

Town Development Manager Report For Town Council Meeting 28 March 2022

This report focuses on our aims and progress for a vibrant town centre both now and into the future

1. *How are we faring in our Covid recovery?*

- Although online shopping and Covid has forced many well-known high street names to disappear – our town centre has relatively few empty shops - and exciting new incomers.
- However, footfall is approximately 29% lower than pre-pandemic levels – being greatly impacted by the increasing trend for online shopping.

As a high proportion of our shops are *comparison* retailers (88%)¹, our recovery after the pandemic is much slower than towns with more *speciality* (eg cultural/heritage), *holiday* or *multifunctional* uses.

In week to 5 March 2022, **UK retail footfall was 84% of level seen in equivalent 2019 week.**² Comparison towns were harder hit so maybe unsurprising that **we are closer to 70% of equivalent week**

2. *Town Council initiatives to boost footfall*

- **Go New Milton** website / social media to promote independent traders and help shoppers plan visits.
- **Seasonal promotional campaigns** – our first campaign at Christmas showed a distinct increase in footfall.
- **Neighbourhood Plan delivery of ambitious vision to transform our ‘Comparison Retail’ town into a Multifunctional town** with more health, social, leisure, living & business uses.

While tactical initiatives support the town centre in the short term, **longer-term success is far harder to win.** We have made some progress with our Plan’s aims...

Social: Summer 2022 launch boosting cultural offer with **No1 New Milton Heritage Centre.**

Walking: Improved **green routes** into town centre as part of ongoing project.

Health: Awaiting outcome of bid for **socially prescribed cooking courses** in town centre.

However, to unlock the full vision, the Town Council may need to consider a much more strategic, investment-led approach to achieve the transformation required.

Recommended actions:

1. A **Spring promotional campaign**, once M&S has launched (and flowerbeds planted with summer bedding).
2. **Explore opportunities for specialist markets** – footfall tends to be higher on Wednesdays when we have street trading.
3. **Continue to monitor / measure town centre performance** with research data.
4. **Adopt a more business-led strategic approach to achieving the full vision.**

Reliance on Retail slowed high streets’ recovery

Over 67% of ‘Speciality’ towns – those which serve the local populace, but which also attract tourists and day trippers - recovered footfall over summer 2020. However, no Comparison retail towns achieved a similar recovery during this period. Holiday towns were the best performing during this period with nearly 50% actually beating pre-pandemic footfall forecasts.

From 2016-2019 the number of Comparison Towns fell by 60% with 11 former Comparison Towns evolved into Multifunctional Towns.

High Streets Task Force: Review of High Street Footfall 2020-21

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21 March 2022

¹ New Milton Town Centre Study 2010

² ONS 10 March 2022.