org.uk/sustainability\\_toolkit/](http://towns.org.uk/sustainability_toolkit/)
- There is a Healthy High Street health check for high streets and town centres that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills arranged: [http://www.bcsc.org.uk/publication.asp?pub\\_id=394](http://www.bcsc.org.uk/publication.asp?pub_id=394)
- ATCM worked jointly with Gloucestershire First Local Enterprise Partnership to produce a report, “Successful town centres - developing effective strategies” which offers a series of easily used tools and ideas: [https://www.atcm.org/tools\\_dir/successful\\_town\\_centres\\_\\_\\_developing\\_effective\\_strategies](https://www.atcm.org/tools_dir/successful_town_centres___developing_effective_strategies)
- The British Retail Consortium’s “21st Century High Street” [http://www.brc.org.uk/downloads/21st\\_Century\\_High\\_Streets\\_What\\_next\\_for\\_Britain\\_town\\_centres.pdf](http://www.brc.org.uk/downloads/21st_Century_High_Streets_What_next_for_Britain_town_centres.pdf)
- Business In The Community “Future High Streets” highlights some excellent examples of business-led partnerships and locally active store managers <http://www.bitc.org.uk/our-resources/report/future-high-streets-businesses-going-local>
- DCLG “Re-imagining urban spaces to help revitalise our high streets” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-imagining-urban-spaces-to-help-revitalise-our-high-streets>
- DCLG “High streets at the heart of our communities: The Government response to the Portas Review” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-streets-at-the-heart-of-our-communities-government-response-to-the-mary-portas-review>

It is worth identifying where the gaps in skills and knowledge in the town team might be, and to address these with training, other support or professional expertise. Resources for support on skills includes:

- The National Skills Academy for Retail provides training and business support for retailers nationally and locally through its network of skills shops:  
<http://www.nsaforretail.com/Pages/default.aspx>
- ATCM are providing a range of workshops and training courses to Portas Pilots and Town Team Partners at free or discounted rates as part of the Government-funded support package. More information is available on  
[https://www.atcm.org/programmes/town\\_teams/](https://www.atcm.org/programmes/town_teams/)
- The Association of Convenience Stores has produced a guide to help local businesses, communities and councils understand how town planning can be used to help support and achieve diverse and healthy local centres, which are at the hearts of their communities: <http://www.acs.org.uk/en/Advice/planning-for-diverse-local-centres/>

Running and funding a Town Team:

- ATCM have guidance on how to set up a town team:  
<https://www.atcm.org/townteamuploads/1193-howtoestablishatownteam> and on different governance models for town teams:  
[https://www.atcm.org/townteamuploads/a\\_firm\\_basis](https://www.atcm.org/townteamuploads/a_firm_basis)
- There is more information on Business Improvement Districts from UK Bids and British BIDs: [https://www.atcm.org/programmes/uk\\_bids](https://www.atcm.org/programmes/uk_bids) and [www.britishbids.info](http://www.britishbids.info)
- Crowdfunding enables town teams to gather momentum within the local community to raise funds for projects. No money exchanges hands until the target is reached -  
<https://spacehive.com/initiatives/towncentres>

Setting up and running successful Markets:

- The National Association of British Market Authorities: [www.nabma.com](http://www.nabma.com)
- The National Market Traders' Federation: [www.nmtf.co.uk](http://www.nmtf.co.uk)

Using Empty Shops:

- Meanwhile Space works with landlords, landowners, developers and local authorities to advise and deliver projects that relieve them temporarily of liabilities (insurance, rates, security etc.) associated with holding redundant shops, offices, cleared land etc. whilst an appropriate commercial solution is being sought:  
<http://www.meanwhilespace.com/>
- A 'Meanwhile Lease' can make starting pop up shops easier and Government has published a guide to help: <https://www.gov.uk/meanwhile-use-lease-and-guidance-notes-for-landlords>

- The Leasecode which provides advice to potential occupiers on leases and lease negotiations <http://www.leasingbusinesspremises.co.uk/>
- The Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors and the British Retail Consortium produced a small business lease: <http://www.rics.org/uk/knowledge/more-services/professional-services/small-business-retail-lease/>
- Related resources on pop ups are also available from Pop Up Britain: <http://popupbritain.com/>

Making the most of social media and community assets:

- Advice to town teams on working with the media is available from DCLG and ATCM: <https://www.atcm.org/townteamuploads/1203-workingwiththemediard>
- There is advice on using community assets, social media and more on <http://locality.org.uk/resources/>