



Homes
England

The Housing and Regeneration Agency



Sustainable Placemaking Guidance

Delivering Quality: Local Centres

March 2026



Image 1: Cover Page: Jubilee Square, Marleigh Park
(Image credit: © The Hill Group)

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4	List of Images	
Foreword	5	Image 1: Cover Page: Jubilee Square, Marleigh Park	2
Executive Summary	6	Image 2: Steepleton, Tetbury	16
1 Introduction	9	Image 3: Jubilee Square, Marleigh Park	18
1.1 Defining local centres	10	Image 4: Chesterwell Plaza, Chesterwell	20
1.2 Challenges to delivery	11	Image 5: The Hub, Mulberry Park	22
1.3 Achieving success	12	Image 6: Sketch of Hobson Square, Clay Farm	24
2 Strategic Principles	13	Image 7: Beaulieu Square, Chelmsford	26
2.1 Introducing strategic principles	14	Image 8: Station House, Heyford Park	28
2.2 Design fundamentals	17	Image 9: Houlton, Rugby	30
2.3 Strategy	19	Image 10: Nansledan, Newquay	32
2.4 Configuration	25	Image 11: The Shed, Whitehill & Bordon	34
2.5 Design	29	Image 12: Civic Square, Ladywood	36
2.6 Mix	35	Image 13: Olive Lane, Waverley	38
3 Delivering Success	39	List of Figures	
3.1 Defining success	40	Figure 1: Local centre principles summary	6
3.2 A new delivery model	41	Figure 2: Local centre as a centre point	10
3.3 Nine delivery steps for success	42	Figure 3: Successful local centres cited in this document	10
		Figure 4: Defining success through decision-making	12
		Figure 5: Steps & factors for success diagram	14

Acknowledgements

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List of local centres cited

- Jubilee Square, Marleigh Park
- Chesterwell Plaza, Colchester
- The Hub, Mulberry Park
- Beaulieu Square, Chelmsford
- Station House, Heyford Park
- Houlton, Rugby
- The Shed, Whitehill & Bordon
- Nansledan, Newquay
- Olive Lane, Waverley
- Steepleton, Tetley
- Civic Square, Ladywood

This document was also informed by a structured workshop organised by the Homes England Property Panel, with 31 consultants from across the country.

Homes England is grateful for all the time and input offered to the Agency to develop this document.

Foreword

We recognise the critical importance of embedding well-designed local centres and associated amenities in the masterplans of Homes England sites. These centres are essential to our ambition of delivering sustainable communities, enabling residents to live, work and access services locally, and supporting more sustainable choices in how people live and travel.

By reducing reliance on private cars, well-integrated local centres contribute directly to our sustainability outcomes, and to the creation of walkable, vibrant neighbourhoods that align with the Building for a Healthy Life principles, and with our strategic commitment to sustainable placemaking.

This report addresses the key question of how to design and deliver successful, vibrant and mixed-use local centres. It draws on insights from leading practitioners across the industry, sharing their experiences on what works in practice.

Alison Crofton - Chief Property Officer, Homes England

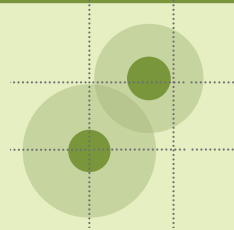
Executive Summary

Our research shows that delivering successful local centres is possible. This is especially true where they are considered as a piece of critical infrastructure in the same way as schools and open spaces, with the capital costs borne by the development as a whole.

The principles opposite, and on the next page, are key to successful local centres.

Strategy & Value

Strategic Location:



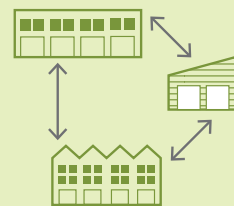
Choose the location where the local centre can be accessible to as many people as possible from within and outside the red line

Partnership and Timing:



Work with operators to shape a common vision and get the timing right

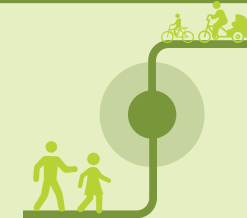
More than Co-location:



Cluster mixed uses together and integrate their facilities and operations so that they support each other

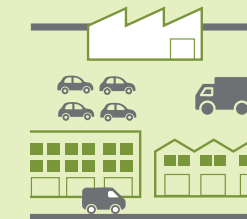
Configuration & Access

Active Travel:



Make walking and cycling the best option to get to the local centre

Car parking & Servicing:

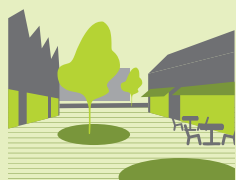


Integrate parking and servicing within the urban form and street scene without letting it dictate the placemaking approach

Figure 1: Local centre principles summary

Design & Character

Space & Enclosure:



Establish a sense of place by providing open spaces with containment, frontage, shelter and shade

Landscape & Public Realm:



Use landscape and urban elements to provide amenity, enhance seasonality, define boundaries and stimulate conviviality

Fabric & Flexibility:



Design the building for flexibility and adaptability, and pay particular attention to the ground floor

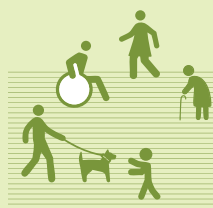
Mix & Appeal

Variety & Choice:



Understand the local community and the local market, then tailor the mix of uses and operators accordingly

Social Life:



Create a welcoming, inclusive and resilient place for local people to build community from the outset, including by programming temporary and meanwhile uses

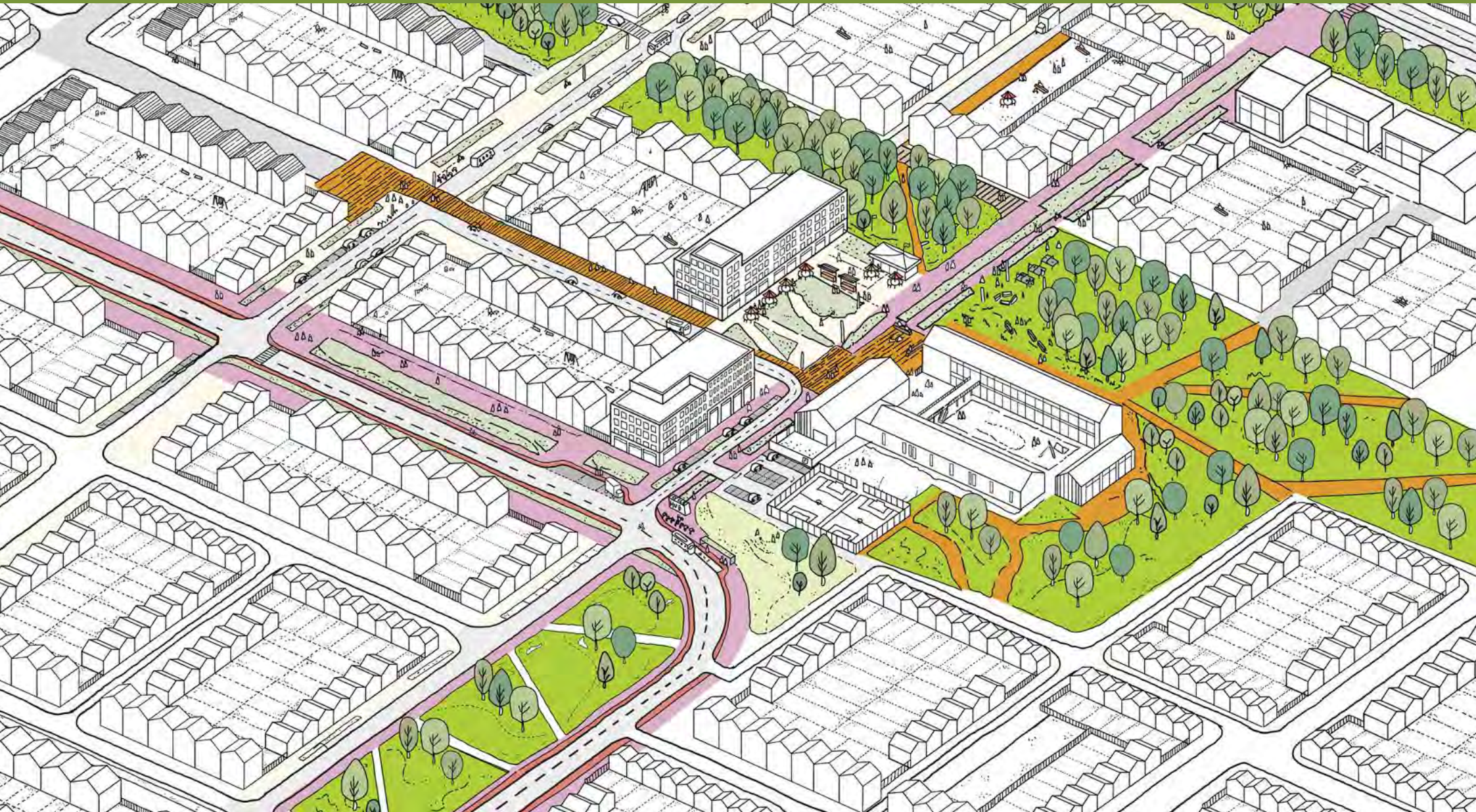
Delivering Success

The delivery of a successful local centre according to these principles can be summarised in nine steps:

- Understand the place
- Optimise the location
- Establish the operational model
- Bring uses and their servicing together
- Create an appropriate setting
- Deliver beyond 'shell and core'
- Get the mix and timing right
- Manage expectations
- Be flexible and responsive

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1 | Introduction



1.1 | Defining local centres

A local centre is the closest point of access to shared amenities and services in neighbourhoods that are predominantly residential.

Local centres can vary considerably in scale:

- A small local centre might have a single anchor, whether a commercial foodstore or a community building like a school;
- A medium-size local centre might have two or three anchor uses, such as a grocery shop, a school, a community centre or a co-working space; and
- A large local centre might have three or more anchor uses, including any of the aforementioned, a medical centre, a pub or hotel, and so on.

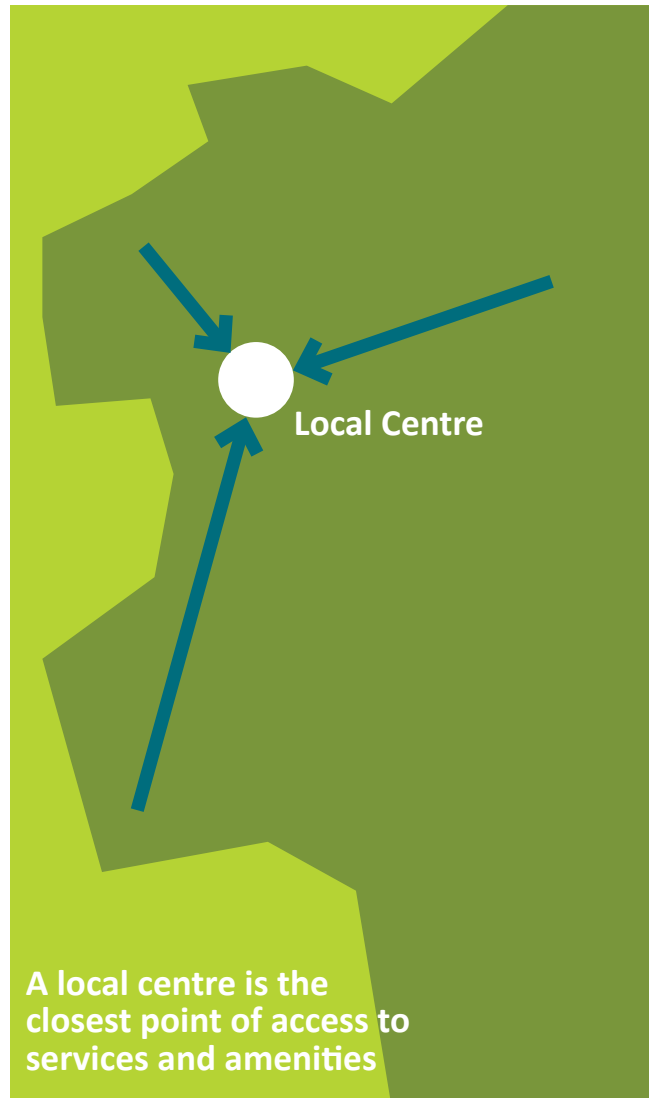
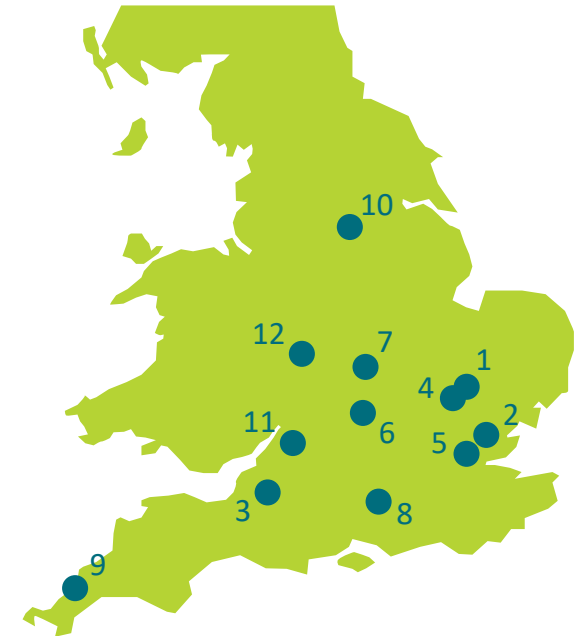


Figure 2: Local centre as a centre point



1. Jubilee Square, Marleigh Park
2. Chesterwell Plaza, Colchester
3. The Hub, Mulberry Park, Bath
4. Hobson Square, Clay Farm
5. Beaulieu Square, Chelmsford
6. Station House, Heyford Park
7. Houlton, Rugby
8. The Shed, Whitehill & Bordon
9. Nansledan, Newquay
10. Olive Lane, Waverley
11. Steepleton, Tetley
12. Civic Square, Ladywood

Figure 3: Successful local centres cited in this document

1.2 | Challenges to delivery

The research identified several challenges facing the delivery of local centres. The document explains how some of those challenges could become opportunities, if the right kind of infrastructure is delivered at a right time, and with appropriate stewardship mechanisms in place.

Interaction between density and location

New residential neighbourhoods in England, frequently at the edge of existing settlements, tend to be relatively low density. This combination of low density and peripheral location makes it difficult to deliver local centres. Their population catchment, needed to sustain businesses within, is too large to foster walking. This encourages car use, which often means driving to a larger centre that can meet more needs.

Critical role of early delivery

Local centres are a key component of successful neighbourhoods. Their delivery needs to be carefully planned to ensure that local uses are developed early enough to establish sustainable lifestyles, but late enough to enable commercial success of the businesses within them. Meanwhile uses can provide a foothold for the growing community and establish patterns of patronage and loyalty.

Local centre character

Attracting people to your local centre, in the face of competition from adjacent centres, relies on its unique features, environmental setting, design quality, mix of uses and operators, as well as the cultural and community offer.

Economic value of a local centre

Successful local centres bring long-term benefits for all stakeholders. These include driving residential sale rates and increasing sale values and property values for individual homeowners. Acting as a quality benchmark, they can help supporting planning negotiations with local communities with Local Planning Authorities.

Encouraging active travel and walkability, local centres can reduce vehicular movements, decreasing capital and operational costs of transport improvements that may be required as part of the development.

Compact local centre design formats

The most successful local centres reviewed for this study have a street based setting, with non-residential uses lining the ground floor, and housing above. Upper floors are an important success component as they add natural surveillance, help define the townscape, support local centre visibility, provide enclosure to public spaces, and establish a sense of place. Some local centres reviewed had the character of small retail parks, with isolated single-story buildings and surface car parks. This approach creates low-quality spaces, uses land inefficiently, and discourages public life and active travel.

1.3 | Achieving success

Success means different things to different stakeholders, and successful local centres add up to more than the sum of their parts. Seeing the bigger picture involves unlocking the synergies between their strategy, access, design, and mix of uses, through a delivery model that accrues benefits for all stakeholders.

This document brings together learning from across the country, which Homes England has assembled with the help of stakeholder interviews, industry engagement and consultant advice. It considers how the different components of a local centre can be brought together in a coherent and cohesive way. This is inherently difficult and requires responsive and proactive management to do so successfully.

There is no straightforward template for a successful local centre: there are also a myriad of contextual factors that determine success and are specific to each development and locality.

Success ultimately requires flexibility and compromise between stakeholders across the many issues to be considered. These range from the large-scale strategic decisions that need long-term commitment from the start of the process, through to access, design and the ongoing management of the mix in response to change. Each of these is considered in turn in the following chapters.

The document concludes with a delivery roadmap for successful local centres, to assist stakeholders in seeing the bigger picture beyond their individual priorities.

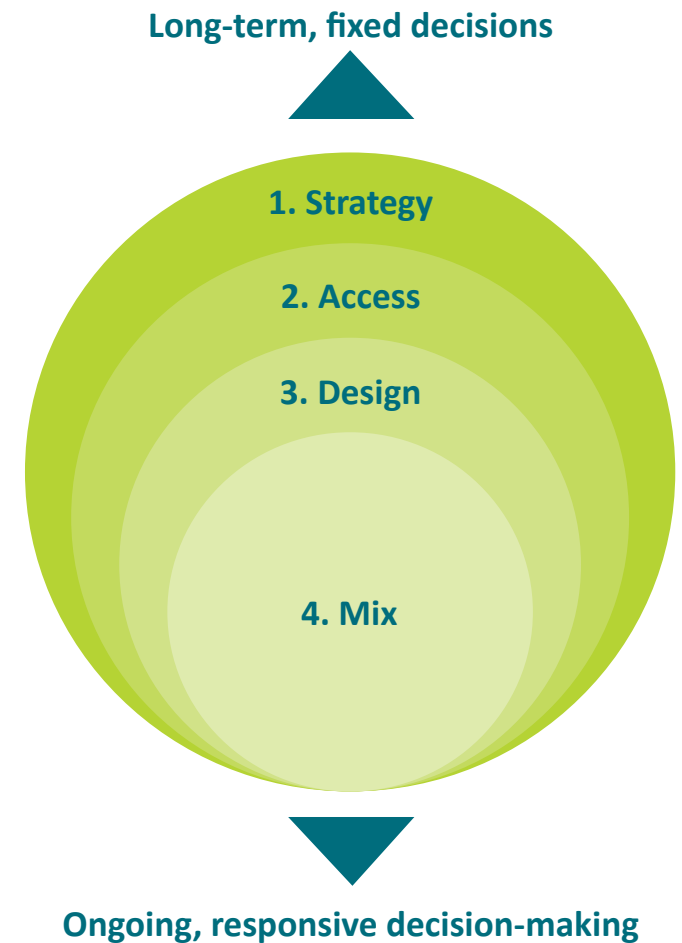


Figure 4: Defining success through decision-making

2 | Strategic Principles



2.1 | Introducing strategic principles

Our research shows that a range of factors must be considered to support the delivery of a local centres. These considerations relate to four key strands that includes design fundamentals: strategy, configuration, design and mix. The ten principles can be categorised into these four strands.

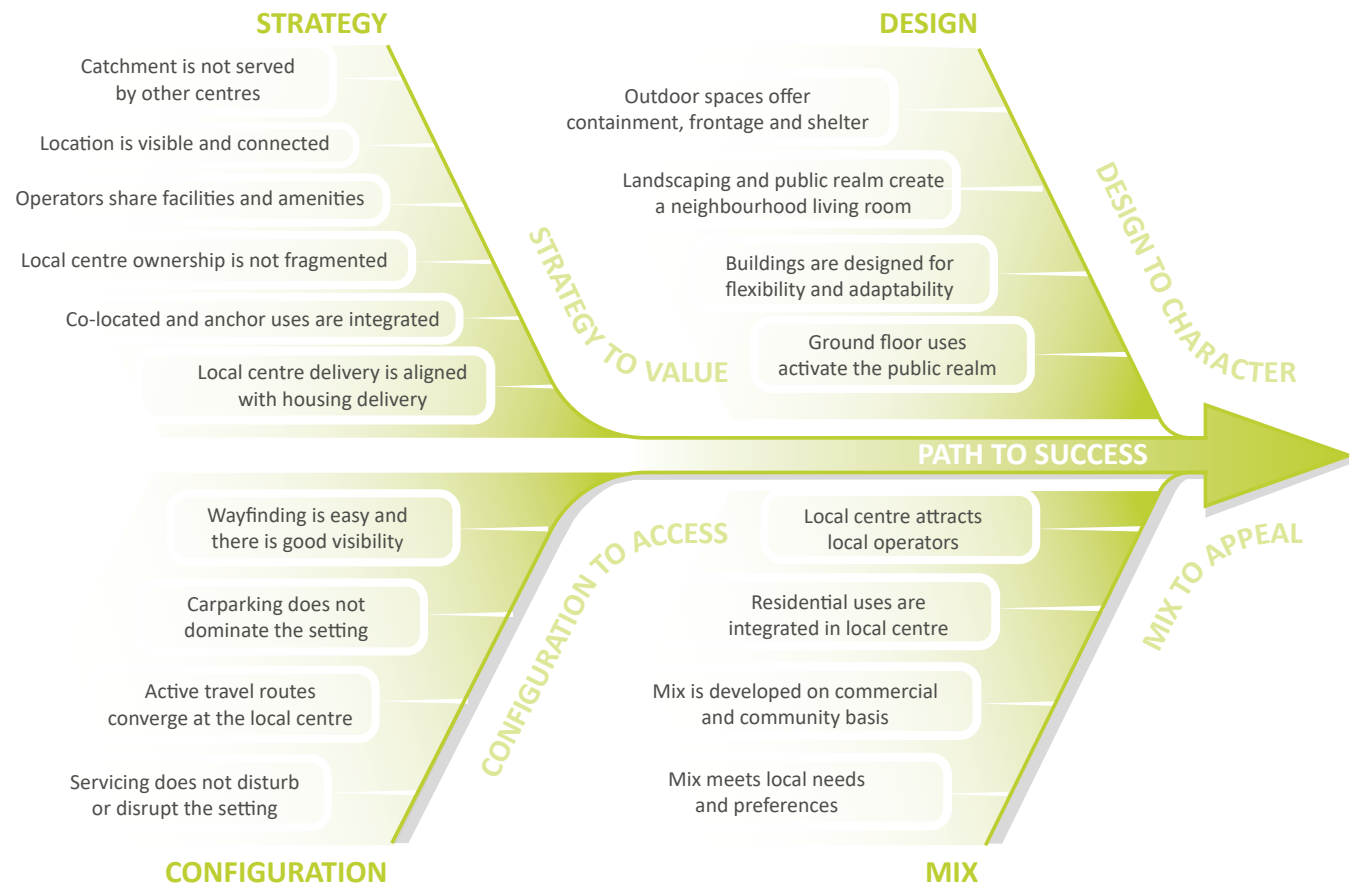
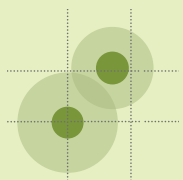


Figure 5: Steps and factors for success

Strategy

Strategic Location



Choose the location where the local centre is accessible to as many people as possible from within and outside the red line.

Partnership and Timing



Work with operators to shape a common vision and get the timing right

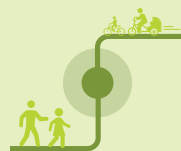
More than Co-location



Cluster mixed uses and integrate their facilities so that they support each other

Configuration

Active Travel



Make walking and cycling the best option to get to the local centre

Car parking & Servicing



Integrate parking and servicing within the urban form and street scene

Design

Space & Enclosure



Establish a sense of place by providing open spaces with containment, frontage, shelter and shade

Landscape & Public Realm



Design to provide amenity, enhance seasonality, define boundaries and stimulate conviviality

Fabric & Flexibility



Design for flexibility and adaptability, and pay particular attention to the ground floor

Mix

Variety & Choice



Understand the local community and the local market, then tailor the mix of uses and operators accordingly

Social Life



Create a welcoming, inclusive and resilient place for local people to foster community from the outset



1. Steepleton, Tetbury

In PegasusLife's Steepleton development in Tetbury, a publicly accessible Village Hall is at the heart of the site. It contains communal facilities including a large dining area and resident's lounge, care and therapy provision, IT facilities and an exercise room. A central communal court and open-air bathing pond accompany a Spa and can be used by residents and the local community alike, and there is an inviting public café open to all, located along the street frontage.

Image 2: Steepleton, Tetbury (Image credit: ©Proctor & Matthews)

2.2 | Design fundamentals

A local centre is above all a place, and its design and character are key to its placemaking quality.

Street-based first

In general, a local centre should be configured in a street-based setting for vitality and conviviality, and include a generous approach to the public realm to encourage dwelling. Where appropriate, local centre design can also draw on traditional settlement patterns in the local area, and could use locally-sourced materials and vernacular configurations.

Civic rather than domestic

The design of the local centre should be related to, but clearly distinct from, the surrounding residential neighbourhood. Rather than being a continuation of the residential design of the surrounding area, its architectural spatial layout, design and construction should communicate and accommodate its role in the civic and collective life of the neighbourhood.

Form before function

Local centre operators and uses can and will change over time, so it is important that the form of the local centre is not shaped too specifically around the requirements of a specific use or occupier. Indoor and outdoor spaces (including car parking) should be sufficiently flexible to adapt to other uses. While the local centre should at all times perform functionally, it is important that its spatial arrangements have longevity and long-term appeal to continue to attract operators and patronage.

Relationships, not metrics

The design of a local centre must find a balance between many different requirements, which will require some compromise between different functional specifications. Rather than focusing on the strict metrics of street design or unit size, it is key to establish the spatial relationships between different elements that can achieve enduring and memorable character.

2. Jubilee Square, Marleigh Park

This local centre is the heart of The Hill Group's new Marleigh Park neighbourhood in Cambridge. Commercial and community facilities including a community centre, primary school, nursery foodstore and café are all co-located around a public square. It is strategically located not in the centre of the neighbourhood but on its edge.

Its position is close to the passing A-road, and adjacent to a Park and Ride facility. Good masterplanning ensures that development density is highest in its immediate vicinity. This forms a recognizable gateway to the neighbourhood as a whole, for those arriving both by public transport services and by car. Its location is no more than 800m (10 minute's walk) from all parts of the development.

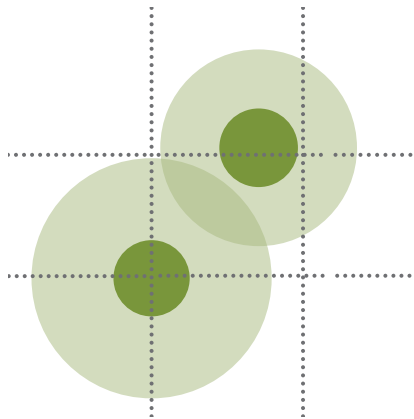
Image 3: Jubilee Square, Marleigh Park (Image credit: © The Hill Group)



2.3 | Strategy

2.3.1 | Strategic Location

Choose the location where the local centre can be accessed by as many people as possible



Maximise connectivity and visibility

A local centre should be located to maximise connectivity and footfall while encouraging passing traffic. This may mean that the best location is not the physical centre of the new neighbourhood but a location close to a movement corridor, or to an adjacent neighbourhood with an unmet need. It should strike balance between a local centre's outward orientation and its role as neighbourhood 'heart'.

Scope out local needs and catchment

Early stages of masterplanning should include catchment analysis to understand the existing local centre provision and demand. This will also enable the identification of gaps in provision and targeting of relevant operators to meet unmet local need. It is critical that the size and offer of a new centre does not undermine existing local centres.

Assemble the right site

Once a strategic location for the local centre has been identified, further site assembly and allocation may be needed before it can proceed to masterplanning. All sites critical to delivery should be acquired before finalising the location, including those providing access or with the potential to impact on its setting.

Optimise location to suit phasing

The optimal location for a local centre may change over time. Early on, it may be best next to passing trade. But a location more central to the neighbourhood may ultimately be more sustainable. Sometimes the optimal location may only be deliverable in late phases due to access, infrastructural or ownership issues. It may then be best to bring forward more than one local centre but with different function and scale.

Increase density and converge routes

The immediate context of the local centre should have higher density than the rest of the neighbourhood. Active travel and public transport routes should be configured to lead directly to and converge at the local centre. Buildings within it should be configured for visibility from strategic and local approaches, and be recognisable as of mixed use without the need for excessive signage.

Integrate car movement

Car parking should be limited and integrated into the urban and public realm setting of the local centre. Careful balance must be struck to provide for the car movements of the passing traffic while discouraging local residents from driving to a local centre that could be reached walking or wheeling.



3. Chesterwell Plaza, Chesterwell

The configuration, mix and design of the centre were guided by a design brief which Mersea Homes commissioned in consultation with Colchester City Council.

Mersea Homes retains ownership and has shaped the mix around a 'Health Plaza' concept, with a private medical practice and a gym/fitness centre. Other uses include a grocery shop and a café, both run by quality regional operators, and a landscaped plaza fronted by a new academy school and a nursery.

Image 4: Chesterwell Plaza, Chesterwell (Image credit: © Mersea Homes)

2.3.2 | Partnership and Timing

Work with operators to shape a common vision and get the timing right



Work with operators from the outset

Local centre strategy should identify likely operators. This can establish clear placemaking principles and provide guidance on the types and mix of uses. If this is in place early, developers and operators can work together to develop the local centre designs.

Attract independent & local operators

Local and independent operators bring appeal and commitment. They may prefer smaller units and may need them fitted-out. Their lesser covenant strength may impact the investment yield applied, which needs to be recognised in viability appraisals.

Attract national operators

National operators are important attractors, but often only open premises once the critical mass of homes is built, often set at 1,000. Early discussions should identify opportunities for earlier delivery, and acceptance of the shared vision, such as for mixed-use buildings with shared parking.

Insist on shared operator facilities

Dedicated car parking for individual uses should be avoided. Shared parking facilities are more conducive to quality placemaking, can avoid duplication of provision and reduce the land take.

Synchronise with housing delivery

A quality local centre brings place-shaping benefits for the scheme and the surrounding population. It may increase house values and/or sales rates. As such, it should be delivered early enough to capture the place-shaping uplift.

Deliver early to foster local lifestyles

A local centre should be delivered as early as feasible to embed local shopping habits. Where the permanent local centre cannot be delivered early, temporary or meanwhile uses should be considered.

Consider long term project-wide viability

Local centre costs should be considered as value-generating infrastructure that can provide return on investment in the long run. When mature, a successful local centre can generate a place-shaping value uplift in the wider area and reward 'patient' investment.

Consider retaining ownership

Some developers and investors retain local centre ownership to generate a rental income, or as part of the neighbourhood stewardship strategy. This allows ongoing control and curation of the uses to ensure they align with the placemaking objectives.

4. The Hub, Mulberry Park Foxhill, Bath

With commercial facilities already provided nearby on Bradford Road, The Hub is anchored by community uses only, including a primary school, nursery, community centre and café.

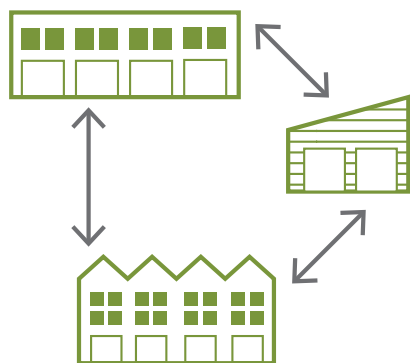
The West of England housing association, Curo, ensured that these facilities are co-located and integrated into a landmark building fronting a landscaped public space, and provide controlled access to shared sports facilities behind. Against the backdrop of the central square, the Hub is inspired by the site's military history and creates a dramatic and welcoming spatial focus for the new neighbourhood.

Image 5: The Hub, Mulberry Park (Image credit: © BDP)



2.3.3 | More than co-location

Cluster mixed uses and integrate their facilities so that they support each other



Bring uses and their servicing together

Non-residential uses within developments should generally be concentrated in and around local centres. For a centre to really thrive, these uses should be integrated with each other and with the wider setting. For example, they can share open spaces, car parking and servicing. Such integration can lead to linked trips for different purposes, thus driving footfall and building community cohesion.

Curate a mix of uses

Successful local centres could include a brand name convenience shop, a coffee shop or café predominantly for daytime use, a gym or leisure centre, restaurant or pub, and a health and beauty offer. These could be matched with GP surgeries, dentists, nurseries, as well as an adjoining school or community centre. Even where retail facilities are not viable, these latter uses could still provide a spatial focus for community well-being.

Consider times of activity peaks

Uses should be curated for the local centre to be busy at different periods of the day. Co-location with schools offers the high footfall of people during early mornings, lunch times and mid-afternoons. Hospitality and leisure uses bring activity into the evening.

Secure an anchor use

Securing an anchor use is critical to the success of a local centre. A high profile brand name can draw from the local and the wider catchment. If the anchor is commercial, its operator should agree to follow the placemaking approach of the local centre and wider development, rather than insisting on their generic specification.

Consider a community anchor

Schools, community centres and health centres can act as local centre anchors, particularly where co-located with a public open space and smaller-scale commercial units such as a café. Shared facilities, such as meeting rooms or sports halls, should be encouraged. Segregated ones, particularly so car parking and servicing, should be discouraged.

Health anchors

Local Integrated Care Board (ICB) should be engaged early to establish whether health facilities could be accommodated in a local centre. This may not be possible with many NHS trusts moving toward a 'superhub' provision. It may be appropriate to secure private medical and dental operators as an alternative. This however limits who can engage with such facilities.



5. Hobson Square, Clay Farm

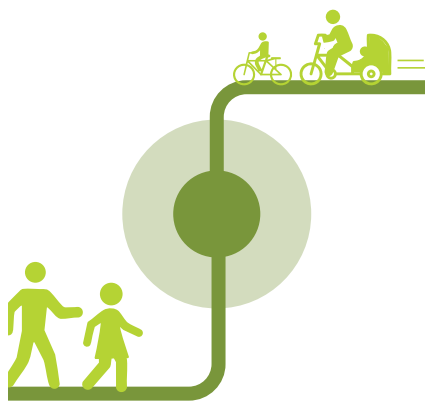
Hobson Square is the local centre for the wider Clay Farm urban extension developed by Countryside at Great Kneighton to the south-west of the city of Cambridge. Local centre uses are clustered around a paved urban square, which lies close to the intersection of two cycle routes, both separated from vehicular traffic. A guided busway runs adjacent to the square, with stops located 150m to the south. A bus gate is located on the west side of the square, ensuring that vehicular movement through the shared-surface public space and surrounding streets is for local access only, and that streets are sufficiently quiet for cycles to share the carriageway with vehicles.

Image 6: Sketch of Hobson Square, Clay Farm (Image credit: © TateHindle)

2.4 | Configuration

2.4.1 | Active Travel

Make walking and cycling the best option to get to the local centre



Link up active travel routes

Active travel routes should converge from all parts of the residential catchment and link up at the local centre. Routes should be direct and as level as possible. On quiet streets they can share the carriageway, but where they pass along busier roads and at junctions they should travel on separated and protected paths. They can also be integrated into public open spaces and parks. Routes should also enjoy continuous natural surveillance from the surrounding frontage of development, and have appropriate lighting and signage.

Prioritise active travel in a local centre

Where active travel routes arrive at the local centre, the movements of those walking, wheeling and cycling should be prioritised over the needs of vehicles. Visitor cycle parking should be provided in a convenient and well-overlooked location and integrated in the broader public realm design. Where possible, active travel routes should also connect with local, regional and national routes.

Support wayfinding and arrival

A local centre should form a focal point in the spatial hierarchy of any masterplan. It should be easily perceived as one of the most significant places in the neighbourhood. It should be the point at which key routes converge, the place where all roads lead, and have a good sense of arrival. Public transport routes and other 'desire lines' should pass through or close to the local centre.

Incorporate a mobility hub

An inclusion of a mobility hub should be considered early in the design process. A mobility hub is a place where people can switch from one mode of transport to another. Local centres can operate as mobility hubs in many ways. They support people to come on foot to hire an e-bike or catch a bus, or they make it easy to arrive by bike and find a secure place to leave it, then pick up a car club car or join a car-share. The hubs come with physical facilities ranging from maps, real-time transport information, seating, or delivery lockers.

6. Beaulieu Square, Chelmsford

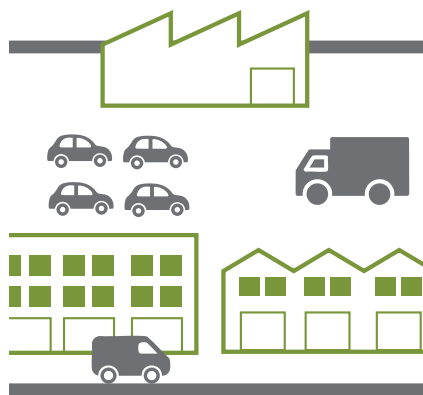
At Countryside's Beaulieu urban extension to Chelmsford, the local centre at Beaulieu Square includes a grocery shop and a range of smaller commercial units whose servicing has been carefully integrated to minimise impacts on business operations, residential amenity and the public realm. Deliveries and waste management take place via a secure service yard in the centre of the urban block, which effectively screens operations from view from the surrounding frontages, open spaces, and residential amenity spaces. Each commercial unit has its own loading bay and service flue, enabling hot food and other production operations without adverse impact on the dwellings on the upper floors.

Image 7: Beaulieu Square, Chelmsford
(Image credit: ©Countryside (now part of the Vistry Group) and L&Q)



2.4.2 | Parking and Servicing

Integrate parking and servicing within the urban form and street scene, without letting it dictate the placemaking approach



Integrate parking in the urban form

Active travel should always be the preferred option for reaching the local centre. This should be reflected in the priority accorded to crossings and in the privileged locations of active travel facilities and infrastructure. Car parking is still important to the viability and should be fully integrated into the design. A common approach should be brokered between local centre stakeholders, to include consideration of the following issues:

- **Amount:** Provide shared and public access parking, and avoid the use of on-plot parking and the potential for duplication of provision;
- **Format:** Offer on-street car parking as the first choice and configure parking courts to be unobtrusive; avoid large parking squares;
- **Design:** Break up car parking with pavement buildouts, street trees, hedge screens and other landscaping approaches;
- **Management:** Designate the most accessible locations for short stay, and locate EV charging or other dedicated bays where a longer dwell time will not be obtrusive; establish clear rules, communicate with customers and operators, and enforce against infringements.

Service from the streets in small centres

In smaller centres, deliveries can occur from the street by means of on-street loading bays provided in discreet locations, with designated hours of operation. Where there is a generous street or square, such provision can be integrated in the public realm without creating a dedicated delivery space. Operators should avoid receiving numerous deliveries per day to the commercial frontage, as this impacts on the quality of the public realm.

Consider service yards in larger centres

In larger centres, service yards can be provided, though these should be configured within the centre of an urban block to avoid impacts on the public domain. Particular care should be given to the design of yard entrances and gates to minimise impacts on building frontages.

Design discreet refuse storage

Bins and recycling facilities should be easy to find, but screened to avoid impacts on the wider public realm. They should be able to operate without disturbing other activity in the local centre.

7. Station House, Heyford Park

The local centre at Heyford Park near Bicester has been configured by Dorchester Regeneration as a linear local high street, by refurbishing, extending and adding to the existing cluster of buildings. Two new mixed-use buildings provide continuous active frontage to Camp Road, currently the main artery of the settlement. Their tall ground floor through-units provide large glazed shopfronts on both sides allowing for subdivision. On the south side, they front a wide pavement and overlook the large neighbourhood green on the opposite side of the street. The two residential upper floors and gable fronts give enclosure and a sense of place to the whole ensemble.

Image 8: Station House, Heyford Park (Image credit: ©Proctor & Matthews)



2.5 | Design

2.5.1 | Space and Enclosure

Establish a sense of place by providing open spaces with containment, frontage, shelter and shade



Differentiate a local centre from its context

The design of the local centre should be related to, but clearly distinct from, the surrounding residential neighbourhood. It should communicate its role in the life of the neighbourhood, rather than being a continuation of the residential design of the surrounding area.

Design for a clear sense of arrival

The local centre should offer a clear sense of place upon arrival. This can be achieved through the definition of thresholds, the framing of views, and above all the enclosure of public space. Vernacular urban design and architecture can give cues.

Design for easy wayfinding

The form and layout of the urban fabric should be configured to orient people towards the local centre. This can involve a 'marker' building visible from across the neighbourhood, or the clustering of local centre buildings in proximity to each other.

Contain public realm at a right scale

The outdoor spaces of the local centre should be clearly defined and contained, and appropriate to the scale of the neighbourhood. Achieving the right scale and proportion of local centres is critical in creating spaces where people want to spend time and relax. Spaces which are too open and ill-defined can feel like spaces to 'pass through' and not places in which to spend time.

Design civic building fronts

Buildings should respond to the scale of the space. Where there is no first floor accommodation, roof forms and gables can be used to give a sense of enclosure and a distinctive silhouette. Thresholds to the local centre should be established through changes in massing, height and alignment as well as landscaping, lighting and other means.

Provide shelter and shade

Enclosure is not only important in creating a sense of place, it can also provide shelter from prevailing winds, and shade at the height of summer sun. Buildings should be oriented to provide shelter from wind and shade. This creates a space that is more usable throughout the year.

8. Houlton, Rugby

At Houlton, Urban & Civic have developed a cluster of refurbished and new buildings for local centre use and as their office and sales suite. The new buildings take their architectural design cues from the existing agricultural and industrial buildings, with simple forms grouped around quadrangles and steep pitched roofs to create a sense of enclosure - a kind of 'neighbourhood living room'. These attractive sheltered spaces will prove usable and adaptable in the later stages of the masterplan as other local centre uses come forward.

Image 9: Houlton, Rugby (Image credit: ©Homes England)



2.5.2 | Landscape and Public Realm

Design to provide amenity, enhance seasonality, define boundaries and stimulate conviviality



Design with topography and views

The configuration of buildings and spaces should work with the landform and take advantage of the topography, especially where views can be afforded over the wider landscape.

Incorporate spaces to sit and dwell in

Seating, changes in levels, water features and soft landscaping should be considered to create a rich and varied setting for people to meet and spend time together, especially through the changing seasons.

Incorporate play and recreation spaces

The public realm should be equipped with outdoor seating, lighting, elements for play, sport and exercise where appropriate, though specific uses should not overwhelm or visually dominate the space.

Boundaries and materials

Landscaping design should help reinforce points of access and building entrances, and screen 'back of house' service areas. This approach can support legibility, avoid visual clutter, and ensure all parts of the public realm are clearly defined with no 'left over' space.

Biodiversity and Nature Connectedness

Consider using planting and soft landscape to introduce biodiversity value to local centres and offer a chance for users to engage with nature.

9. Nansledan, Newquay

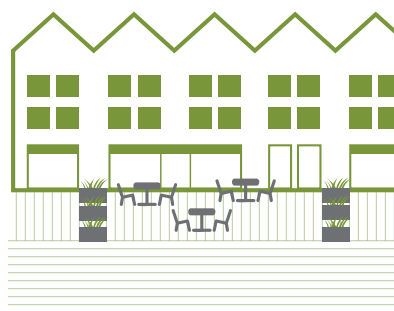
The Duchy of Cornwall is developing the new neighbourhood of Nansledan as a major urban extension to the Cornwall town of Newquay. Pockets of mixed-use development have been carefully incorporated in the early phases of the residential development, even before reaching a 'critical mass' of residents to support full-scale local centre facilities. Clusters of three-storey parades combine commercial micro-units on ground floor and one- or two-bed residential units directly above (50-65sqm). While units can be combined as needed, the small size attracts particular interest from small businesses in the locality, including for personal and professional services, workshops and studios. Such parades are often developed by local housebuilders who retain a commercial interest for the long term, managing the freehold and associated income stream. As well as supporting local economic development, distributing mixed use across the neighbourhood in this way generates character and maintains footfall, activity and natural surveillance throughout the week.

Image 10: Nansledan, Newquay (Image credit: ©Hugh Hastings)



2.5.3 | Fabric and Flexibility

Design the buildings for flexibility and adaptability, and pay particular attention to the ground floor



Develop an adaptability strategy

The role of the local centre is likely to evolve over time. As a development grows and matures it responds to market trends and future economic cycles. Consider in the design process how the local centre can respond to the changing world.

Construct for adaptability

Consider structural solutions such as solutions with tall floor-to-ceiling heights, or that allow units to be easily subdivided or expanded based on tenant requirements. Units with dual aspect can enable frontage to be provided on both sides, facilitating subdivision. Equipping units with flues can enable a hot food offer to be provided without damaging the amenity of apartments on upper floors.

Evolve what is already there

Where available, existing buildings should be re-used as part of a local centre to add a distinctive local character. This can demonstrate the project ambition for long-term adaptability and longevity.

Design public realm for expansion

External spaces should add flexibility. Providing access to sheltered and paved external spaces directly outside units can enable uses to ‘spill out’ and activate the public realm.

Design buildings to meet the street

The configuration and design of ground floors is critical to the success of a local centre. The number and the kind of door and windows, the degree of shelter, and the quality of materials should be carefully considered to achieve a successful place.

Remember about storage

Consider the sizing and the configuration of commercial units. Larger units, such as a grocery shop, come with substantial storage areas. They should be located away from the frontage.

Consider business rate thresholds

Provide a range of smaller units, including units below 280sqm. Such units avoid Sunday trading restrictions and may qualify for higher business rate relief.

10. The Shed, Whitehill & Bordon, Hampshire

The Shed is a multi-use market hall type building developed and run by Dorchester Regeneration in the Hampshire town of Whitehill and Bordon. It is open daily from 8am to 11pm and co-located with the town park and adjacent leisure centre. The building makes imaginative use of off-the-shelf industrial components, with a free-spanning portal frame structure and rolling fire-station doors opening to the town park alongside. An internal 'street' of micro units provides food, beverage and retailing opportunities for local businesses to operate outside the Sunday trading regulations. The core community of operators is key to The Shed's ongoing appeal and patronage, and are a key element of its communications and branding. The internal street frames an extended shared space running the length of the cavernous building. Seating and tables are arranged 'food court' style between the different units, and can be reconfigured for evening performance events. On the first floor, a large co-working space offers a variety of office settings and overlooks the activity of the internal street below.

Image 11: The Shed, Whitehill & Bordon
(Image credit: ©Stride Treglown)



2.6 | Mix

2.6.1 | Variety and Choice

Understand the local community and the local market, then tailor the mix of uses and operators accordingly



Understand the local community

Anticipating future demographics should shape the local centre offer. For example, in schemes with many family homes, health care facilities and nurseries may be more important than evening uses.

Understand the wider community

Where a local centre serves areas beyond the site, other uses may be appropriate to serve what may be a different demographic to that of the scheme. A market gap analysis should be conducted early.

Engage the market

Potential operators should be engaged early to establish who may be appropriate and willing to operate within a local centre. This process should test the scope for compromise between potential operators and stakeholders – particularly in terms of occupying mixed-use buildings, or sharing car parking provision – collaboration and shared understanding of the local centre strategy is important.

Curate the mix

Achieving the desired mix of uses and operators can be challenging. It may involve cost trade-offs to incentivise the right operators to establish in a local centre at a right time.

Cultivate local businesses

Local operators should be supported to test the market. ‘Pop-ups’ and meanwhile uses can be effective to establish an offer that is appropriate to the emerging local tastes. Low operator turnover in the early phases of a local centre should not always be seen as a failure, more a test of fit between operator and patron.

Consider a community-led offer

Community-led and/or voluntary services and amenities should be considered as part of the neighbourhood stewardship strategy. This could include community-run shops, cafés and pubs.

Include residential uses

Mixed-use buildings with commercial ground floors and residential upper floors should be considered. They enable a more efficient use of land and provide scale, social activity and natural surveillance around the clock. They are often not supported by developers due to their higher build cost and a perception of lower values as a result of increased traffic, deliveries, noise and odour. Phasing strategy should address these concerns, for example through the uses of ‘meanwhile’ local centre uses until market confidence has grown to establish a higher density local centre.

11. Civic Square, Ladywood, Birmingham

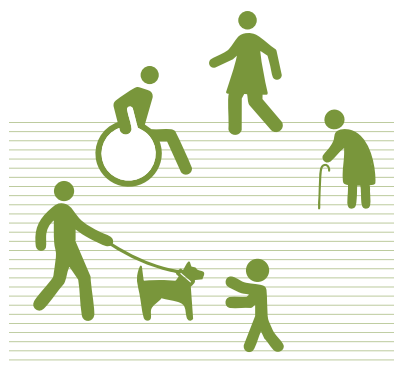
Civic Square is a community-led demonstrator project in the Port Loop regeneration area of Birmingham. Founded in 2020, it aims to provide the wider Ladywood neighbourhood with tools and infrastructure for the social, ecological, economic, and climate transition over the coming years. Located in the former Tubeworks industrial complex adjacent to the area's main public park, Civic Square provides a focus for community social life and public goods for social development. It is working towards neighbourhood-scale retrofit and a regenerative local economic development model, based on Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics.

Image 12: Civic Square, Ladywood
(Image credit: ©Paul Stringer)



2.6.2 | Social Life

Create a welcoming, inclusive and resilient place for local people to build community from the outset, including by programming temporary and meanwhile uses



Consider the most vulnerable users

Local centres provide a platform for social and community life. When embedded in residential neighbourhoods, they can be more accessible to those for those who may find it difficult to reach and navigate larger town centres. Consider how a local centre caters for children and young people, those with disabilities or long term illness, and older people.

Designing for an aging population

There are opportunities with older people's housing to create inclusive local centres, for example, to opening up communal facilities including cafés and beauty salons to residents within the wider neighbourhood. This can promote social inclusion where older people are empowered to live an independent and socially active life at the heart of their community. Consider how a 'later living' component could support an early delivery of commercial uses within a local centre.

Incorporate spaces for community groups

The community offer in a local centre should be shaped around the needs and demand of residents in the local catchment, just like the commercial offer. In initial phases, this may be around promoting round-the-clock access to facilities in built venues, such as to sports facilities in schools and meeting rooms in community centres. Over time, community identity might emerge around particular cultural or faith identities, which can then require their own facilities.

12. Olive Lane, Waverley

Developer Harworth Group plc, together with Sky House acting as one of their development partners, are delivering mixed-use buildings as part of the Olive Lane local centre, the final phase of the Waverley development in Rotherham. After a regional-scale retail park on the site was delayed due to changes in retail trends and operator appetite, the scheme was rethought from first principles as a mixed-use street-based local centre linking the surrounding residential neighbourhood with the advanced manufacturing park adjacent. The new local centre, currently under construction, includes a food store, medical centre and community centre, together with a mixed retail, food and beverage offer in a high quality landscaped street setting. The Sky House development forms the eastern end of the street, with residential uses over ground floor commercial frontage. The gable fronted buildings provide scale, visibility and natural surveillance on the approach from the neighbouring employment area.

Image 13: Olive Lane, Waverley (Image credit: ©Harworth Group)



3 | Delivering Success



3.1 | Defining success

Local centres involve many stakeholders. Considering the perspective of each stakeholder can allow conflicts to be identified and help in developing a local centre that finds the right balance.

Consensus on delivery mechanism and approach can be unlikely. By bringing all stakeholders together at the right time these differences can be better understood. This can enable the delivery mechanisms to be created to address them, and find approaches that begin to align and achieve shared outcomes.

For **Homes England**, local centre success means mixed-use places that benefit local communities. This is measured by employment floorspace, number of jobs created, and social value per pound of investment.

For **local residents**, the primary users of a local centre, success means having their daily needs met without the need to travel too far, for there to be safe and direct routes to get to the local centre, and for it to be a welcoming and attractive place.

For **social service providers**, success is the well-being of their service users and associated communities, and their ease of access to the facilities provided.

For **commercial developers**, success is a thriving and profitable local centre which expands their portfolio and builds their reputation.

For **housebuilders**, success may be an early exit from the local centre by selling the site to an investment partner, with whom they may or may not have a long term involvement.

For **landowners**, success is a high receipt for their land holding as a whole, of which the local centre is a small part. Increasingly, they are concerned with stewardship and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) priorities of their investors.

For **commercial operators**, success may be expanding their business footprint into new locations with new customers, and a sufficiently large and/or affluent catchment to support a viable business.

For **local centre managers**, success is seen in a high-quality setting and strong patronage of operator tenants whose services are relevant to the population in their catchment.

3.2 | A local centre as critical infrastructure

This document treats a local centre as critical infrastructure in the same way as roads or schools. It encourages a long-term investment approach to ensure the future success of local centres.

The delivery model proposed in this document and outlined on the next page encourages seeing a local centre as a long-term investment in infrastructure that can pay off. Such an approach requires a mindset shift but relieves the pressure to be commercially viable from the outset. It bridges the gap between the timing of financial return expected by developers, and the returns that arise from non-residential spaces.

Switching focus from repaying upfront capital immediately towards ongoing operational viability, allows a greater range of operators to afford to take space in the local centre. This gives a local centre the best chance for success and enables public bodies such as Homes England to justify supporting stakeholders to deliver them.

The delivery approach mirrors that of the successful local centres referenced in this document. It is no coincidence that those locations have also had delivery partners with a long-term stake in them. They consistently tended to avoid separating non-residential uses onto stand-alone plots. Instead they have followed an integrated approach combining different services and amenities to create mixed-use buildings. In such cases a master-developer (or similar) makes the up-front investment to establish and run the local centre in early phases, then reaps the benefits in later phases through increased sales values and further development allocations and permissions.

In this master-developer model, the local centre is understood less as a commercial development on its own terms, and more as critical infrastructure for the wider neighbourhood, unlocking delivery and bringing wider social and economic benefits.

3.3 | Nine delivery steps for success

A wide range of factors contribute to local centre success. Past failures may include only a few bad decisions, but success requires getting lots of things right and at the right time. Our research has identified the following delivery steps as key to achieving success.

1. Understand the place

- Understand the catchment profile, including its scale, economic fundamentals, existing and projected demography, and its small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Understand the existing provision, including nearby centres and out-of-town locations – what they do and don't provide, and what challenges their occupiers face.
- With this knowledge, establish the scale and mix of the local centre to best serve the catchment.

2. Optimise the location

- Identify the location that maximises access, visibility, and catchment area, while satisfying land ownership and phasing.
- Establish how travel infrastructure can increase local centre footfall.
- Design routes across the development to converge within a local centre.

3. Establish the operational model

- Establish the operational model for the local centre early on as part of the wider scheme's stewardship model. Where relevant, it should provide clarity on the 'exit route' for the developer. Public sector may then support de-risking the local centre through covenant, guarantee or direct ownership.
- Adjust value expectations in the early phases, for example through rent stair-casing, revenue share, turnover rent, to reflect how the local centre will mature, with suitable value capture mechanisms to capture place-shaping value uplift.

4. Bring uses and their servicing together

- Integrate facilities and operations within a local centre, for example through sharing open spaces, car parking and servicing.
- Co-locate commercial and community uses to maximise footfall and linked trips. Schools are excellent anchors generating high footfall of people through the day.

5. Create an appropriate setting

- Create a strong sense of place in open spaces to attract people to visit and dwell at a local centre. They should be defined and contained by active building frontages, and should provide shelter and shade according to the seasons.
- Incorporate landscape elements that enhance seasonality, define boundaries and stimulate conviviality.
- Focus on ground floor units and their treatments, including opportunities for the community and leisure uses to ‘spill out’ and inhabit open spaces between buildings.

6. Deliver beyond ‘shell and core’

- Consider providing fully fitted out units to reduce the cost barriers to operation, particularly so in locations where a more SME-focussed offer is envisioned.

7. Get the mix and the timing right

- Establish which early investments, such as in schools and nurseries, can drive footfall and establish patterns of behaviour.
- Establish commercial terms and opportunities for passing trade that can support early delivery of commercial uses to support residents establishing sustainable local lifestyles. Accommodate a marketing suite and site office within the local centre to generate early footfall.
- Consider meanwhile uses such as ‘pop-up’ grocery shops and mobile food trucks to foster local lifestyles.

8. Manage expectations

- Do not over-promise what and when can be delivered in a local centre. Where triggers are conditioned on the delivery of a local centre once a specified quantum of housing is occupied, those thresholds should be rigorously market tested before they are set.

9. Be flexible and responsive

- Develop a stewardship strategy that can respond to opportunities and challenges that emerge in relation to the development and the wider market conditions.
- Be flexible on commercial terms to help secure ‘meanwhile’ uses which embed behaviour and attract footfall.
- Co-locate uses to reduce overall cost of delivery, for example with a café within a community centre, or a co-working space in a Build-To-Rent development.
- Deliver buildings and units that can be adapted to evolving needs.
- Develop covenants that allow longer opening hours, for example, for the same space to operate as morning café, afternoon restaurant and night-time venue.
- Establish local centre’s benefits beyond commercial value to open opportunities for grant funding. These may be social value, boosting the local economy, improving health and well-being, environment.



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