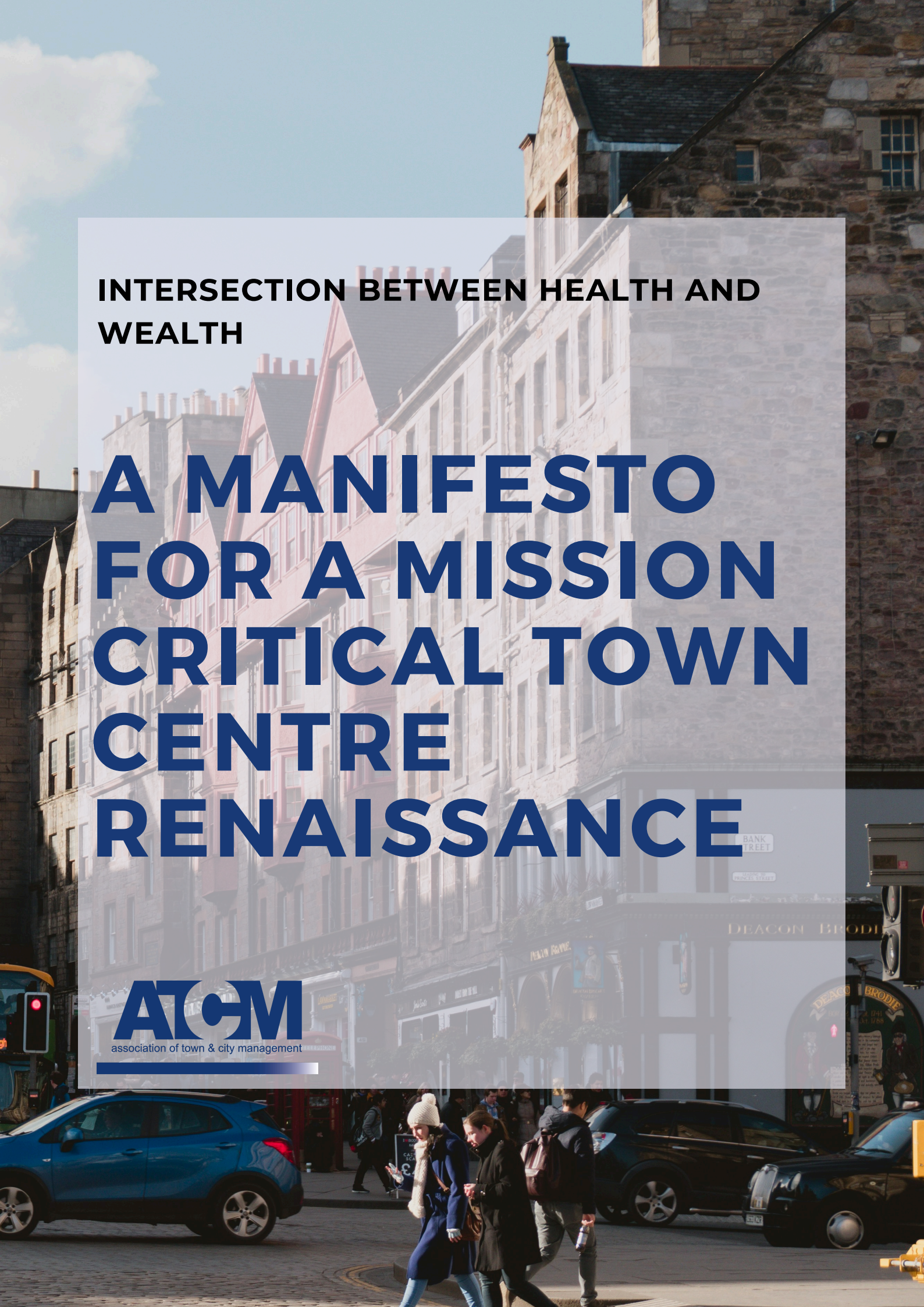


INTERSECTION BETWEEN HEALTH AND WEALTH

A MANIFESTO FOR A MISSION CRITICAL TOWN CENTRE RENAISSANCE

ATCM

association of town & city management



INTRODUCTION

The UK's town centres are at a crossroads.

COVID-19 was the final hammer blow for already struggling retail anchor brands synonymous with the high street for generations, Debenhams and Arcadia being two of the biggest casualties. As high streets search for a new identity, the next UK General Election could be a once in a generation opportunity to align them with some of the UK's biggest challenges - our collective health and wealth.

Good physical and mental health, safety from crime, good quality housing, accessible public services, great jobs and environmental sustainability can all be delivered with a well-designed town centre. Through the devolution of powers, improving planning, investment in local government and strengthening local governance, we can give town centres a new lease of life. Through a commitment to active travel, mixed-use multifunctional centres, tax reform and a coordinated, long-term approach to the reduction of anti-social behaviour, we can develop healthy centres that meet people's needs.

We can make town centres places of health and wealth, commerce and community, with partnerships spanning the public, private and civic. We can design town centres that reduce the burden on care services in later life in both the NHS and local government through a focus on life-long health and well-being. We can strengthen local business networks and supply chains by helping entrepreneurs succeed. And we can make huge strides towards our climate commitments by ensuring the transition of our towns to net zero.

Town centres are the heart of both our economic and community life. Their renewal would accelerate an improvement in our collective health and wealth across the UK. This manifesto outlines how we can achieve this with a coordinated, partnership approach between national and local agencies, and the public and private sectors ahead of the next UK General Election.

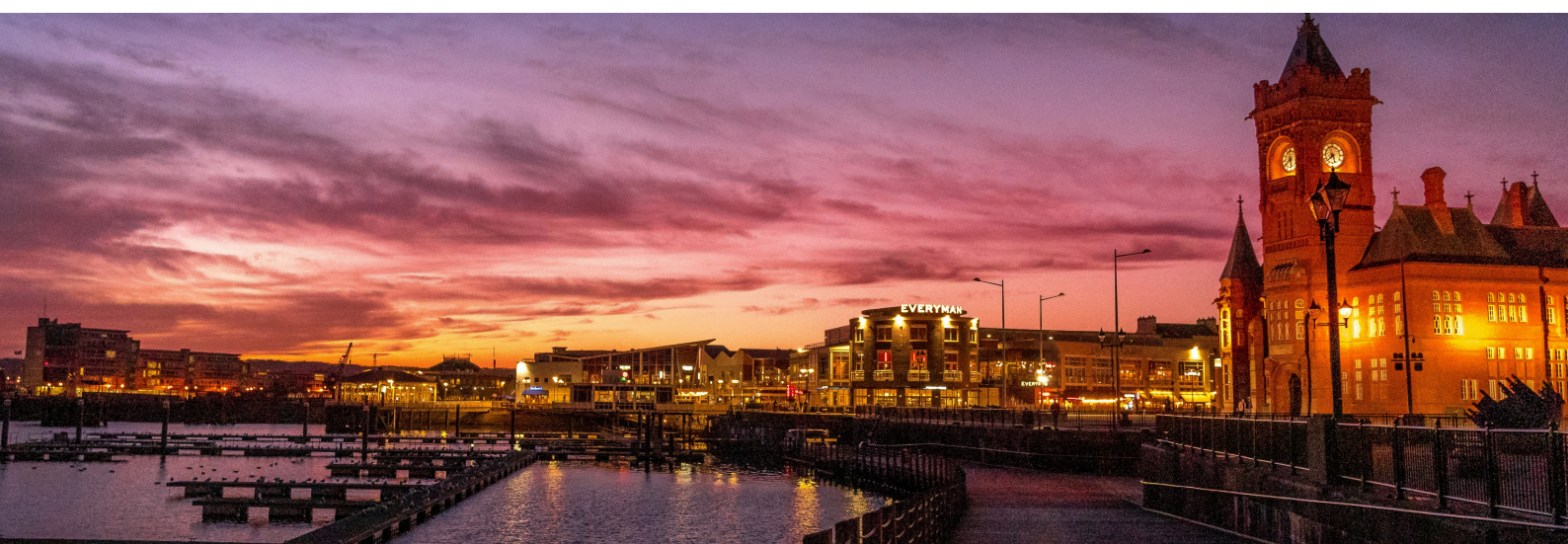


THE VISION

We must embark on an ambitious programme to bring 'gentle density' to those town and city centres that have capacity through the centralisation and co-location of key services and leisure pursuits, reversing decades of urban sprawl. We must co-locate retail, office, leisure, night-time economy, cultural activities, health, education and a range of services in-town alongside the introduction of good quality housing to create strong local economies and high quality living where residents have easy access to services and employment opportunities all within a connected, net zero, climate resilient environment.

To achieve this, we have categorised our recommendations into four key themes:

- Creating **world class stewardship** providing the capacity required locally to deliver the transformation needed.
- Delivering a **built environment for the 21st century** with the physical changes that modernise our town centres and ageing infrastructure so they can help us adapt to today's economic and social challenges.
- Securing a **whole society approach to health & wellbeing** in town centres which encompasses a more people-centric approach to create the environment for communities to prosper.
- Liberating **high street enterprise and investment**, improving the framework for innovation and job creation in town centres to drive economic growth.



WORLD CLASS LOCAL STEWARDSHIP

As hubs of commerce and community, our town centres need to be agile enough to move with the times, but also develop to the benefit of all. For this, we need to become the leaders in developing multi-sector partnerships that can be vehicles which support the long-term evolution of town centres and assist in short-term operational success. This requires the involvement of those with a vested interest in seeing town centres thrive.

WE RECOMMEND:

- Refresh and modernise Business Improvement District regulations complemented by clear guidance for local authorities and allow the creation of Property Owner Business Improvement Districts.
- Create High Street Trusts as bodies to support world class stewardship, expanding the influence of existing town centre management schemes. High Street Trusts must include, as a minimum, local authorities, businesses, community and property owners/investors as key stakeholders to support the strategic evolution of town centres.
- Prioritise investment in key public services that are critical to long-term growth including economic development, planning, policing, arts and culture, highways, infrastructure and other important functions.
- Levy a tax on the owners of long-term empty commercial property to be ring-fenced for services such as planning and economic development for the town centre.
- Identify Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) as the primary vehicles for engaging town centre businesses on a range of issues from economic development to net zero, including them in appropriate programmes and funding opportunities.



A BUILT ENVIRONMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

For too many places, town centres have stagnated for decades. With great planning and collaboration, with the progress made in understanding how the built environment contributes to a happy, and healthy society and with a need to respond to challenges like housing shortages and climate change, we have the responsibility to ensure our places are fit for purpose.

WE RECOMMEND:

- Establish High Street Trusts as the primary vehicle for planning and development in a town centre with responsibility for issues such as site assembly, change of use, public realm and strategic visioning.
- In return for tax and planning incentives, High Street Trusts to set, and deliver on, affordable housing targets in partnership with the UK Government achieving 'gentle densification' in town centres.
- Ensure that towns with trusted multi-sector partnerships such as a High Street Trust are first in line to receive funding for regeneration as they will have the capacity and buy-in to make the best use of financial opportunity.
- Alongside the development of new housing, High Street Trusts must develop and deliver a plan for the delivery of the services and infrastructure that meets the needs of the local population including local transport, green space and health services.
- High Street Trusts to take responsibility for the implementation of renewable energy networks in town centres.
- Work with local authorities to establish Green Investment Bonds, or similar, that could enable individuals, investors and communities to invest in net zero and climate resilience measures for town centres.
- Scrap permitted development rights in England allowing the conversion of commercial to residential without planning permission.
- Use a proportion of developer contributions to invest in climate resilience measures such as the identification of climate vulnerabilities, blue and green infrastructure that can protect the built environment, sustainable urban drainage and other measures.
- The 'Agent of Change' principle must be strengthened and adopted everywhere to protect residents and late night venues from conflict created by noise.
- The inclusion of specific expertise in urban planning both local and nationally including those with expert insight into climate resilience, EVAWG, health, neurodiversity and individual mobility needs.
- Introduce a tax on last mile delivery firms to invest revenue in the public realm to deal with capacity issues related to the growth of bikes and other vehicles used by the sector.

WHOLE SOCIETY APPROACH TO HEALTH & WELLBEING IN TOWN CENTRES

There are numerous societal problems that manifest on the UK's high streets. Crime, anti-social behaviour, homelessness and mental health. Not only are these problems corrosive to the lives of individuals but they can also impact the attractiveness of any place and hold back economic growth. Unfortunately, there is not one solution, or one agency that will solve these problems. They can only be solved through a long-term whole society approach to welfare and wellbeing.

WE RECOMMEND:

- A joined-up approach to dealing with the violence and vulnerability that manifests itself in town centres both locally and nationally. We need coordination between town centre partnerships, local authorities, Business Improvement Districts, policing, mental health charities, addiction services, NHS, housing agencies, faith groups, rough sleeping charities and others to deal with challenges like crime, addiction, ASB and homelessness.
- High Street Trusts must support the provision of high quality space for young people to use for social interaction and activities, develop a closer relationship with their town and reduce long-term nuisances like anti-social behaviour.



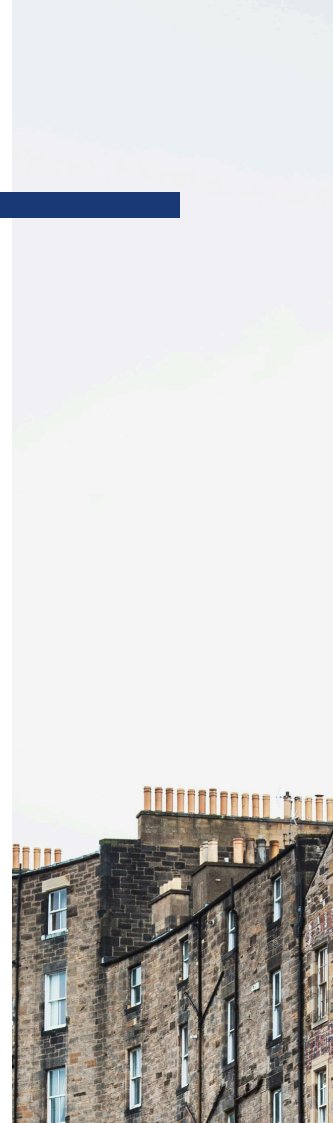
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- Bring often excluded groups into the design process of town and city centres to ensure their needs are met across the day and night. Planners should be innovative when it comes to connecting with hard-to-reach audiences by using more engaging approaches such as mapping using 3D or immersive technology, 'walkshops', and gamification like Minecraft.
- Establish a community contribution scheme to encourage volunteers, especially young people, to get involved in supporting their local town centre with activities like painting, graffiti cleaning, litter picking and even planning to develop pride in the shared ownership and stewardship of their town. This could be aligned to a loyalty scheme where volunteers are rewarded for their contribution.
- Through High Street Trusts, identify property in town centres that can be used for a range of health, wellbeing and vulnerability reduction uses. This should be achieved by working with a range of partners such as the NHS to deliver health services, the night time economy to deliver Safe Spaces or the community to deliver urban farming.
- Invest in on-demand bus services to create a more viable, efficient public transport network for local centres and rural towns to support physical connectivity for communities.

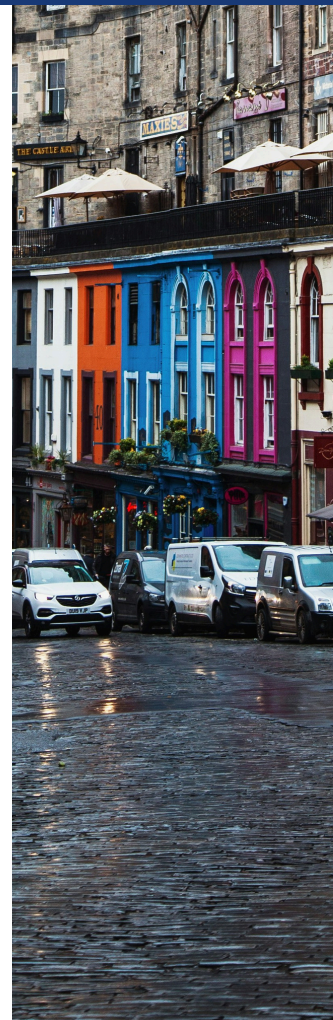
LIBERATING HIGH STREET ENTERPRISE AND INVESTMENT

A conducive environment is essential for businesses to flourish, without it high streets begin to lose their vitality. Businesses have long grappled with historic obstacles such as the outdated business rates system and through new challenges, like the cost of living crisis, creating consistent constraints on brick-and-mortar businesses. Through reform, partnership, and the embrace of new ideas and technologies, we can ensure that businesses have the appropriate conditions to grow, innovate and develop.



WE RECOMMEND:

- Scrap business rates. This is an outdated tax that is harming both the taxpayer (businesses) and the recipient (local authorities). It is time to start again.
- Introduce a new property owner tax based on a rateable value with a fixed multiplier of no more than 33p.
- Alongside this, introduce a new online sales tax to ensure the digital economy makes a fair contribution to public services and ends a scenario where the high street is subsidising online retailers.
- Review how the new streams of revenue should be collected and invested through local agencies to support successful town centres through local authorities, Business Improvement Districts and others.
- Establish Business Improvement Districts as the primary vehicle for engaging businesses locally on a range of issues from economic development to net zero.
- Embark on a joint venture between industry and government to maximise the opportunities afforded by AI to revolutionise understanding of town centre interventions through world leading demand forecasting.



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- Move responsibility for the night time economy from the Home Office to the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport to ensure the emphasis is on creating great destinations and social experiences rather than regulation and control.
- Government and local agencies to work together on delivering Night Time Enterprise Zones across the UK similar to those piloted in London with the provision of better services after dark including transport, retail and hospitality.
- High Street Trusts and other stakeholders to provide low cost business space for entrepreneurs to test ideas and bring new concepts to the marketplace. Retail markets, freight containers, pop-up shops and other formats could be supported to develop new micro-sized businesses and help nurture the development of tomorrow's retail leaders.
- The Government must support retail markets and other forms of retail models for micro-sized businesses to help nurture the development of tomorrow's retail leaders.

