



21st Century Towns

A report from Metro Dynamics to the York,
North Yorkshire & East Riding LEP

December 2019



Metro — Dynamics

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1 INTRODUCTION	7
2 THE TOWNS IN CONTEXT	13
3 TRENDS AFFECTING TOWNS	17
4 VISION: 21 ST CENTURY TOWNS	31
5 RECOMMENDATIONS	33
6 DELIVERING A TRANSFORMATION IN THE TOWNS	74
7 WHAT TO DO NEXT	77
APPENDIX A: THE RETAIL GROUP YNYER STUDY TOWNS ASSESSMENT	

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an ambitious but realistic package of recommendations for fifteen towns in the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership (YNYER LEP) area.

This report looks at opportunities and challenges facing towns over the long term (up to 2040) and considers how these towns can respond to major trends to achieve the economic transformation envisaged by the emerging Local Industrial Strategy.

The focus of this report is how to raise productivity in these towns. In order to do this it is our view that towns must not only address issues around technology, businesses and labour markets, but also look at placemaking, community and social cohesion, education, and health.

Towns are hugely significant to the YNYER LEP area. Taken together, the fifteen towns that are the focus of this study account for 180,000 people, or 15.5% of YNYER LEP's total population, making them an integral part of the LEP area.

As the largest LEP area, with a diverse mix of urban, rural and coastal places, YNYER LEP's towns help connect places and communities which would otherwise be isolated from one another. They drive the region's productivity growth, and they provide homes, jobs, services, retail and leisure amenities, cultural offers and a focal point for civic life for those who live, work and visit here.

Although they perform similar functions, YNYER LEP's towns are different from each other in many ways. Location, size, purpose and history all differ, as does economic performance. Some are doing very well; others are grappling with significant challenges.

One thing which unites them all, however, is the uncertainty of the futures they face. All towns will need to identify and respond to economic, technological, social and environmental trends which are beyond their control but will nevertheless fundamentally influence their futures. These major trends include:

- Digitalisation of the economy across all sectors, affecting the skills that businesses and residents need to be successful.
- New technologies that are affecting a range of sectors which offer the potential for productivity increases and improved living standards, including: modular housing construction, sustainable energy generation and storage technologies, technologies which support a circular economy approach, and innovation in transport.
- Changing consumer trends and preferences, impacting retail and local centres, as well as creating more demand for sustainable, local and authentic products and more experiential leisure activities.

- An ageing population, generating increasing pressure on health and social care services, as well as implications for the mix and type of housing needed and accessibility within town centres.
- Climate change, necessitating a greater focus on protecting and enhancing the natural environment, and creating an economic opportunity for places and businesses able to produce in a more sustainable way.

In the face of these trends, towns that strengthen their identities and focus on maximising upcoming opportunities while mitigating imminent challenges will benefit from productivity gains and renewal.

Building on the foundations of YNYER LEP's Stage 1a and Stage 1b reports into Future Towns and High Streets, this report presents an ambitious vision for what YNYER LEP's towns could be in the future, and what can be done in order to realise that vision. We call this vision the '21st century town'.

A 21st century town is one where the size, location, heritage, attractions, institutions, culture and community of the town are *strengths*. 21st century towns are places which have successfully adapted to, and play an important role in, the modern economy – creating opportunity for residents and businesses alike.

To achieve this requires a holistic programme of interventions to support towns, businesses and residents:

- Putting **digital first**, ensuring that residents and businesses have the digital skills they need to take advantage of new opportunities, and enabling change through provision of fast broadband infrastructure in their towns.
- Ensure that towns are **open for business**, and create the conditions needed to support business growth locally.
- Providing **high quality places and connections**, making the towns more attractive, relevant and memorable to potential residents and visitors, whilst making it easier to get to other places for business and leisure.
- Emphasising **identity and community**, maximising the benefit of towns' unique identities, heritage, qualities and attractions and unlocking the power of local communities to improve places.
- Promoting **sustainability and resilience**, making sure that towns and homes benefit from the sustainability revolution and are resilient in the face of climate change and other threats, including flooding.

This report presents a series of recommendations for initiatives which – taken together – would help to create strong and resilient 21st century towns.

In developing these recommendations we are mindful that across the area there are ongoing initiatives which look to do similar things to some of what we are recommending here. Some of these are referenced though doubtless there are others. In addition, we recognise that different towns are starting from different places and have different assets. Therefore, how these recommendations are implemented will be different in different places. Nonetheless, there are enough similarities between places that there is a common programme for all of the towns. The recommendations are listed below:



DIGITAL FIRST

Ensure that digital skills provision is strong throughout all the towns

Make the transition to gigabit level broadband and provide free public wi-fi

Public sector and anchor institutions to help create demand for digital skills and digital solutions



OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Create enterprise centres to accommodate small businesses and start-ups

Encourage Industry 4.0 in the manufacturing and logistics sectors

Support agricultural firms to benefit from new technologies

Encourage local retailers, manufacturers and craftspeople to embrace online retail

Increase the value of the visitor economy



HIGH QUALITY PLACES AND CONNECTION

Use the collective attraction of existing assets to create destination appeal

Design our towns for the future, with a mix of joined-up housing, employment space and town centre space

Make the most of major transport links

Improve local transport links within places

Upgrade and enhance social infrastructure to attract new residents



STRENGTHENING IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Work to build the community in places

Use place promotion to attract visitors and new residents



SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

Encourage companies to invest in sustainable technologies

Prepare towns to take advantage of clean growth economic opportunities

Work with planning authorities to make homes future-proof

Ensuring that these recommendations result in effective and durable change requires two things: local leadership and ownership; and behavioural and attitude change. The way in which these initiatives are delivered is as important as the nature of the initiatives themselves.

To achieve the vision of 21st century towns, it is important to begin now. We recommend that over the next year:

- **Each town develops a town futures team** - including members of the town council, any local BIDs / TCMs, local businesses and residents groups.
- Each town futures team **develops a local vision, informed by the LIS and this study**. The vision should have a clear mandate to look long-term and the purpose should be to improve the economy of the town.
- Local authorities should **undertake a town centre audit for each town using the checklist provided in Section 5 (High Quality Places and Connections)**. The aim is to find quick wins that can improve how town centres function – e.g. signage, basic street furniture, lighting, etc.
- **The LEP should prepare a digital skills strategy** that provides a clear way forward on this important agenda. It should make practical recommendations to enhance skills provision within towns.
- The LEP should work with Local authorities to **ensure that all towns have the broadband infrastructure they need**.
- The LEP should **support local town deals** as exemplars for what can be achieved and share best practice from these processes.
- Local authorities should **develop an active network to share best practice**. Towards the end of this period, the LEP and local authorities should work together to network the towns so that best practice is actively being shared between town futures teams.

Local ownership of the concepts set out in this report, coupled with a renewed optimism in the potential for change, and supported by strong networks between places to share experiences and best practice will all be crucial to achieve the transformation anticipated in YNYER LEP's Local Industrial Strategy.

1 Introduction

Metro Dynamics and project partners The Retail Group and Make the Link have been commissioned by the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Enterprise Partnership (YNYER LEP) to develop a series of recommendations which will enable the area's towns to play a vital role as drivers of economic growth and productivity into the future.

This work will guide YNYER LEP's future policy, including the content and direction of the Local Industrial Strategy. This work is also a resource for developing planning and regeneration policy within local authorities in the area – and to support the development of regeneration propositions by communities within the towns. Recommendations arising from this report will help YNYER LEP achieve the emerging priorities for its Local Industrial Strategy, which are to:

- **Invest in places, people and culture to drive productivity;**
- **Unlock constrained growth in productive sectors and realise productivity potential in low pay sectors; and**
- **Drive new productive growth by leading the transformation to a carbon neutral circular economy.**

Taken together, **these priorities amount to a transformational ambition** for the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEP area. This report will contribute to the achievement of this ambition by ensuring towns throughout the region are prepared to drive productivity growth in the future.

The recommendations in this report are geared towards ensuring the long-term vitality of the area's towns and the economic success of the people who live in them. When developing these recommendations, we have asked ourselves what these towns may be like – and more importantly what they may *want* to be like – one decade or more from now. Our answers to these questions include a mix of pragmatic initiatives which can be begun now, as well as larger, strategic recommendations which will take years to execute and with benefits that will only be accrued in the long term.

Successful towns drive productivity growth

The contribution towns can make to addressing the UK's productivity challenge is increasingly and rightly acknowledged. There are clear reasons why towns are now in the policy spotlight: stagnant national productivity with localised pockets of particular concern; spatial economic inequality; the decline of high streets and traditional retail; and concern about what this all means for culture and identity.

It is a good thing that towns are currently high on the national policy agenda as a component of improved productivity growth. But towns throughout the YNYER LEP area – let alone throughout the country – are very different from each other. Some are performing very

strongly. Others face challenges, including some areas that are experiencing pervasive low pay and deprivation. Recommendations for towns need to reflect these differences and work carefully to support each place.

Across all levels of government and throughout society there is growing recognition of the value of local approaches to solving the problems towns face. Likewise, there is growing recognition that to raise productivity within a place requires a holistic approach which addresses a broad range of social factors, with the aim of creating places that attract and retain productive workers and businesses, and ensuring that growth is genuinely inclusive and supports residents to achieve their potential. Recent policy initiatives, such as the Towns Fund, are geared towards enabling towns to achieve this through town centre regeneration, improved transport, better broadband connectivity, skills and culture.¹ The Government's indication that it will pursue greater devolution to local places is also relevant as it presents the opportunity for more local funding and greater local discretion to address strategic objectives.

21st Century Towns

As the importance of towns is recognised, so too is there recognition that they face uncertain futures. **The forms and functions of towns are transforming in response to dramatic and often unprecedented economic, technological, social and environmental trends.** These trends follow unpredictable paths and affect different places in different ways. Some towns stand to benefit from these trends; others, without intervention, face stagnation or decline.

Towns cannot control these trends, but they *can* control how they prepare for and react to them. To this end it is important to understand what the major trends are and how susceptible to them a town is likely to be. Once this is known it is possible for towns – with ambition and imagination - to harness opportunities and alleviate challenges which will arise.

Successfully addressing these challenges and opportunities will enable the creation of prosperous and thriving towns which are fit for the 21st century. Central to this project is establishing a vision for what a 21st century town looks like for the YNYER LEP area.

Put simply, **a 21st century town is one where its size, heritage, attractions, institutions, culture and community are strengths which reinforce the local economy and quality of life for residents.** 21st century towns are places which have successfully adapted to, and play an important role in, the modern economy – creating opportunity for residents and businesses alike. The recommendations set out in this report are designed to help YNYER LEP's towns build on their existing distinctive strengths in pursuit of becoming 21st century towns.

Project scope and approach

This report builds on the evidence gathered by YNYER LEP through the Stage 1a and Stage 1b projects. These projects, carried out under the Place foundation of productivity, aimed to

¹ *Towns Fund Prospectus*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. 2019

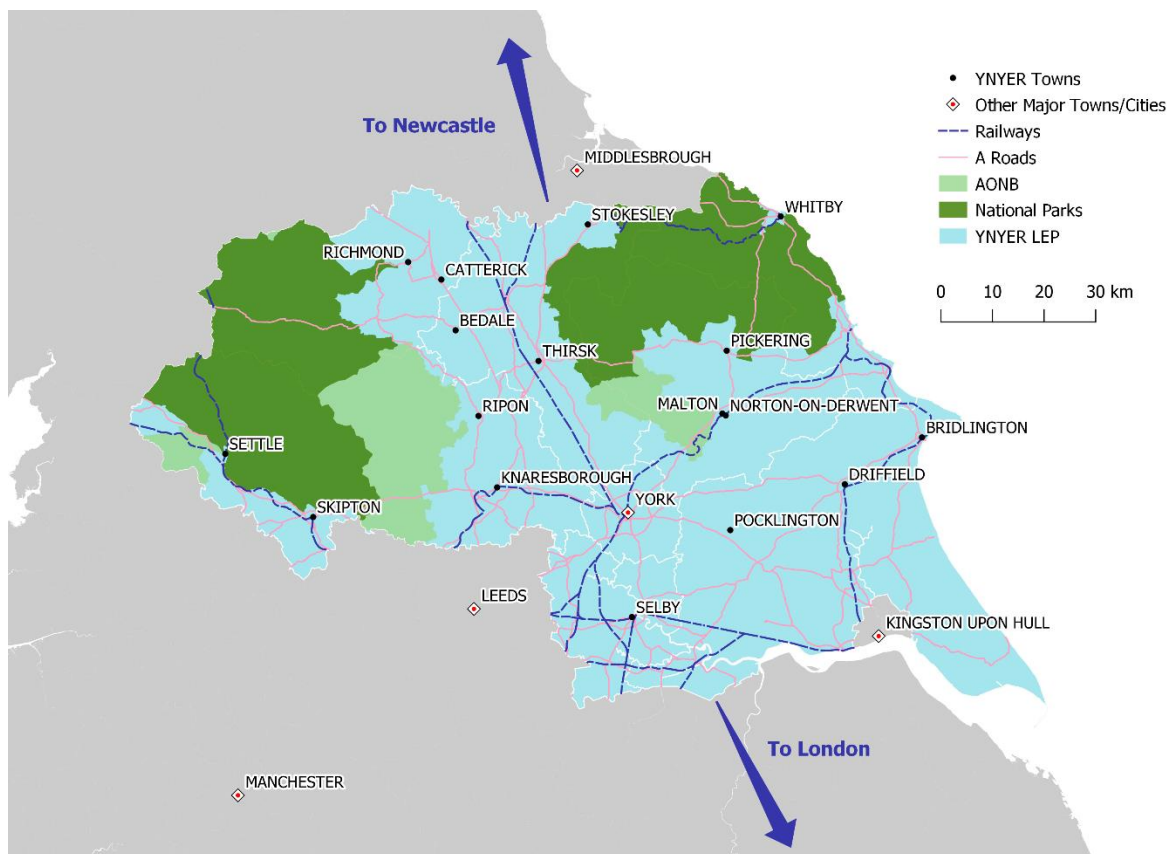
develop a deeper understanding of how the YNYER LEP’s towns function as places both now and in the future.

Stage 1a identified 42 towns throughout the YNYER LEP area which formed the baseline for the study. In Stage 1b this list of 42 towns was refined to 15 whose socio-economic and town-centre health characteristics were studied in more detail. These 15 towns (listed below) were selected based on their roles within their local economies and the opportunities for growth identified in Local Plans. These 15 towns are the focus of this report:

Bedale	Pickering	Settle
Bridlington	Pocklington	Skipton
Driffield	Richmond and Catterick	Stokesley
Knaresborough	Ripon	Thirsk
Malton and Norton	Selby	Whitby

The towns are illustrated on the map below.

Figure 1. YNYER LEP's 15 towns in scope



Whilst these 15 towns are the focus of the recommendations and analysis in this report, it is likely that many of the recommendations made in this report have applicability for other towns in the area.

Methodology

As outlined in the figure below, this report draws together information and analysis from different sources to produce a series of ambitious, actionable recommendations for YNYER's towns. There were four steps to our approach:

1. Understand the towns

- We reviewed the Stage 1a and Stage 1b reports provided to us by YNYER LEP to draw out the main points about the circumstances, similarities and differences of the 15 towns.
- The Retail Group visited eight towns to conduct 'town health checks'. The towns visited were Bedale, Drifffield, Malton, Richmond, Ripon, Selby, Stokesley and Whitby. Each town was assessed against a proforma which contained 18 metrics under the categories 'Health and Vitality', 'Multiple Reasons to Visit', 'Experience' and 'Facilities. Full details are included in Appendix A of this report.
- Metro Dynamics conducted phone interviews on key topics with 18 individuals selected by YNYER LEP. Topics discussed included Digital Connectivity, Coastal Communities, Mobility and Transport, Retail and Town Centres, Skills, Public Health, Communities and Culture, and the Local Industrial Strategy / Infrastructure / Place.
- Additional desktop research was carried out as required to fill in our understanding of the area and its towns.

2. Analyse trends

- Using a framework of Economic / Technological / Environmental / Social we carried out desktop research to develop a long list of trends which are likely to shape the future.
- Within the context of which trends are most likely to impact upon the productivity of YNYER's towns in the future, we narrowed this long list down to the 10 major trends which are explored in detail in section 3 of this report.

3. Develop vision of 21st Century Towns

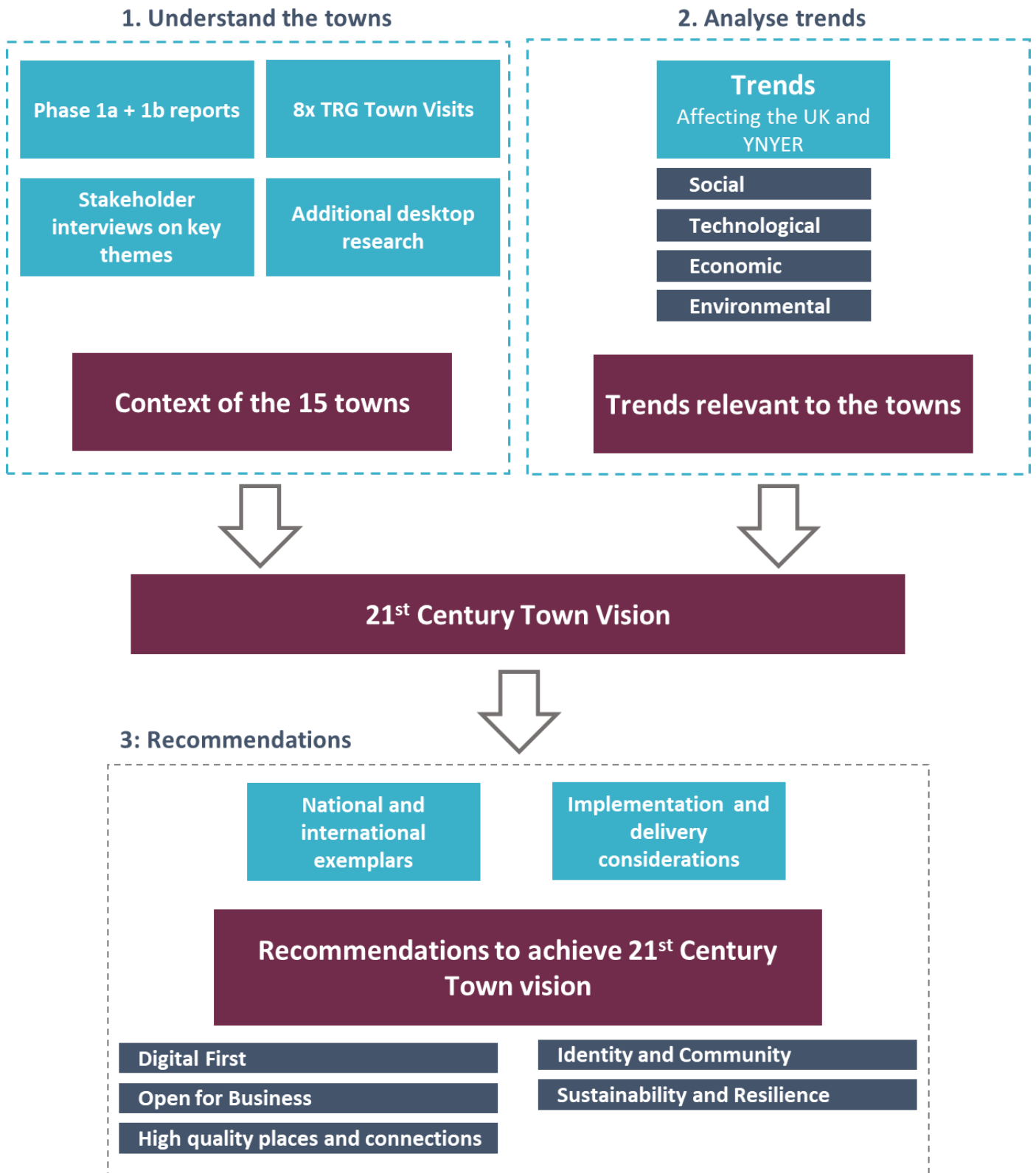
- Based on the project brief and in consultation with YNYER stakeholders we developed a vision of a '21st century town.' This vision provided a target to aim at when developing recommendations for the towns. Subject matter expertise was provided by Make The Link.

4. Provide recommendations and a plan of what to do next

- Based on our understanding of the towns, the trends which will affect them, and our vision of what a 21st century town should be, we produced a series of recommendations for towns to follow. These recommendations combine immediate actions and quick wins with longer-term strategic actions to pursue.
- We sourced exemplars from other towns – both within the UK and beyond – where initiatives similar to our recommendations had been successful.

- Finally, we considered how our recommendations can be implemented, focusing on the importance of local leadership and behavioural change in transforming YNYER’s towns. We also produced a plan of what steps should be taken next. This information is outlined in Sections 6 and 7 respectively.

A visual summary of our methodology is provided here:



The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- In Section 2 – **‘The Towns in Context’** – we outline the role played by YNYER LEP’s towns and provide an overview, based on YNYER LEP’s assessments, of their current circumstances, endowments and challenges. This baseline information helps to understand the starting points for towns when considering how they might respond to the challenges and opportunities facing them.
- In Section 3 – **‘Trends Affecting Towns’** – we outline the major trends which will impact the form and function of YNYER’s towns. These trends are framed in terms of their impact on productivity.
- In Section 4 – **‘Vision: 21st Century Towns’** – we lay out a vision of what a 21st century town means.
- In Section 5 – **‘Recommendations’** – we present a series of ambitious, tailored recommendations for how YNYER’s towns can respond to the global trends they face. This section draws upon exemplars of best practice from within the UK and beyond.
- In Section 6 – **‘Delivering a transformation in the towns’** – we discuss the ways and means by which YNYER LEP and its towns can implement the recommendations of this report. Gaining local buy-in and building momentum for change is of paramount importance, alongside effective governance arrangements and a clear strategy.
- Finally, in Section 7 – **‘What to do next’**– we provide some starting points from which YNYER LEP’s towns can begin to realise the vision of becoming 21st century towns.

2 The Towns in Context

Taken together, **the fifteen towns that are the focus of this study account for 180,000 people, or 15.5% of YNYER LEP's total population of 1.16 million.** These towns vary in population from 2,500 (Settle, in the Yorkshire Dales) to 37,000 residents (Bridlington, on the coast), and many of them are market towns and/or have significant tourist economies (including Settle, Thirsk and Pickering).

York, North Yorkshire and East Riding is the most geographically vast of any LEP in the country, and has a notable mix of urban, rural and coastal areas. The area's towns are similarly diverse in their geographic setting. Some towns in the area are close to city centres, like Leeds, York, Hull and the Teesside conurbation, and function as quasi-suburbs. Others – including coastal towns - are isolated from urban centres and provide service and leisure offerings to significant rural catchment areas. As well as the importance of the cities to the economies of the fifteen towns, other large towns such as Harrogate and Scarborough are also important influences.

The area has a rich heritage, strong cultural offer and areas of immense natural beauty, and many of the towns benefit from this.

The Phase 1b study generated a scorecard (Figure 3, below) that provides summary statistics of the Population, Housing, Economy, Town Centre Performance and Connectedness status of the fifteen chosen towns.² The summary scorecard provides a useful starting point which, when supplemented with local insight, helps us to understand the current condition of towns in YNYER LEP.

² Substantial extra information on the towns in scope is included in the Stage 1a and 1b reports but it is not our intention to reproduce that information here. Instead, this report uses those reports as baselines which guide the recommendations it includes.

Figure 2. Summary scorecard of representative towns' economic performance

Settlement	Local Authority	Population		Housing	Economy			Town Centre Performance	Connectedness		Total Score (/3)
		Total population (% change) 2011-2017	Working age population (% change) 2011-2017	Housing completions (per 1,000 population) 2012-2018	Business stock (% change) 2011-2018	Jobs (% change) 2011-2018	Vacancy rates (+ higher vacancy rate) 2019	Rail usage (% change) 2010/11-2017/18	Ultrafast connectivity (% availability) 2018		
Settle	Craven	+2.7%	-2.5%	23.2	+10.2%	+6.4%	+0.8%	-2.2%	1.82%	0.75	
Skipton		+2.9%	-1.6%	21.4	+10.2%	+14.9%	+1.2%	+29.8%	1.20%	1.38	
Bridlington	East Riding of Yorkshire	-0.3%	-6.7%	12.0	+5.7%	+11.7%	+1.1%	+13.4%	0.04%	0.88	
Driffield		-0.7%	-7.7%	23.8	+9.0%	-0.45%	+0.5%	+5.0%	11.60%	0.63	
Pocklington		+6.9%	+1.6%	43.5	+18.2%	+31.7%	-0.3%	-	4.36%	2.14	
Bedale	Hambleton	+9.9%	+8.3%	38.0	+19.7%	-2.5%	-0.8%	-	0.00%	1.86	
Stokesley		-1.4%	-5.5%	36.3	+16.6%	+21.7%	+8.2%	-	0.32%	1.00	
Thirsk		+3.6%	-0.4%	42.5	+8.1%	-2.4%	-2.0%	+24.4%	9.13%	1.25	
Knaresborough	Harrogate	+0.2%	-6.4%	6.9	+25.9%	+18.7%	+4.9%	+27.5%	77.02%	1.50	
Ripon		-2.3%	-8.6%	-	+4.9%	-8.9%	+2.3%	-	6.12%	0.33	
Richmond and Catterick	Richmondshire	-0.4%	-4.3%	50.0	+13.6%	+0.74%	+1.5%	-	7.91%	1.00	
Malton and Norton	Ryedale	+11.9%	+9.2%	52.8	+17.2%	+22.2%	-4.6%	+24.6%	3.30%	2.25	
Pickering		+6.3%	+0.8%	53.0	-1.7%	-4.7%	+0.9%	-	2.39%	1.29	
Selby	Selby	+7.6%	+2.9%	31.9	+37.8%	+23.3%	-1.1%	+35.2%	5.34%	2.75	
Whitby	Scarborough	-1.3%	-5.7%	-	+8.8%	+6.8%	+2.1%	+3.4%	4.31%	0.57	

The Future of Market Towns and High Streets [Study 1B: Town Centre Performance Analysis]. York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEP. Page 170.

Local insights into towns

Based on the Stage 1a and 1b reports, the information below briefly summarises the similarities and differences that exist across the towns in the scope of this report.

Ageing populations and demographic shifts

As with many similar places in the UK, **towns in YNYER have increasingly ageing populations**, which means that in the coming years a growing proportion of the population will be comprised of individuals over 65 years old. Currently, across the LEP area, one in four people are above the age of 65 with older demographics tending to cluster in more rural and coastal areas. Per 100 people of working age (16 – 64) in YNYER, there are 39 people over the age of 65. Nationally, there are only 29 people over the age of 65 per 100 working age people.

However, **different towns are experiencing different demographic trends**. There has been a sharp decline in the working age population in many of the towns in this study, though there are a couple of towns, Bedale and Malton & Norton, that have significantly bucked this trend, whilst the working age population is also rising in Pocklington and Selby. In general, decline in the working age population is correlated with wider population decline (and vice versa), but not always. Settle, Skipton and Thirsk are seeing rising populations despite working age population declines, suggesting that in some cases older people may be moving to these areas.

Population projections by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests that by 2041 up to 32% of the population could be over-65 (compared to 24% at a national level)³. An ageing population represents a significant potential burden on social supports and welfare systems.

New homes are being built

Many towns have seen large growth in housing since 2012. This explains some of the large increases in population noted above, but housing growth is also observable in places that have seen decline in the working age population and the population overall (e.g. Stokesley). Housing will play an important role in stabilising the populations of the towns, and allowing young people to live locally and move to the area.

Transport and digital connectivity – when available - builds resilience and capacity

Factors like connectivity, proximity to cities and other urban centres, proximity to the coast and dependence on the visitor economy are important features of a town's resilience and capacity. Transport connectivity is a particularly important structural factor, indicating an economy's long-term potential for success independent of more cyclical factors like employment rates and demographic profiles.

Many of the towns with rail links have experienced major increases in rail usage. This is particularly notable in places like Bridlington which have seen rail usage increase by double digits whilst the overall population has fallen. This emphasises the importance of these strategic links, and the role of commuting in the local economy.

Ultrafast broadband coverage is mostly poor in the towns. With the exception of Knaresborough which has an impressive 77% coverage, no town has coverage of more than 12%. This will be a significant brake on the expansion of service sector businesses and digital businesses, as well as making it harder to use digital technologies across the economy.

Employment growth is a mixed picture

Similar industries – primarily agriculture, construction, retail and visitor economy – make up substantial parts of many towns' economies. But there is also a great deal of variety. Employment has grown strongly in many towns, and is particularly notable in places like Stokesley that have seen population decline. Conversely, towns like Ripon and Pickering have seen a decline in employment. In Pickering, employment has declined even though the overall population has increased.

The numbers of businesses locally have grown strongly in nearly all of the towns since 2011. Self-employment is important locally, particularly in more remote places.

Coastal towns may face greater risks

Coastal towns in the LEP area (Whitby, Bridlington) have specific opportunities and challenges in terms of the visitor economy, environmental impacts, self-containment

³ ONS (2019) Population projections – local authority based by single year of age. Note: figures for YNYER LEP are calculated on the basis of York, North Yorkshire, and East Riding councils.

and industrial modernisation. Coastal towns may often be isolated from larger urban centres and the types of businesses, sectors and employment opportunities that mostly exist in large centres. In addition, coastal towns find their catchment areas and potential housing and economic development areas constrained by geography. Proximity to the shoreline also brings heightened flood risk and its associated impacts on businesses, homes, and the suitability of coastal land to development.

The relationship between cities and YNYER's towns

YNYER's towns do not exist in isolation. They have important relationships with cities and other major urban centres which are near them. YNYER's towns are linked to the economies of Leeds, York, Hull, Doncaster and the Teesside cities. In charting a course towards becoming 21st century towns it is important to understand how the relationship between cities and towns affects the form and function of towns.

Different towns have quite different levels and patterns of commuting. Some towns, such as Bedale, Knaresborough and Stokesley have relatively low percentages of residents who live and work in the area, suggesting large daily outflows of residents to jobs elsewhere, though equally in some places in-commuting to industrial parks is an important dynamic. While for most towns large urban centres and cities (such as Harrogate, York, Leeds, Hull) are the main outflow destination, no single city dominates commuter patterns for a particular town, suggesting that commuting patterns are more diverse than might initially be expected.

Pulling this all together, there are both similarities and differences between towns. Ageing populations, growing business numbers, growing housing and growing rail usage are common trends, as is poor broadband provision.

Employment growth is much more mixed, with some areas seeing strong growth and others declining employment. Commuter flows and relationships with nearby urban centres vary. The impact of peripherality must be considered when thinking about coastal towns and others in very isolated places.

All of these factors will be important to bear in mind when implementing the recommendations later in this report.

In the next section, we have outlined some of the most pressing upcoming trends that are likely to affect towns in YNYER, the UK and beyond.

3 Trends Affecting Towns

In our work with towns, cities and regions throughout the UK, Metro Dynamics regularly identifies the trends affecting places today. Often, it is difficult to step back from a current or shorter-term lens to consider the ways that our places, our country and the world are going to change in the coming decades. We have taken this opportunity to engage in thought-provoking conversation about the shape of trends to come, and to consider specifically how they will affect towns and local governance. The ten trends are summarised below.

Economic	Technological	Environmental	Social
Digitalisation	Local Energy Generation	Climate Change	Ageing Populations
Redefining Retail	Digital Connection		Rising Inequality
	Transport Innovation		Social Inclusion
	Housing Innovation		

Many trends are uncertain – the nature of innovation is such that we often don’t get advance notice of paradigm shifts. When the World Wide Web was made public in 1991, even experts of the time struggled to conceptualise and articulate the breadth of possibility to come. On the other hand, while the coming decades will surely be marked by massive shifts and shocks, it is not entirely impossible to predict, at the very least, the directions that these changes will take.

In this section, we outline the major trends that are likely to impact the form and function of towns in the UK, and in YNYER LEP specifically. The focus of each of these trends is fundamentally economic in nature, and they have been framed to reflect implications for productivity.

It would be a mistake to consider any of these trends in isolation. Many of these trends are interrelated, likely to exert simultaneous pressures on towns. Likewise, many of the recommendations that we suggest will be self-reinforcing, interacting with and complementing one another, often responding to multiple trends and pressures at once.

Towns have the potential to address the challenges of our time and to act as catalysts for future economic growth. There is growing recognition in governance and society that local approaches are invaluable to supporting growth. Local, place-based approaches are especially vital—though towns are not immune from national and global trends, they do experience their impacts in different ways depending on local features and the quality of local assets and institutions. What follows is a collection of the trends that will impact the form

and function of towns in YNYER LEP, framed in terms of productivity impacts, which guide the development of our recommendations for 21st Century Towns.

Economic

Digitalisation

Digital technologies have transformed most aspects of our lives, including our economies. The instantaneous communication, automation of complex processes and sharing of information made possible by new computing technologies and the internet have impacted business models in all sectors, and businesses must adapt to remain competitive.

The impact is felt within a growing digital sector, and as digital technologies are applied across the economy. The tech industry is expanding 2.6 times faster than the rest of the UK economy⁴.

Digital technologies will affect every sector and most businesses, creating new types of jobs just as they make existing ones obsolete. Although the impact of this ‘fourth industrial revolution’ is often measured in terms of jobs lost to automation, it also presents an opportunity to businesses that can leverage new economic conditions, developing new products and services based on information management, automation and virtual reality. Using a broad definition of digital employment (including digital roles in non-digital sectors), there are over 2.1 million people working in UK digital tech in 2018, making the tech economy a bigger employer than sectors like Hospitality (1.3m), Construction (1.9m) and Financial Services (1.2m)⁵.

This huge expansion in the digital sector is driving a large increase in demand for workers with a range of digital skills – from basic IT skills to highly specialised skills in coding and programming. Almost 90% of new jobs require digital skills to some degree, with 72% of employers stating that they are unwilling to interview candidates who do not have basic IT skills⁶. Two-thirds of strongly digital businesses report that they have struggled to fill at least one vacancy when trying to recruit analysts over a 12-month period, and 93% of tech companies find that the digital skills gap affects their commercial operations⁷.

Government research has found that firms with the most highly developed IT infrastructure are the most competitive, but that there is a shortage of digital skills in the UK labour market.⁸ The rapid pace of digitalisation makes it increasingly difficult to adapt, and both firms and

⁴ Technation (2019) A Bright Tech Future

⁵ Technation (2019) A Bright Tech Future

⁶ House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (2017) Digital Skills Crisis

⁷ Ibid

⁸ *Digital Skills for the UK Economy: A Report By ECORYS UK, 2016;*

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/492889/DCMSDigitalSkillsReportJan2016.pdf

individuals require support and skills training if they are to truly participate in the digital economy.

Conversely the opportunity for workers that possess these skills is significant. Within the digital sector itself, average salaries across the UK are estimated at approximately £50,000⁹, compared to a national average annual salary (across all sectors) of £37,400 and a YNYER LEP area average salary of £32,700¹⁰.

The diffusion of digital technologies and processes through the economy is unequal. Many small towns and rural communities lack the connectivity and internet speeds they need to fully enter the digital economy, and individuals lack the digital literacy needed to adapt their business models or engage in online retail.

Industries and businesses that effectively leverage digitalisation stand to access significant benefits. For instance, the ability to collect and process increasingly complex data sets can help businesses become better informed about their own internal practices, market trends and economic forces as well as consumer behaviours and preferences. Big data can facilitate competitive advantage, information security, improved knowledge diffusion and other as yet unrealised benefits.¹¹

Just as they are transforming business practices, digital technologies are changing the way we work. Fast and reliable internet connections mean that people can work from anywhere, which has given rise to the increasing popularity of flexible and remote working. 89% of employees from British businesses considered flexible working to be an important motivator to productivity. In 2017, 43% of workers were able to work flexibly, compared to 30% in 2014.¹² Changing behaviours increase demand for flexible working space and coworking spaces where freelancers can hire desks or offices on a short-term basis. In 2018, demand for flexible office space across major cities increased by 20%, and currently the share of office space in European centres made up of flexible units is 10%.¹³

Practical Implications: Digital technologies are changing the way the economy works, creating opportunities for businesses to increase productivity, and driving huge demand for a whole range of digital skills. Digital skills attract a wage premium for employees. Crucially for towns, increased digital connectivity is enabling more remote working, such that geographically isolated towns with good digital infrastructure can potentially attract new skilled workers.

Relocating to attractive and affordable places is becoming increasingly feasible for skilled workers in cities, and towns can attract new residents by advertising local quality of life

⁹ House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (2017) Digital Skills Crisis – figure is for 2016

¹⁰ ONS (2019) Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings. Note: figures for UK and YNYER LEP are mean annual salaries for full time workers for 2019.

¹¹ <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320625220>

¹² *Flexible working: here's what employees want*, Financial Times, 2018.

¹³ *Flexible Office Space*, Savills, 2019.

and services. Towns that encourage innovative business practices might benefit from agglomeration as well, as new residents seek to work in productive, digitally capable firms. At the same time, other firms might co-locate in productive towns in order to benefit from knowledge spillovers.

Redefining Retail and the Experience Economy

The internet, digital technologies, home entertainment, social media and other modern forces have changed the way that consumers interact with retail and their high streets or town centres. **Advances in information and communication technologies, financial services and consumer tastes have changed the face of physical retail.** Consumers today are increasingly shopping online, ordering goods from Amazon and other dedicated online retailers – 19% of retail sales are made online today.¹⁴

Town residents increasingly view town centres and high streets as destinations for recreation and leisure, as opposed to purely retail. Some of the most successful town centre businesses are those that sell experiences, food or drink rather than physical goods. Few physical retailers can compete with online providers on price or range of choice, but they can differentiate based on providing unique consumer experiences, excellent service and specialist or artisan products. That said, the diverse nature of ‘retail’ offers are an experience in themselves, the ability to provide ‘different’ retail is considered important, particularly independent operators and markets, events and artisan products.

Recent research shows that half of consumers would rather pay for a good experience than for material possessions.¹⁵ Arts, heritage and entertainment venues bring vibrancy and a unique character to town centres, drawing visitors from beyond town boundaries while also encouraging residents to engage with one another as a community. Younger generations have also been influenced by social media to place increasing value on experiences.

Together, online shopping and the draws of an ‘experience economy’ pose a significant risk to the traditional British High Street. High Streets are home to more than 100,000 local business owners, driving private sector employment as well as local entrepreneurship. High Streets are vital centres of community and real-world interactions, and contribute to the overall attractiveness of living in certain places.

High streets with high proportions of retailers tend to struggle as demand in the sector shrinks, creating challenges such as vacant units. Analysis by the Centre for Cities demonstrates that **the most successful high streets tend to be in places with high numbers of professional workers and high paying jobs** – people who shop, drink and eat

¹⁴ *Retail Sales Index, Great Britain*, Office for National Statistics, October 2019.

¹⁵ <https://www.retail-insight-network.com/news/consumers-prefer-experiences-material-items-study-finds/>

locally outside of working hours. Some of the hardest hit town centres, by contrast, are those without high concentrations of such workers.¹⁶ The importance of workforce consumers, and visitors or even students, is an accepted factor to the success of many different locations. Although the visitor economy will not hold all the answers to the problems facing high streets, attracting more visitors, more often, into town centres and onto high streets to spend more money can help boost retail and alleviate decline.

Local retailers can perhaps leverage digitalisation to their advantage by establishing an online presence and selling products to a greater pool of consumers. Facilitating the resilience and prosperity of high streets will require creative and adaptive approaches that respond to local conditions.

Practical Implications: Navigating the experience-driven economy requires creative approaches by towns seeking to maintain or revive activity in their centres. This includes supporting the switch from retail-driven to experience-driven offers, consolidating retail within centres to strengthen the offer, attracting visitors into town centres, and promoting new and complimentary uses including residential and flexible office space.

Towns that adapt to changing tastes and new consumer trends will realise significant benefits. Successful high streets can improve the attractiveness of a place, drawing in visitors as well as new residents. Thriving centres are also conducive to innovation and entrepreneurship, drawing in new businesses and firms. Places that have well-established uses tend to have strong identities that enable successful, well-recognised offers. Towns that provide positive and successful centres can also better serve their catchment areas, which is particularly important in towns that serve rural areas or towns with high proportions of remote workers.

Technological

Local Energy Generation, Storage and Consumption

Advances in energy technology and the declining price of renewable energy production have made the production of energy a realistic prospect for small communities. Over the last ten years, renewable energy sources have grown from supplying just 2% of the UK's power to nearly 20% of all electricity produced¹⁷.

The cost of producing renewable energy has fallen consistently, to the point that solar and wind power are now the most affordable power source in many locations and markets.¹⁸ These cost decreases are set to continue as the technology for producing and storing

¹⁶ <https://www.centreforcities.org/publication/city-centres-past-present-and-future/>

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/jun/21/zero-carbon-energy-overtakes-fossil-fuels-as-the-uks-largest-electricity-source>

¹⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikescott/2018/11/21/want-the-cheapest-electricity-build-solar-and-wind-farms-not-coal-power-plants/#7c8cfa4f66ce>

renewable energy decreases further, which will in turn put more opportunities into the hands of local communities to produce energy locally.¹⁹

Renewable energy, since it relies on smaller-scale and decentralised generation, requires distributed networks to be most effective. Local authorities, community groups or public private partnerships can set up new schemes, and use this to produce energy for the local community. Local renewable energy production might be one method through which to make feasible the infrastructure required for smart towns. Facilitating the development of smart towns will, in turn, deliver further energy and carbon savings.

More places across the UK are now establishing local energy schemes. In Carmarthen, Wales, local community group YnNi Teg, meaning ‘fair energy’, has built a 900kW wind turbine which generates enough energy to power 650 homes. Set up as a community benefit society, members of the public can buy shares in the project and receive interest, while surplus income is spent in the local community. An added benefit of such a scheme is community interaction, and through it, cohesion.

Local energy generation schemes might also be essential to integrate sustainability into business models. Businesses that effectively use new forms of energy production will benefit from cost savings, decreased dependence on centralised energy infrastructure and even positive media coverage as consumers are becoming increasingly mindful of the environmental impacts of their spending decisions. **Participating in sustainable innovation can benefit businesses in the short and long term.** This is particularly true as renewable energy will only grow increasingly affordable, just as carbon fuel sources will become increasingly scarce and costly.

Practical Implications: Local and inexpensive means of generating and storing energy has the potential to impact towns a great deal. Rural and geographically isolated towns will benefit from meaningful cost savings and decreased dependence on central hubs and infrastructure. Towns will also be able to attract innovative businesses and a skilled labour force if they are able to leverage the marketable impacts of energy independence. Local businesses likewise stand to gain from independence and cost savings if they participate in local energy generation.

New Means of Digital Connection

The internet has made communication instantaneous and the sharing of content, resources or data quick, cheap and easy. This presents a significant opportunity for places but also a challenge. Businesses and communities will often require support to use the internet in a productive way which suits their needs.²⁰ Research by McKinsey shows that less than 30 percent of firms undertaking the digital transformation of their business models

¹⁹ <https://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/blog/wind-power-%E2%80%93-now-cheaper-gas>

²⁰ *Unlocking success in digital transformations*, McKinsey, 2018; *OpenCommunity Discovery The case for a community-based services data standard*, Snook, 2019.

succeed. But the capacity to leverage appropriate digital infrastructure is vital to remaining competitive and innovative in an increasingly global and digital marketplace.

In order to facilitate digital innovations, places will need to prepare by implementing cutting-edge broadband, fibre-optic or 5G facilities. Future innovations like internet of things, big data processing and artificial intelligence will require massive processing power as well as immense speed. For example, before 2012, the processing power required to run complex AI systems would double every two years, but since then, the rate has increased to every 3.4 months, dramatically increasing the costs of competition dramatically.²¹ The infrastructure and skills requirements for participating in the global economy will only continue to increase. This comes at a cost: in an analysis of the costs of infrastructure upgrades, McKinsey found that network-related capital expenditures would have to increase 60 percent from 2020 through 2025, doubling the total cost of ownership.²²

Industries and places that fail to prepare for the technologies of the future will likely be left behind, suffering from skills shortages and isolation from global economic structures. Recently, the urbanisation trend has accelerated across the world, and the global urban population has grown rapidly from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018.²³ Rural populations lose their tax base when skilled people leave, forcing them to cut spending, and businesses suffer from declining footfall.²⁴ Places at the frontier of digital innovation and connectivity will become increasingly attractive to the productive employers of the future, and to an increasingly mobile labour force, and for businesses to thrive in remote areas they need infrastructure that allows them to compete.²⁵

Even small and remote places which are able to appeal to such workers have much to gain. Through an incentive scheme called the Remote Workers Grant, the US state Vermont has tried to attract highly skilled tech workers to the largely rural state. Vermont reimburses employees up to \$10,000 for relocation costs, equipment and expenses²⁶ The speed of innovation in the digital world will make it difficult for places to remain on top of current offerings, but will also entail meaningful benefits for the places, industries and people that are able to leverage offerings to their advantage.

Practical Implications: Towns that effectively implement infrastructure and promote the skills required to support technological innovations will reap significant social and economic benefits. Towns that have high levels of digital connectivity have the potential to attract innovative and productive firms, and will likely benefit from real time implementation of cutting-edge technologies like internet of things and artificial intelligence. Some businesses - particularly in the services sectors - are also more mobile than individuals, so towns with a highly skilled working age population are more likely to attract such productive companies. Digital connectivity and advanced technologies will, in

²¹ *AI and Compute*, Open AI, 2019.

²² *The road to 5G: The inevitable growth of infrastructure cost*, McKinsey, 2018.

²³ *2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects*, UN, 2018.

²⁴ *Rural States Try to Stop Population Exodus*, Governing, 2015.

²⁵ *The challenges and necessity of rural innovation*, Interreg Europe, 2019.

²⁶ *How Smaller Cities Are Trying to Plug America's Brain Drain*, Wired, 2019.

turn, improve quality of life for existing residents by improving public service provision and leisure offerings while also attracting more skilled workers to supplement their working age population.

Transport Innovation

The coming decades will bring significant changes to how transport connects people within their towns and beyond. Trains will become increasingly efficient and will decouple from carbon-fuel intensive engineering. **All modes of travel will become faster, timelier and, thanks to rigorous data and analytics, better equipped to meet local demand.**

Transport systems overall will become more efficient and will offer expanded services. Buses will become more fuel efficient while the use of data will allow improved tailoring of routes. In small or isolated communities, where public transport has historically proven unviable due to costs, such efficiency services could create space for new offerings and solutions. These improvements will contribute to and benefit from the development of smart towns capacities.

At the same time, mobile connectivity and the gig economy will together enable improved on-demand transport offerings. Improved data collection and marketing will make it feasible and profitable for them to expand offerings of such on-demand services in rural places. Autonomous vehicles, enabled by technology that is becoming increasingly available to both the consumer-facing market and the business market, may also improve the viability of such tailored and independent solutions in geographically isolated places. Improved transport connectivity and technologies will be vital to industries that rely on delivering products and services.

Concerns about carbon-based fuel consumption, environmental impacts and public health will also continue to lead individuals to cycling and walking more. Improved cycle routes as well as bike-sharing programmes will facilitate this shift in preferences. As things stand, however, YNYER's towns have some way to go towards providing the kind of walking and cycling facilities that will deliver a step change in transport in the towns.

Practical Implications: Towns will benefit from the introduction of new transport technologies and the application of improved digital solutions in the transport industry. Places where public transport had previously been a cost-inefficient solution will be benefited by data-driven route design as well as improvements to fuel efficiency and even autonomous vehicles. Individuals living in towns will benefit from improved service provision, as on-demand solutions might be better able to cater to previously isolated locations. Towns' agricultural and manufacturing products will be transported in increasingly carbon- and time-efficient ways, improving cost savings and sustainability. Public health concerns and changing tastes will result in individuals cycling and walking

more, increasing demand for dedicated, safe cycle routes in towns. Towns able to cater to these new offerings and demands will be able to attract new businesses and residents while serving existing industries and locals responsibly and efficiently.

Housing innovation

The UK faces an acute housing shortage. Researchers estimate that 340,000 new homes must be built every year from now to 2031 to cope with the shortfall.²⁷ Not only is there a shortfall in the total stock of houses but there are acute shortages in the types of homes that will meet the needs of the UK's ageing demographic.²⁸

The scale of this challenge is inspiring innovation in house building. Many developers are exploring modular and prefabricated homes as a solution to the UK's housing needs. By manufacturing pre-designed components in factories, homes could be assembled quickly and inexpensively, allowing homes to be built in a fraction of the usual time and for a lower cost.²⁹

Modern and future construction projects require new skills: the Construction Industry Training Board projects that 68,500 construction jobs will be created from 2019-2023, and that the most high-demand positions in the sector will be in professional, management and technical roles. At present, the workforce is ageing and there are pressures to attract skilled workers.³⁰ In the construction industry, the total number of workers over 60 years old has increased more than any other age group.³¹

Between changing production techniques, skill development requirements and an ageing workforce, the construction industry is facing an impending capacity crunch. This shortage of labour might be exacerbated if Brexit impedes construction labourers from the EU from working in the UK.

Market towns and rural areas are attempting to attract remote workers, who are less bound to specific places because of their more flexible jobs. Success relies on those towns and places offering attractive, appealing and affordable housing.³² Brexit, and the uncertainty surrounding it, has checked inflation of house prices in many urban centres, and increased the attractiveness of the housing market elsewhere.³³ Small towns have much to offer in

²⁷<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/housing-homeless-crisis-homes-a8356646.html>

²⁸ *Housing our Ageing Population*, Local Government Association, 2017.

²⁹ <https://blog.capterra.com/the-pros-cons-and-cost-of-modular-homes/>

³⁰ *Shortage occupations in construction: A cross-industry research report*, CIOB, 2019.

³¹ [https://www.ciob.org/sites/default/files/CIOB%20research%20-%20The%20Impact%20of%20the%20Ageing%20Population%20on%20the%20Construction%20Indus](https://www.ciob.org/sites/default/files/CIOB%20research%20-%20The%20Impact%20of%20the%20Ageing%20Population%20on%20the%20Construction%20Industry%200.pdf)
[try 0.pdf](https://www.ciob.org/sites/default/files/CIOB%20research%20-%20The%20Impact%20of%20the%20Ageing%20Population%20on%20the%20Construction%20Indus)

³² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattballantine/2019/02/21/working-remotely-to-sustain-rural-communities/#2de40652477f>

³³ *UK Housing Market Update*, Savills, 2019.

terms of quality of life and can appeal, in particular, to young families looking to move out of cities. In capitalising on these opportunities, however, **towns need to ensure new housing developments connect fluently with the rest of the town, especially the town centre.**

Innovation in the housing sector will also need to account for the burdens of climate change on housing structures. Increased flooding, extreme weather events and extreme hot and cold periods will all create increased stress for buildings as well as people who rely on climate control mechanisms. Extreme weather events will be particularly harmful to the health of at-risk groups, especially including children and the elderly. **Mitigating the impact of climate change on housing will require housing retrofits for improved insulation and energy generation or storage as well as future-facing housing design and construction.** It will be also important to consider minimising carbon impacts in construction processes, for instance by implementing modular design and off-site production to facilitate efficiencies.

Practical Implications: Changes to the housing industry and market – including new technologies, offsite production and assembly, retrofitting to adapt to climate events and limitations on carbon-intensive fuel consumption – will be felt quite intensely in towns. Residential and commuter towns will need to proactively build houses that suit homeowners’ tastes and requirements. Demands of the housing market will increasingly favour proximity to thriving town centres. Towns will have to offer support services, like digital and transport connectivity, to make remote work feasible. Places that effectively leverage innovations in the housing sector will benefit from attracting new residents and meeting existing residents’ needs.

Environmental

Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events

Anthropogenic climate change will likely affect all levels of society in every country, through increased extreme weather events, limitations on carbon consumption and other far-reaching impacts. There is only so much that can now be done to mitigate the extent of damage done to the environment, meaning that places will soon need to adapt to the constraints on resources, productivity and choice caused by environmental degradation.

Already, incidences of extended heat and cold waves are rising, with immediate implications for productivity in agriculture, transport and more.³⁴ And as extreme weather events become more common, it will also become more difficult to protect homes and shelters due to the climbing costs and increasing scarcity of carbon-based fuel sources.³⁵ Heavier rainfall plus sea level rise will increase flood risk in the UK as the climate warms – a problem of particular relevance to some of YNYER’s towns.³⁶

³⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/04/how-will-climate-change-affect-productivity/>

³⁵ <https://www.passivhaustrust.org.uk/what-is-passivhaus.php#Why%20Passivhaus>

³⁶ <https://www.carbonbrief.org/how-much-flooding-is-in-the-uks-future-a-look-at-the-ipcc-report>

Agricultural practices both contribute to and are affected by climate change – growing global demand and competition for resources will have fundamental implications for food production systems, which will need to be seen in a context that links agriculture, energy and food security.³⁷ Places with large amounts of uninhabited land will also have significant roles in carbon sequestration, reforestation and flood protection. Reforestation in particular could mean the provision of new jobs and potentially profitably local opportunities.³⁸

In order to succeed within a world affected by anthropogenic climate change, places will have to invest in housing retrofits, flooding and emergency preparedness, public building protection and more. The industries of the future will adapt to changing resource availability and consumer demands, so education programmes must provide the future workforce with necessary skills. People and places will need to become increasingly mindful of the ways that materials are used, as well as the ways in which waste is disposed of or recycled. Carbon offsetting programmes, as with tree planting, will be insufficient but important pieces of the future economy.

Industries and individuals will need to abandon traditional, linear models of consumption in favour of a circular model. A circular economy is one that aims at eliminating or minimising waste via the continual use of resources – extracting the maximum value and productivity from materials at every stage.

Forces like climate change, population growth and industrial over-development put places' natural assets at risk of redevelopment, abuse and erosion or disrepair. Recently, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of places' unique natural attributes and offers. Such uniqueness contributes to towns' local identity and vibrancy, as well as their overall reputation and attractiveness to visitors and residents.

Investment in and maintenance of natural assets can help places to differentiate themselves and stand out as thriving centres and destinations. The benefits of nature and wildlife extend to economics and wellbeing, science and education, culture, recreation, environmental quality and beyond.³⁹ National park maintenance, for instance, is likely to be impacted by increasing demands upon preservation and conservation – investments that might prove vital in places that depend on national park-driven tourism.

Practical Implications: Towns that effectively manage the burden of climate change will benefit not only from greater sustainability, but also from attractiveness to residents and visitors. Keeping places affordable and accessible while mitigating negative impacts will also be fundamental in continuing to serve ageing or disadvantaged populations. In summary, aside from concerns about place stewardship and sustainability, climate change

³⁷ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/signals/signals-2015/articles/agriculture-and-climate-change>

³⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/16/reforesting-the-uk-trees-are-the-ultimate-long-term-project>

³⁹ <http://www.environmentlaw.org.uk/rte.asp?id=200>

will fundamentally affect places' productivity and capacity to succeed. Changes to how we grow, produce and move food will be fundamental to protecting natural assets, especially in the face of climate change. Failure to protect natural assets, on the other hand, can lead to permanent damage to natural features, further environmental degradation and non-accessibility for future generations. Towns that cater to people's desire for natural beauty and experiences while maintaining their authenticity and character will benefit from increased attractiveness, employment opportunities and generally positive place marketing.

Social

Ageing Population

Advances in healthcare and overall prosperity, especially in Western countries, mean that people are living longer. Combined with declining birth levels, **populations are becoming increasingly skewed towards older age groups**. By 2042, the ONS projects that more than 24% of people living in the UK will be aged 65 or over.⁴⁰

This balance poses a challenge to our economies. People of working age pay the bulk of taxes that support public spending, including state pensions (the largest single component of the welfare budget). **As older people have a greater need for public services, particularly healthcare, providers and institutions will need to adapt to cope.**

Local governments will need to address the needs of older individuals, including housing, employment, health care and social protection. Anticipating this demographic shift will allow local actors to proactively enact policies to adapt to an ageing population.

Innovations in service and care will be necessary to ensure high quality of life for ageing populations. Housing solutions must be tailored to the accessibility needs of older residents – including proximity to towns' service centres, adequate heating and cooling solutions and physical design which promotes accessibility. Leisure offerings must be provided to prevent feelings of isolation and loneliness, and to foster community cohesion. Employers will need to continue investing in lifelong learning strategies to support older individuals to stay in work. The best way to prevent an excessive burden on welfare systems is to ensure adequate provision of the tools and infrastructure for healthy, independent living.

While catering to the needs of their older residents, towns must also address the impending labour force shortages that will be the result of declining or stagnating working age

⁴⁰

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/howwouldyousupportourageingpopulation/2019-06-24>

populations. This means attracting and engaging a working age population, as well as providing affordable housing options for that population.

Practical Implications: Towns that are unable to manage the effects of an ageing population will be quickly impacted by a shrinking productive labour pool as well as vast demands upon social care, healthcare and welfare benefits systems. Towns will need to ensure that they can provide adequate infrastructure and facilities to meet the demands of ageing populations. But towns will also need to proactively address shrinking workforces by attracting working age residents.

Rising Actual and Perceptions of Inequality

Inequality in the UK is high and rising. The OECD ranks the UK among the most unequal nations in Europe,⁴¹ and the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that levels of income inequality are likely to increase over the coming years, should policy trends continue in their current direction.⁴² This leaves many people to feel as though they are not sharing in the country's wealth or prosperity.

While some degree of inequality might be inevitable in a market-based system, consequences of extreme divisions can include diminished quality of life, polarisation of politics, the rise of populism and generally low ambition or aspiration. **Societal divisions can destabilise growth and create conditions for economic slowdown at all levels.**

More concerning are the rising levels of inequality across the country. 4 million people in the UK are trapped in deep poverty, meaning their income is at least 50% below the official poverty line.⁴³ Policies to help reduce inequality include capital and social investment in human or physical assets for the most disadvantaged; assurances that markets work fairly for everyone; protections for the middle class; and investments in skills and training.

Practical Implications: Towns feel the effects of interpersonal inequality quite acutely, with neighbours experiencing disparate levels of deprivation and potential from one another. More inclusive economic growth has the potential to distribute the dividends of economic growth more evenly, extending to towns that have often been left on the periphery of the global economy and to disadvantaged groups. Considering how to make this happen is important to towns to ensure that all share in the benefits of productivity increases.

Social Inclusion and Openness

In the last few decades, the British public has become more liberal on social issues. Society today is increasingly marked by favour for equality of opportunity, gender empowerment

⁴¹ <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/cope-divide-europe-2017-background-report.pdf>

⁴² <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R136.pdf>

⁴³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jul/29/uk-deep-poverty-study-austerity>

and acceptance of different worldviews, although this is not universal. **Increasing openness to social change could reshape political and economic landscapes at all levels.**

Individuals' attitudes towards the environment are becoming notably more liberal, demonstrated by the growing popularity of ecologically minded activities like recycling, buying organic and fair-trade goods, maintaining plant-based diets and taking part in the natural world. Increasing awareness of climate change and of humans' role in nature is resulting in growing support for environmentally friendly companies and practices, as well as a range of ideas around consumer responses to climate change and environmental stewardship.

Practical Implications: Towns that are able to champion local produce which caters to people's evolving tastes will become vibrant communities with positive reputations and place branding, and gain the ability to attract visitors and residents. At the same time, as consumers become increasingly savvy, they will monitor their own spending to support inclusive and sustainable practices. Thus, public service providers and private firms alike will be influenced to provide increasingly ethical and sustainable goods and services to meet the demands of a well-informed market.

4 Vision: 21st Century Towns

There is a tremendous opportunity to build on the strengths of these 15 towns to create places that are robust and well-suited to the 21st Century. We can see that the towns in this study have a number of advantages (albeit differing in different places):

- Attractive places with a strong identity
- Strength of community
- Embedded local companies and industries
- Important links to the major cities of Leeds, York, Hull, Doncaster and the Teesside cities.

Furthermore, these strengths include existing and highly visible heritage and social assets. In many instances the towns also have underutilised or even emerging assets to nurture, nourish and build upon.

We can also see that **the fundamentals of the economy are shifting** in important ways. Whereas for much of the latter 20th Century, scale – often in large towns and cities – was favoured by larger firms, the importance of this to the economy is waning. **The digital service economy is growing and is increasingly decentralised**, with employees able to work remotely and able to choose where they live – often in more rural areas outside cities in order to access a lifestyle that cities cannot offer.

And digital technology is not confined to the service sectors. Manufacturing, logistics, energy generation, construction, agriculture – these sectors will need an increasing array of digital skills to succeed. Nor are digital technologies the only important change, with sustainability and energy technologies, as well as important changes in consumer tastes.

There are challenges too: an ageing population will increase pressure on our care and NHS services, wider town facilities, transport access and social infrastructure.

The aim must be to help transform the towns into successful 21st century towns that can thrive and succeed into the future – accessing the opportunities we can see while empowering people to address the challenges.

A 21st century town is one where the size, location, heritage, attractions, institutions, culture and community of the town are strengths.

21st century towns are places which have successfully adapted to, and play an important role in, the modern economy – creating opportunity for residents and businesses alike.

We think that this means:

- Putting **digital first**, ensuring that residents and businesses have the digital skills they need to take advantage of new opportunities, and enabling change through provision of fast broadband infrastructure in their towns.
- Ensure that towns are **open for business**, and create the conditions needed to support business growth locally.
- Providing **high quality places and connections**, making the towns more attractive, relevant and memorable to potential residents and visitors, whilst making it easier to get to other places for business and leisure.
- Emphasising **identity and community**, maximising the benefit of towns' unique identities, heritage, qualities and attractions and unlocking the power of local communities to improve places.
- Promoting **sustainability and resilience**, making sure that towns and homes benefit from the sustainability revolution and are resilient in the face of climate change and other threats, including flooding.

By doing this, these towns will:

- be even more attractive to new residents, visitors and businesses
- address local challenges by empowering residents individually and collectively
- be resilient in the face of major changes and trends
- be stronger towns which are more productive and better places to live and visit

In order to do this, it will be important to change the way local businesses and residents think about these towns. Alongside the history and heritage that places are rightly proud of, it is important to ensure that the towns and their residents see themselves as part of what is happening across the world. Many residents and businesses understand this, some may not. To make this change it is necessary that as many residents as possible understand and support the transformation set out in the Local Industrial Strategy. This will involve empowering local people to own this vision, make it theirs, and lead change locally.

The next section describes what we think the LEP and partners, working with the towns and their residents and businesses, should do to realise this vision.

5 Recommendations

This section sets out a series of recommendations for initiatives which – taken together – will help to create strong and resilient 21st century market towns. These recommendations are summarised in the graphic below, then explained in further detail.

In developing these recommendations, we are mindful of the following:

- That across the area there are ongoing initiatives which look to do similar things to some of what we are recommending here. Some of these are referenced though doubtless there are others.
- How these recommendations are implemented will be different in different places. We have tried to indicate these differences where possible.

We have tried to indicate some of the issues and considerations involved in delivery as far as possible, however this is not a full delivery plan for each initiative and much of the detail of delivery will depend on how effectively local partners work together to deliver this and where some of these initiatives build on existing schemes.



DIGITAL FIRST

Ensure that digital skills provision is strong throughout all the towns

- More local people engaged in the digital economy with benefits in terms of incomes and employment levels
- More local businesses using the internet to sell online – boosting incomes and productivity.
- Enabling local businesses to reap the benefits of new technologies and therefore improving productivity in towns.
- Wider use of digital apps and platforms to support community work and building the brand / identity of towns.

Make the transition to gigabit level broadband and provide free public wi-fi

- Encourage inward investment / location by businesses and skilled freelancers.
- Support local people to make best use of new digital skills and access remote employment opportunities that require access to good broadband.
- Reinforce the message that these towns are ‘places of the future with strong heritage’, rather than ‘heritage places’.

Public sector and anchor institutions to help create demand for digital skills and digital solutions

- Help to provide opportunities for local companies and professionals, and ensure that more of the public procurement spend gets spent locally.
- Create opportunities for networking amongst digital professionals and businesses locally.
- Develop innovative responses to public sector and social challenges.
- Reinforce our aim to be a ‘digital first’ place.



OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Create enterprise centres to accommodate small businesses and start-ups

- Help increase the number of businesses locally.
- Provide a place for freelancers to locate their businesses in a more professional setting than at home.
- Provide a visible local example of the opportunities in the professional and digital sectors for young people and those retraining.
- Help develop local networks of small businesses.

Encourage Industry 4.0 in the manufacturing and logistics sectors

- Boost productivity in our main large employers, whilst potentially helping with retention of companies by strengthening the performance of existing premises / sites.
- Help support the drive to increased digital skills, reinforcing the digital skills programme.

Support agricultural firms to benefit from new technologies

- Help farmers to boost productivity and manage the risks in a competitive, cyclical market.
- Reduce the use of fertilizers and products which damage our natural assets.
- Maximise the re-use value of agricultural waste and support a more circular economy.

Encourage local retailers, manufacturers and craftspeople to embrace online retail

- Increase productivity in relevant sectors
- Reinforce the visitor economy by encouraging more visits
- Increase resilience of local businesses through diversification of income.

Increase the value of the visitor economy

- Increase local employment and investment in the sector.
- Help enhance the reputation and attractiveness of the towns.
- Support facilities and amenities that would be beneficial to the resident population of the towns.



HIGH QUALITY PLACES AND CONNECTION

Design our towns for the future, with a mix of joined-up housing, employment space and town centre space

- Ensure new residential and commercial developments are integrated into the town rather than being constructed alongside it.
- Ensure that new housing is zero carbon with strong broadband connectivity.
- Safeguard the purpose of town centres and help revitalise those which are in decline.
- Improve public health outcomes for residents by making walking and cycling more appealing options than driving.
- Support retail and the visitor economy through creating a more attractive, amenable and navigable town centre with increased foot traffic.
- Make towns more attractive to prospective residents.

Use the collective attraction of existing assets to create destination appeal

- Encourage more consumers to use local centres at different times of the day and week.
- Make the towns more distinctive and memorable
- Make it easier to stand out and create destination appeal
- Encourage local offers and traders to work together to create collective critical mass
- Make it easier for consumers to shop and visit the whole town centre offer
- Encourage consumers to visit local centres more often, and stay longer each time
- Enable local authorities to drive forward improvements when budgets are constrained

Make the most of major transport links

- Improved rail and bus station facilities, with these hubs becoming more attractive gateways to our towns, and having better links to local centres.
- Better co-operation between the different governance and institutions involved in transport infrastructure
- Clearer vision of investment priorities for local planning authorities, with good evidence about where any additional funding could have the greatest impact.
- Reduced reliance on cars as a means of transport.

Improve local transport links within places

- Connect housing development, business and industrial units and town centres via public transport links and improved interchange facilities
- Facilitate repurposed car parking and efficient use of public spaces, mixed use areas and green spaces
- Encourage positive public health outcomes through provision of walking and cycling routes or paths
- Support the transition to electric vehicles.

Upgrade and enhance social infrastructure to attract new residents

- Support current residents across the lifecycle
- Improve quality of life for current and new residents
- Contribute to towns' attractiveness and appeal for working age populations
- Support individuals and businesses to stay in towns



STRENGTHENING IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Work to build the community in places

- Improve public health outcomes through the provision of community initiatives
- Contribute to residents’ wellbeing and prevent isolation
- Improve public spaces to foster cohesion and social gatherings
- Ease the pressures of social challenges while maximising the attractiveness of towns

Use place promotion to attract visitors and new residents

- Attract visitors, residents, businesses and industrial opportunities through unique and well-established place offers
- Facilitate high aspirations among residents from all age groups
- Ensure that the benefits of local development reach all resident and local groups
- Require the use of modern tools like social media to improve local identity and awareness



SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

Encourage companies to invest in sustainable technologies

- Improved local sustainability and resilience in the face of forthcoming climate change and shocks
- Active participation from residents and businesses in promoting and using sustainable technologies
- Buy-in for the upcoming LIS, as well as long term engagement with its objectives
- Maintenance of long-term networks and linkages to support institutions and businesses in becoming more sustainable

Prepare towns to take advantage of clean growth economic opportunities

- Create ‘future-proofed’ economic opportunities for local people
- Establish the towns as areas of expertise in green technologies and places to invest
- Help encourage swifter investment in sustainable infrastructure and building upgrades.

Work with planning authorities to make homes future-proof

- Ensure residents at all stages of the lifecycle have access to affordable and adequate housing.
- Make housing available and appealing to young and skilled workers in towns.
- Ensure that we have the low carbon sustainable housing we need for the future – reducing energy costs for our residents.
- Foster community cohesion via linkages between housing developments, businesses and town centres
- Make homes accessible for older residents, enabling them to live independently at home for longer.
- Protect our communities from flood risk and climate change.

Digital first

Ensure that digital skills provision is strong throughout all the towns

Aim: In the 21st century digital literacy is increasingly as important as the ability to read and write. Helping local residents gain digital skills will be a crucial component of enabling young people in the towns to succeed, supporting mature workers to progress and retrain, and helping older residents to access services in the community. All of these aims contribute to helping people understand they can live a '21st century life' in towns.

What needs to happen: Digital skills encompasses a range of different things, including:

- Basic use of the internet and social media to access information and communicate whilst being able to critically assess information and stay safe online. This includes being able to use the internet to learn new (digital and non-digital) skills.
- Use of digital technology – especially smartphones
- Programming skills / app development
- Data science skills
- Web-design
- Digital media skills

More and more there are high quality resources to teach these skills available either cheaply or for free online, although in some cases hardware provision / provision of software licenses will be important for some types of learning. In all cases, making the shift to a 'digital first' mindset in our places involves behavioural change.

The challenge for towns and their residents is therefore:

- Introducing these skills at an early age
- Normalising the use of digital technology in our communities. Breaking down barriers, particularly notions that 'this isn't for me', including in older residents.
- Providing a friendly and approachable way of accessing these skills within a safe and open environment.
- Signposting to resources and initial handholding to demystify what is out there.

How could this be delivered? Skills training provision can be delivered from physical centres in larger towns, possibly including co-location of training services within libraries or other public buildings. These facilities will need to have access to the relevant equipment (computers, smartphones, tablets, etc.) needed to teach the range of core skills. In smaller towns it might be harder to have dedicated facilities, but pop-up classes can be held in church halls etc. provided there is wi-fi available.

For the teaching materials, it is possible to use existing online resources (e.g. Codecademy, Udacity, etc.) but it is important to have someone on hand who can help learners navigate unfamiliar concepts. Where it is possible to partner with local businesses or experts in the community to run classes, this should be explored.

Partnerships with schools will be important to embed this with young people from an early age, including offering relevant before- and after-school classes, free or subsidised whenever possible.

To encourage behaviour change it will be important to use area-wide competitions and events to encourage the practical application of skills. Digital achievements should be as widely celebrated as, say, sporting achievements. Local public sector organisations can also help stimulate digital innovation by commissioning digital solutions to public sector challenges and using social value to promote local responses.

What could success look like? If we support our residents and businesses to access the digital skills that they need, we think that the following benefits could be achieved:

- More local people engaged in the digital economy with benefits in terms of incomes and employment levels. Potentially fewer young people moving away to live and work. Greater recognition of the contribution towns make to 21st century society and economy.
- More local businesses using the internet to sell online – boosting incomes and productivity.
- Enabling local businesses to reap the benefits of new technologies and therefore improving productivity in towns.
- Wider use of digital apps and platforms to support community work and building the brand / identity of towns.

Exemplar: Flintshire, North Wales

Since its opening in 2013 after the merger of Deeside and Yale College, Coleg Cambria has expanded to 9 campuses spread across North Wales. The College provides a range of digital and computing related training on a full-time or part-time basis such as coding, web & game design, CISCO networking courses, digital marketing ranging from Levels 2-6. These programmes are specifically geared towards closing the digital skills gap and helping local people attain digital literacy.

In 2017, Coleg Cambria provided the first Digital Essentials module in its Northop site located in Flintshire, North Wales.⁴⁴ The course introduced digital marketing, familiarising students to its function and purpose in a business. The Digital Essentials module aligned with industry-recognised standards established by the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM). The training included a work-based assignment. Students applied their digital marketing knowledge to optimise business performance. College Cambria received a congratulatory note from CIM representatives celebrating

⁴⁴ <https://www.cambria.ac.uk/plugging-digital-skills-gap-north-wales-cim-marketing-training-excellence-coleg-cambria/>

the first cohort's performance. All students achieved a distinction pass in the Digital Essentials assignment, exceeding standards expected at Level 3.

The College's Northop site in Flintshire is home to the North Wales Coalfield, with the last mine at Point of Ayr closing in 1996. The North of Wales has a strong manufacturing base with global names such as Airbus and Toyota operating within the area. The College's role in this town has been to help reskill and upskill residents with forward-facing skill sets, helping people access employment as well as progression opportunities.



Make the transition to gigabit level broadband and provide free public wi-fi

Aim: Digital first is dependent upon having fast and reliable broadband. Government 'superfast' standards are increasingly outdated, at only 24mbps. To future proof our area, we need to provide gigabit speeds, increase accessibility using public wi-fi, and deliver new infrastructure in a way which makes it easier to upgrade as standards and technology improves.

What needs to happen: The LEP area is fortunate to have a digital trailblazer in the form of York's gigabit connectivity with plans to roll out the same approach to Harrogate, Ripon, and Knaresborough. That commercial partners are looking to provide gigabit speeds to towns the size of Ripon and Knaresborough demonstrates that there is genuine potential to have market-leading internet speeds in our market towns. This needs to be replicated within all towns.

In order to make this happen, local planning authorities need to learn the lessons of the York programme. This includes:

- Getting fibre connectivity to key public buildings within places to develop the backbone infrastructure.
- Managing a proactive communications policy that helps spread the positive messages of broadband investment and ensures that local people are prepared to deal with the temporary disruption of installing the infrastructure.
- Using a range of technologies to get connectivity to individual premises (though a clear preference for fibre connectivity where feasible).

Alongside this, public wi-fi should be provided as standard and publicised to support local residents, businesses and the visitor economy.

How could this be delivered? The York programme provides a delivery model. Where possible, a ‘dig once’ philosophy can help minimise disruption to residents and businesses, and can help future-proof infrastructure by making it easier to upgrade equipment in future as technology changes. The challenge of connecting to individual premises might involve a range of technologies, particularly to areas on the edge of, or just beyond the boundaries of, the towns. Staying abreast of technological options – e.g. the use of digital whitespace and satellite broadband – will be important.

What could success look like? Achieving gigabit speeds in the towns will help to do the following:

- Encourage inward investment / location by businesses and skilled freelancers.
- Support local people to make best use of new digital skills and access remote employment opportunities that require access to good broadband.
- Reinforce the message that these towns are ‘places of the future with strong heritage’, rather than ‘heritage places’.

Exemplar: Lancashire & Cumbria

In the North West of England, a volunteer group is providing local rural communities with some of the fastest available broadband speeds. Broadband for the Rural North (B4RN) was established in 2011 and has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds from the community to invest in broadband infrastructure.

Small, rural villages are often unattractive investments to major broadband providers, since they don’t offer the critical mass of customers which densely occupied cities do. Because of this, B4RN coordinates its volunteers to dig channels and lay fibre optic cables to connect villages and towns in rural areas of Lancashire and Cumbria to superfast speeds. So far, B4RN has connected over 5,000 properties in Cumbria, providing local communities with some of the fastest speeds in the country. 65% of all the properties in connected communities take up the offer, a high level of coverage. Due to this initiative, rural communities can access the opportunities of the modern economy.



Public sector and anchor institutions to help create demand for digital skills and digital solutions

Aim: Ensure that public sector procurement and commissioning actively creates opportunities for local people with digital skills, and that digital solutions and innovation are used to solve local challenges.

What needs to happen: There are a number of areas where digital solutions can address local challenges (e.g. helping to build local networks to deal with health, mobility and social challenges), as well as a number of existing needs for digital services (e.g. local authority and public sector web design and maintenance, social media operations, data capture and analysis etc.) which could be provided by local businesses and freelancers, especially as the towns build their digital skills bases.

It is important that local authorities and the public sector in the region help to generate demand for these services, and use social value provisions to make sure locals can compete and gain experience. The goal should be to reinforce the notion within town communities that digital skills are vital to modern life and that digital solutions should always be considered.

Local authorities and the public sector can also be sources of demand for innovation, through commissioning and innovation competitions using schemes such as the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) and using Innovate UK funding. As well as formal procurement processes, there may be opportunities for 'hackathons' that bring together public sector officers and local skilled experts. This would help identify potential solutions and support better networking amongst local digital practitioners.

How could this be delivered? Procurement opportunities could be publicised beyond existing portals within towns using digital skills centres and networks. Local authorities and the LEP could keep a list of businesses / freelancers and their capabilities to ensure that these companies are actively approached about opportunities.

What could success look like? Driving demand for digital services and innovation in the towns would:

- Help to provide opportunities for local companies and professionals, and ensure that more of the public procurement spend gets spent locally.
- Create opportunities for networking amongst digital professionals and businesses locally.
- Develop innovative responses to public sector and social challenges.
- Reinforce our aim to be a ‘digital first’ place.

Exemplar: Durham Smart County

Durham County Council is using procurement to improve digital skills and business growth in the area. With the Durham Smart County initiative, the council (DCC) has reformed its procurement processes to provide local companies with opportunities, giving them room to develop their proposals in cooperation with the council and experiment with innovative solutions.



Rather than publish invitations to tender that ask for specific services or products, DCC has opted for a challenge-based approach to procurement, presenting the problem they are seeking to address and inviting bids from private companies that propose to solve it. Working with the public through consultation, DCC decides on a problem before opening it to tender, inviting submissions and supporting companies to prepare a response. With many of these digital solutions, the process of open innovation allows the companies to work with Business Durham, the economic development arm of DCC, and its partners in academia and business, developing their skills in the process and increasing the likelihood of them winning the work. Business Durham then helps unsuccessful bidders to find opportunities elsewhere. The approach supports ambitious local

businesses and helps them build capacity, growing the number of local jobs and improving the skills of the workforce.

The latest Smart County round focuses on healthcare and consequences of social isolation. Using a network of local government, existing businesses and academia, the approach supports companies as they come up with innovative products and services which will make a difference to people's lives.⁴⁵

Open for business

Create enterprise centres to accommodate small businesses and start-ups

Aim: to ensure that small businesses, start-ups, and freelancers have appropriate facilities for running their businesses, and to encourage and strengthen local business networks.

What needs to happen: Nationally there has been a large increase in the provision of small, flexible business space to accommodate the needs of the knowledge economy. For the most part, this accommodation is clustered in large cities, with secondary and tertiary markets poorly served. It will be important to ensure that small professional services businesses and the growing number of freelancers working remotely have access to adequate facilities to support their work – specifically, serviced office space available on a flexible rental basis. This will be vital to attracting and retaining skilled professionals and helping locals to start their own companies.

The LEP and partners should build an understanding of what the potential demand for this space looks like – looking at uptake of existing spaces in town centres, using business incorporation records to understand where there are existing services businesses located within homes in the area, and looking at equivalent activity in libraries and cafes. Talking to businesses and freelancers will help build a picture of local needs and willingness to pay.

How could this be delivered? What an enterprise centre looks like in practice will vary depending on the options available in local places and the scale of the town. In some places, there may be enough identifiable demand to justify development of a new building or refurbishment of an existing building to provide a dedicated facility. In other towns, co-location with existing services (particularly libraries) may be more practical. In some places, working with local cafes and tea rooms, ensuring good wi-fi provision and working to create local networks of similar businesses may be most practical. Accommodation may be provided by private or public entities, or a partnership between the two, depending on what is best suited to a particular town.

It's important that enterprise centre facilities are located in town centres where possible (rather than in out-of-centre locations) or otherwise well-linked to town centres. New and

⁴⁵ Durham Smart County, Business Durham; Encouraging innovation in local government procurement, LGA 2017.

refurbished buildings should aim to enhance the quality of place in an area. High speed broadband is essential.

What could success look like? Creating high-quality space in our town centres would:

- Help increase the number of businesses locally.
- Provide a place for freelancers to locate their businesses in a more professional setting than at home.
- Provide a visible local example of the opportunities in the professional and digital sectors for young people and those retraining.
- Help develop local networks of small businesses.

Exemplar: Tamworth, West Midlands

Tamworth in the West Midlands has set up an Enterprise Centre to provide local entrepreneurs and small businesses with serviced office space. Opened in 2017 and managed by Tamworth Borough Council, the centre immediately filled with tenants and its 16 offices are fully let. The businesses in the centre have grown quickly, and the centre has helped to establish a small innovative business community in the town, many of whom operate in the digital sector and provide advanced services. One the tenants, the augmented reality business *Enlighten*, provides services to the Ministry of Defence for use in training.

The enterprise centre is currently at capacity, and demand for start-up space remains. Private operators, prompted by the Enterprise Centre's success, are entering the market to meet demand from other small businesses. The project serves as an example to private developers of the potential for the town, and attracts customers and interest from large neighbouring economies, in particular Birmingham.



Encourage Industry 4.0 in the manufacturing and logistics sectors

Aim: Help our companies make the transition to using new digital technologies in order to boost productivity and competitiveness.

What needs to happen: Many of the towns' most important employers remain large manufacturing firms, across a variety of sub-sectors. There are also some important wholesale and logistics businesses. Many of these companies can benefit from major productivity increases by adopting the package of technologies dubbed Industry 4.0 (e.g. Internet of Things (IoT), big data, AI, robotics, etc.). Provided the backbone broadband network is strong enough, the use of 5G technologies may be an option to support the uptake of Industry 4.0 technologies in certain businesses.

In practice, this is likely to involve:

- Supporting technology demonstrators.
- Helping firms access relevant grants and loans.
- Supporting companies to develop new business models, including servitisation in the manufacturing sectors.

How could this be delivered? Specialist innovation support as part of the wider LIS implementation. Larger towns and towns with more pronounced manufacturing and logistics sectors might benefit from a more permanent support offer, potentially including demonstrator space, but for most towns having access to a roving innovation support person would be sufficient. Key to the success of this is personalised mentoring for firms that are less well prepared to benefit from Industry 4.0.

What could success look like? Helping more businesses to adopt Industry 4.0 and similar technologies would:

- Boost productivity in our main large employers, whilst potentially helping with retention of companies by strengthening the performance of existing premises / sites.
- Help support the drive to increased digital skills, reinforcing the digital skills programme.

Exemplar: Aston Business School, West Midlands

In the West Midlands, Aston Business School works with local manufacturing firms on intensive mentoring programmes, helping them to learn new techniques and adapt their businesses to make them more competitive.

The towns and cities that make up the Greater Birmingham conurbation have long been centres of manufacturing, but few firms have the resources to react to technological and industrial changes. The Advanced Services Group at the Business School works with small firms across the region to adapt to these changes. The group's experts and academics coach local firms and tradespeople,

helping them to think creatively about their industries and experiment with the services that they can offer their clients.

As a specialist centre for servitisation – the transformation of manufacturing companies, helping them to create and market services as well as products – the group is important to improving the resilience of these companies. As competition in the sector grows, particularly from emerging markets, they help small firms to diversify and enter new markets. Through intensive and tailored coaching, based on an understanding of the individual businesses, Aston Business School helps to show traditional manufacturers the importance of innovation and adaptation. Its business growth programmes take local firms on intensive courses, helping them to understand modern approaches and techniques and adapt their business models to fit them.

This work is supported by Aston’s Logistics and Systems Institute, a leading research body based at the university. It designs solutions across the conurbation which are then fed back into local businesses.



Support agricultural firms to benefit from new technologies

Aim: Support local agricultural firms to adopt new technologies to boost productivity and competitiveness.

What needs to happen: Agriculture is a sector that will see significant digitalisation over the next decade, as well as dealing with challenges such as the labour market impact of Brexit, the impact of commodity food price cycles, changing consumer tastes, and potentially policy changes from Government in the desire to de-carbonise the food chain and reduce wastage. There are a range of technologies which are already available, and which will become more commonplace as the next decade progresses. These include:

- Precision planting and application of fertilizer / pesticide (including the use of robotics to deploy these solutions)
- Use of sensors to generate data that can be used to fine-tune processes
- Anaerobic digestion to turn waste agricultural products into energy

How could this be delivered? These new technologies will require awareness from local businesses, confidence in the ability to generate timely financial returns from investment, new skills to use the technology, and a willingness to change established methods. Providing

effective support to businesses through existing markets and co-operatives will be important, as will ensuring that skills training is available through local colleges. Providing effective technology and process demonstration, and supporting access to finance, is also important.

Clearly, this recommendation will have more relevance in towns which have important agricultural functions and a large rural agricultural hinterland. Making these technologies work effectively is dependent upon delivering high quality broadband to rural areas.

What could success look like? Boosting agri-tech in the areas surrounding towns would:

- Help farmers to boost productivity and manage the risks in a competitive, cyclical market.
- Reduce the use of fertilizers and products which damage our natural assets.
- Maximise the re-use value of agricultural waste and support a more circular economy.

Exemplar: Cornwall

Cornwall is supporting local SMEs to develop innovative products and services for the agricultural sector. With small grants, the unique business support programme ‘Tevi’ provides firms in the agriculture supply chain with the money they need to do research or employ consultants and has set up a graduate placement programme to provide firms with skilled workers to get projects off the ground.

The project is led by the Duchy College Rural Businesses school, which works with the Universities of Exeter, Plymouth, Rothamsted Research and the Cornwall Development Company to coordinate funds and expertise, helping small businesses to develop new products and services, and then to commercialise them. The programme is designed to help adapt Cornwall’s agricultural industry to modernise technologies, and through doing so to improve the productivity of the sector.

Using ERDF funding, the partners team make innovation grants of £2,500-£50,000 available for projects, which can be used to support feasibility studies, commissioning specialist researchers, equipment, consultancy costs, or specialists to undertake direct research.⁴⁶ Among the projects that have been supported are an edible insect scheme, a £3m dairy research centre, which will explore cutting-edge management of cattle herds and trial efficiency improvements, and using drones to assess crop health.



⁴⁶ Agri-Tech Cornwall and the Isles Of Scilly; *The SW Rural Productivity Commission Evidence Report 2017*, Heart of the SW LEP, 2017.

Encourage local retailers, manufacturers and craftspeople to embrace online retail

Aim: Ensure that all businesses with distinctive products are supported to make the leap to online retail – embracing online as a means through which to access additional distribution and revenue streams.

What needs to happen: Online retail creates huge opportunities for smaller firms to sell direct to customers, to build a brand outside of their immediate retail catchment, and to make consumers within their immediate retail catchment more aware of the goods and services they provide. It also provides the opportunity to diversify revenue streams, helping make businesses more resilient. Whilst many retailers have taken advantage of this, nationally we know that many retailers do not have a well-developed web presence, or even a website in some cases.

Therefore, providing support to retailers, craftspeople, and manufacturers / farmers will be needed. This should involve hands on support via the Growth Hub and other local business support schemes. Support should focus on:

- Helping businesses identify distinctive products and potential online markets / audiences
- Helping businesses establish websites and other sales channels (e.g. Shopify, Amazon, Etsy, etc.)
- Helping businesses establish processes and tools to manage the online sales process
- Helping businesses better understand how online channels, such as marketing campaigns, can support traditional retail sales.

How could this be delivered? As above, the Growth Hub can provide hands-on support to make this happen. Using local retailer and craft groups to identify potential clients and to provide peer-to-peer support will help deliver this initiative.

What could success look like? Getting more firms to sell products online could:

- Increase productivity in relevant sectors
- Reinforce the visitor economy by encouraging more visits
- Increase resilience of local businesses through diversification of income.

Exemplar: Bridestowe Lavender Estate, Tasmania

One of the more dramatic examples of online retail success has been the experience of the Bridestowe Lavender Estate in Tasmania. The 265-acre farm is one of the largest lavender farms in the world. Alongside the lavender production the farm had a small sideline making Bobbie teddy bears stuffed with lavender.⁴⁷ In 2011 the farm was selling approximately 10 bears per month. Following a social media post by a famous Chinese actress, sales of the bears rocketed to 4,000 per month, largely in online sales to China, but also through increased visits by Chinese visitors to the farm itself. Overall visits have tripled since 2007, from 23,000 to 65,000 visits per year. Indeed, the brand has been so successful that Bridestowe has partnered with a media production company to produce an Adventures of Bobbie the Bear animated television series.

Whilst the case study is an extreme example, it shows that unique products with local character can use social media to radically scale up their potential market and their sales.



Increase the value of the visitor economy

Aim: develop the value of the visitor economy by marketing a strong identity for each town in a targeted way, using online marketing and similar tools to reach a targeted audience. Clearly communicate the unique offerings and attractions of every town, while investing to maintain and enhance those offerings.

What needs to happen: The visitor economy is already important for many of these towns. In many towns it is a large employer in its own right and produces spillover benefits for other sectors. But more important than simply increasing employment in the sector is increasing the value the sector produces, and this must be an aspiration for towns where it is realistic. The added value of a 'future towns' approach is to consider how social media and online marketing can be leveraged to add to existing efforts, and where marketing the towns and the area as a 'package' can help turn day visits into overnight stays and longer visits. Using innovative online approaches will probably be the most cost-effective intervention for most towns.

In terms of social media and online marketing, the LEP and partners should commission a team to work with town councils to promote the towns, using messages tailored to specific

⁴⁷ See Financial Times (2016) Bobbie, the purple bear that sparked a rush of counterfeits

groups (e.g. families with young children), and using social media marketing techniques to develop viral content that reaches a wider audience. Content can be sourced in part through local competitions / events and draw on the talents of local residents.

In terms of marketing the area as a package we suggest that campaigns make stronger links between the towns, major cities, and natural assets – and build and promote itineraries pitched at different target audiences (e.g. young families, couples) which can be easily followed by potential visitors.

The public sector also needs to promote the visitor economy through helping support local events and festivals that help draw people into the towns. Some of these visitor attractors already exist, and in other towns it may be necessary to work with local places to scale-up existing events or create new ones.

How might this be delivered? We suggest that the scale of effort involved here requires some dedicated resource to operate across the towns, while ensuring that the mandate for action includes working with local places to ensure that there is local input and creativity in the process. There is a strong link between promoting the visitor economy and promoting the towns as places for individuals and families to relocate – both will require similar tactics and techniques, though the messages and the target markets may differ.

Not all places will have the same potential to boost their visitor economy. It will be important to identify the leading centres first and market these towns, and then consider over time how to boost the visitor economy in towns which have historically had this as less of a focus, or which have fewer visitor assets.

We are also mindful that some towns, particularly coastal towns, have a very seasonal offer. This means that some assets are relatively under-used in the off-season. Working to extend the season, and finding alternative uses for assets which are under-used in the off-season (e.g. seafront carparking), should also be a consideration.

What could success look like? Boosting the visitor economy would:

- Increase local employment and investment in the sector.
- Help enhance the reputation and attractiveness of the towns.
- Support facilities and amenities that would be beneficial to the resident population of the towns.

Doing this in the way we have suggested above, success will be apparent when there is a step-change in how promotional content is being received and shared, and when there is a change in the type, volume and spending power of visitors.

Exemplar: Rent a Finn, Visit Finland

With its Rent a Finn campaign, Finland is using social media to promote its lifestyle and friendliness and through this pull in visitors. Winner of City/Nation/Place award for Best Use of Social Media in

2019, with Rent a Finn visit Finland recruits local Finns to act as guides for competition winners, who apply for a trip to Finland hosted by their ‘rented’ Finn.⁴⁸ Coordinated activity and creative campaigns by Visit Finland are having their effect: the number of nights spent by non-residents increased by 1.3 per cent in 2018, reaching 6.8 million.⁴⁹



The official contest is supported by a social media campaign. Ordinary Finns are invited to apply ‘rent’ themselves to visitors for couple of hours, showing their availability through social media using the hashtag #rentafinn to connect with potential tourists, or inviting acquaintances to visit Finland. The rented Finns then introduce the visitors to Finnish habits, nature and traditional or popular activities, again sharing their experiences via social media using the hashtag. A largely rural country which has urbanised slowly and late in comparison to the rest of Europe, the campaign emphasises the warmth and generosity of the Finns themselves and the natural beauty of the land, something which the programme helps to reinforce. Tourists, in turn, are asked to respect the environment by signing a pledge to ‘be like a Finn and slow down from within’, clearing up after themselves when on trips, drinking tap rather than bottled water and respecting the privacy of locals.⁵⁰

High quality places and connections

Design our towns for the future, with a mix of joined-up housing, employment space and town centre space

Aim: Ensure that our towns are configured to support future economic activity. Ensure that we maximise the benefit of the spaces in our towns, by making sure that the physical configuration of towns facilitates accessibility, promotes healthy lifestyles and supports a successful town centre economy. Connect people in new and existing housing developments

⁴⁸ City/Nation/Place Awards 2019.

⁴⁹ Visit Finland.

⁵⁰ Take the Sustainable Finland Pledge, Visit Finland.

to historic and thriving town centres via cycle and pedestrian routes, and plan developments to encourage sustainable town use.

What needs to happen: The requirements for our town centres are changing. In many centres we will need less retail space and more space for leisure. There will also be opportunities in some centres to increase the provision of employment space and/or housing within centres – reflecting changing demands and preferences of businesses and residents. Joining up town centre and edge-of-centre places, especially new housing developments, will be crucial for the success of our towns. Edge-of-centre retail should be discouraged.

To promote higher quality of life, serve existing population groups of all ages and to attract new residents:

- Towns must be designed and developed in ways that suit multiple purposes. This includes drawing on the lessons and principles of the NHS Healthy New Towns programme.
- Town centres should be clear areas, well-marked and walkable, with good, safe walking and cycle links to surrounding areas.
- Investments in physical infrastructure should be made with aesthetic appeal in mind, as well as practical uses.

How might this be delivered? Developing a suitable physical configuration requires mindful commitment through a number of different avenues. It is important to have buy-in from the LEP, local authorities, town planners and private developers to facilitate effective town design. There are many different ways to promote appropriate town design, depending on existing assets and capabilities:

- Draw high street boundaries to A.) maintain focused, central retail emphases B.) encourage the development of housing in central locations, near consolidated town centre offers.
- Ensure that housing development is supported by gigabit broadband and is sustainable in design (discussed more fully in other recommendations in this section).
- Revise out of town planning permissions to prevent retail centres being developed on the outskirts of towns when town centres remain underutilised.
- Promote railway stations as local hubs which are joined up to economic activity in the town through public transport and walkable routes. Improve the physical design and attractiveness of stations, recognising their role as visitors' first point of contact with a town.
- Pedestrianise portions of town centre and high street areas, to discourage the use of cars, promote and protect foot traffic, and encourage walking as part of a healthy and active experiential economy.

- Design and fund extensive cycle networks, especially within towns but also between them where appropriate; connect existing and new housing developments with town centres, employment and essential social infrastructure services.
- Prioritise green street lighting arranged in such a way as to promote safety and evening use of town centres.
- Make street maps available, both throughout town centres and via a free publication.
- Install and maintain unified and clear sign posting – to and from the town centre as well as other important destinations.

What could success look like? More active town planning and design will:

- Ensure new residential and commercial developments are integrated into the town rather than being constructed alongside it, enabling communities and businesses to connect more effectively and creating the critical mass which will help centres thrive.
- Ensure that new housing is zero carbon with strong broadband connectivity.
- Safeguard the purpose of town centres and help revitalise those which are in decline.
- Improve public health outcomes for residents by making walking and cycling more appealing options than driving.
- Support retail and the visitor economy through creating a more attractive, amenable and navigable town centre with increased foot traffic.
- Make towns more attractive to prospective residents.

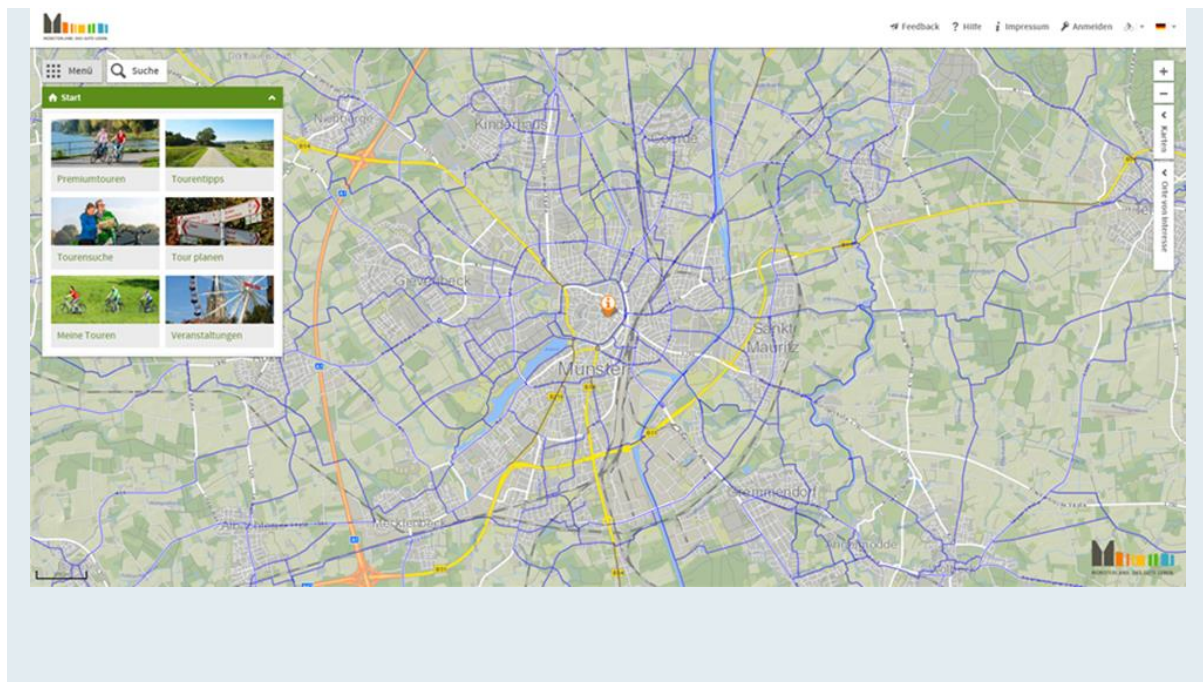
Exemplar: Münster, North Rhine Westphalia, Germany

Over several decades Münster has used city planning not only to improve cycling infrastructure, but to remodel the city for the benefit of cyclists. Cycling is the most popular mode of transport in Münster, and the city is consistently recognised as one of the best cities in Germany for cycling.

Münster, a city in North Rhine Westphalia of 280,000 people, has used long-term spatial policy to locate important economic and social utilities within the city centre or on major arterial routes. Since over 70% of the city's population live within a bike ride of the city centre – 6km – they are able to boost cycling as a mode of day-to-day transport.⁵¹ Around 40% of total trips in the city are made by bicycle.

With popular movements in favour of cycling encouraging the city authorities to take bold action, it has steadily improved cycling infrastructure and information for commuters and tourists. This has spread to the surrounding towns and villages, and information and route planning for cycling routes across the wider area are available through the Münsterland tour planner.

⁵¹ *Enabling Cycling Cities: Ingredients for Success*, Civitas Mimosa, 2013



Use the collective attraction of existing assets to create destination appeal

Aim: Maximise the use of local assets and attractions and get visitors to use the whole offer, more visits, to more of the town, more frequently.

What needs to happen: As well as reconfiguring centres to make them more fit for the future (see above), the LEP and local authority partners need to make it easier for consumers to visit the variety of local attractions and offers that exist. This means better marketing and promotion, more co-ordinated events and activities as well as better signage and information on the ground and online. One of the biggest failings identified in our health check of towns was the lack of impact, promotion and often visibility of many of the existing assets in the town. Councils also have an essential role in ensuring that the infrastructure and facilities (as set out in the report) are in place to make the experience rewarding and memorable

How might this be delivered? The key here is to encourage owners and managers of assets to work together for the good of the town. In many instances it is not about creating new anchors or securing huge investment. Maximum benefit is gained by facilitating and stimulating cooperation. It could include town partnerships or town teams. It may include the creation of BID's in bigger towns. The collective benefit of sharing customers, visitors and users across different assets (leisure, employment, civic, retail, and community / arts) will increase spend locally and lead to more sustainable communities.

Some of the best advocates to promote places are local traders and business owners. These are often social media savvy and confident self-promoters. They will often be happy to work together and encourage consumers to visit other like-minded or complementary operators in the town.

It's not unusual for the collective appeal of centres to be missed or forgotten, e.g. quality of independent convenience operators in Stokesley, or gallery and art spaces in Richmond. These are attributes that consumers will respond to, if they are reminded or made aware of them. There are opportunities to reveal and nurture these emerging, occasionally lost attributes and differentiators.

It's also important to promote these assets at all stages of the visit pattern, e.g. pre-visit, on arrival at stations or car parking, at key access or confluence points in the town centre etc.

The most successful town centres in the future will be those with recognised strengths, great reputations and distinct identities.

Based on established best practise and case studies of other locations that have successfully improved the quality and reputation of their 'place', the following checklist provides a list of place management and place making deliverables and outcomes that can be assessed as part of improving town experience:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perception | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Events & Markets | <input type="checkbox"/> Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Pride |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Permeability & Movement | <input type="checkbox"/> Connections & Routing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attractiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safety & Security | <input type="checkbox"/> Memorable & Distinctiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleanliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Space |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ease of Use | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Pre-Marketing & Info |

What could success look like? Making the most of existing assets and attractions will:

- Encourage more consumers to use local centres at different times of the day and week.
- Make the towns more distinctive and memorable
- Make it easier to stand out and create destination appeal
- Encourage local offers and traders to work together to create collective critical mass
- Make it easier for consumers to shop and visit the whole town centre offer
- Encourage consumers to visit local centres more often, and stay longer each time
- Enable local authorities to drive forward improvements when budgets are constrained

As can be seen, making the most of local assets will help to put the towns on the map, increase their destination appeal and give consumers clear reasons to choose to visit their local centres as opposed to spend online or visit out of town retail destinations.

Exemplar: Malmesbury Wiltshire

Malmesbury has much in common with many of YNYER LEP's towns, in that it was 'doing ok', it wasn't thriving, and it wasn't in terminal decline.

That said macro-economic forces and external factors forced the town to think differently (a new Waitrose food store, additional housing growth and improving competition).

Building on the interest in the development of the neighbourhood plan, local community members helped to create a 'Town Team' approach to driving forward the town and its activity. Local champions, including residents, businesses and leisure operators sought external advice to develop an action plan that focussed on improving the experience for resident and visitor customers. The research was funded through Section 106 contributions with a further budget for implementation. The plan identified a wealth of 'assets' for the town to build on, some were physical buildings, environment, shops, cinema, restaurants and fairly visible and obvious. Others were 'unearthed' and moulded into strengths for the town these included the passing nearby national cycle way, existing nearby festivals, the many hotels, gastro pubs and guest houses on the edge of the Cotswolds.

Whilst some were in the town and many were remote, they were all considered assets and valuable generators of footfall, customer visits to be shared and linked to all assets. A new dedicated website Discover Malmesbury built on the connectivity, becoming a self-funding asset. Additional revenue streams were realised from visiting markets and other town centre activity. The new Waitrose was viewed, and used as, a draw to the town, rather than being a drain on it.

A small market town, created critical mass and impact in a very competitive environment through using the visible assets, focussing on all customer groups, revealing underutilised existing assets and incorporating them into the town's persona.



Exemplar: Cathedral Quarter Blackburn

The Local Authority identified over a decade ago that Blackburn needed to improve its town centre leisure offer to be more family focussed and eating oriented. The historic Cathedral (the only one in Lancashire) was adjacent to the town centre, but not considered part of it and not visited by town centre users. As part of a strategy to widen the town centre appeal, counteract the inward-looking 1960s shopping centre and to create an improved customer experience / public realm, the Council and other stakeholders including the diocese used the planned redevelopment of Cathedral assets to pump prime investment and to create a new vibrant part of the town centre. Working with a non-retail asset (the Cathedral) resulted in new F&B quarter with five new eating and socialising venues, new office accommodation and a new hotel, new improved public realm and a new event space.

Cathedral Quarter has not stopped the macro retail issues impacting on Blackburn; however it has helped to increase catchment area, customer appeal and provide additional reasons to use the town centre, both during the day and into the evening. It has led to wider investment and is ideally positioned to create a halo effect between it and the core town centre retail offer.

Exemplar: Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre Market

A recognised case study for how a new locally curated ‘event’ can become a regional institution within a relatively short timescale. The first market was circa 18 years ago.

The Christmas fayre market was instigated by the town’s tourism team, not the markets team, initially as a small event, simply to provide another reason for local residents to come into the town. This has grown to a major four-day event. The Christmas Fayre is now in its eighteenth year, and includes more than 300 stalls situated throughout the historic Georgian town centre. According to the local press, the four-day fayre attracted around 130,000 visitors.



Make the most of major transport links

Aim: Recognising that the links to other towns and surrounding cities are essential, ensure that major transport links are used as effectively as they can be. Make rail stations attractive hub/gateway locations. Ensure major road connections are reinforced as necessary. Identify where improvements could be most effective and advocate for these.

What needs to happen: Transport links are crucial for the growth of the towns. The economic importance of commuting links to surrounding cities – particularly Leeds, York, Hull, Doncaster, and the Teesside conurbation - is evident in many of the towns in this study, as are transport links that support inward tourist visits. Conversely, some towns are not immediately connected to the rail network or are dependent on parkway stations, and some towns are linked by single carriageway A-roads and B-roads which are vulnerable to disruption.

Therefore, improving these transport assets is essential for maximising their value to the towns. In practice, this means:

- Improving the attractiveness of railway and bus stations as gateways to their towns, and improving links from these hubs to the town centres.
- Local transport schemes to address the interface between major routes and local roads where there are issues.
- Exploring the use of technology to communicate where there are issues in real-time – congestion, delays, etc. – and help residents and commuters plan around this.

Over the long-term, ensuring that towns are well-positioned to apply for pots of (national) infrastructure funding will be important. Therefore, identifying and building the case for specific investments will be necessary.

How might this be delivered? Addressing these issues does not rest at a town level. Rather it involves the local planning authorities working with adjoining areas, the LEP, Transport for the North, Highways England, and Network Rail. Nonetheless, it is important that local planning authorities understand the investment priorities and work actively to secure funding where possible.

What could success look like? Ensuring that the towns have adequate transport links to support their growth will generate:

- Improved rail and bus station facilities, with these hubs becoming more attractive gateways to our towns, and having better links to local centres.
- Better co-operation between the different governance and institutions involved in transport infrastructure
- Clearer vision of investment priorities for local planning authorities, with good evidence about where any additional funding could have the greatest impact.

Exemplar: St Helens Train Station redevelopment

In St Helens, the redevelopment of the train station had a significant economic impact on the town, incentivising new office developments and inspiring a wider regeneration programme in the town centre. By providing an accessible and attractive gateway and by connecting the town more effectively to the rail network, passenger numbers have increased, and St Helens has grown as a centre of business and professional services.



In 2005, Merseyrail and Network Rail began work to redevelop St Helens Central. The passenger facilities were limited and the station in a poor state, in clear contrast to surrounding buildings. The plans were to demolish and replace the existing station building, adding a footbridge and lifts to improve accessibility. Completed in 2007 and costing £6.2m, the station has proved a success.

Station demand increased from 413,000 in 2006/7 to 685,000 in 2009/10, and two new office investments – a 39,000 square foot commercial office space and 23,000 square foot three-story glass building – have opened nearby. The George Street Quarter surrounding the station has become a thriving leisure, residential and business centre and the station has become a clear asset for the town, used in all of its promotional materials.⁵²

Improve local transport links within places

Aim: Review existing provision and boost accessibility through shuttle bus services, better walk/cycle routes, or improved parking in centres.

What needs to happen: Links within towns are vital to improving the sense of place and community. The specific challenges will vary by town, but typical issues are likely to be:

- Poor connectivity for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians between major edge-of-town housing or commercial sites and the town centre, which therefore deprives the centre of potential business and isolates residents from their town centre.
- Lack of EV charging points in centres making it hard for local residents and businesses to transition to electric vehicles.
- Lack of public transport links, particularly to out-of-town business and retail parks.
- Lack of car parking and/or poorly located car parking. This includes car parking which takes up valuable public space (e.g. a former market square) and which could be better located near to a centre but not within it.
- Poor transport interchanges and/or bus terminus facilities which impede journeys between towns and discourage use of public transport.

How might this be delivered? The solutions to these issues will vary by place. However, solutions which take advantage of the scale of the towns include:

- Local car clubs, vehicle sharing schemes and cycle sharing schemes.
- Repurposing car parking which has been allowed over time to encroach on public spaces (e.g. former market square spaces and on-street car parking in central locations). Providing this car parking in more appropriate places and encouraging pedestrianisation in very central areas will enhance the quality of place. This includes provision of park and ride facilities where appropriate.
- Enhancing pedestrian and cycle links – including to edge-of-town housing and commercial sites.
- Encourage walk / cycle to school days, ensuring appropriate safety provisions for children.

⁵² *The Value of Station Investment Report*, Steer Davies Gleave, 2011.

- Accessible EV charging infrastructure as standard in all car parks.

What could success look like? Better transport links between places will:

- Connect housing development, business and industrial units and town centres via public transport links and improved interchange facilities
- Facilitate repurposed car parking and efficient use of public spaces, mixed use areas and green spaces
- Encourage positive public health outcomes through provision of walking and cycling routes or paths
- Support the transition to electric vehicles.

Exemplar: Lincolnshire

With CallConnect, Lincolnshire has set up an on-demand bus service, helping people in its rural communities to travel between towns easily and affordably. Covering four areas in North Lincolnshire, the service is helping to make bus travel viable in remote places that have suffered most from bus cuts and declining passenger numbers.

Bus services have declined dramatically across the UK – there are now more passenger journeys in London than in the rest of the country combined. In small towns and rural communities the decline is even starker, and cuts to services and rising fares have exacerbated already falling passenger numbers.

With CallConnect, passengers declare in advance where they would like to be and when. The council will then design bespoke bus routes to pick up the people who have requested a journey. Customers can book and check bus availability and submit requests, cancel or modify their trips and track the service at any time of day. It is one of several schemes on offer designed to transport people around the area: Lincolnshire County Council runs community car schemes, accessible community buses and scooter hire, allowing it to cater to the needs of different demographics in these places.



Upgrade and enhance social infrastructure to attract new residents

Aim: Assess current provision of social infrastructure, then implement programmes and projects to improve the quality of infrastructure and institutions as well as how frequently they are utilised, supporting new and existing town residents throughout their lives.

What needs to happen: Good quality community infrastructure, such as quality schools, care centres, hospitals and more, is vital for attracting new residents and supporting existing residents. In particular, the quality of schooling, childcare (early years), and local healthcare provision is an important consideration for people seeking to move to a town. Local healthcare provision will be a central factor in providing quality care to towns' rapidly ageing demographics.

The anchor role that major institutions (schools, colleges, hospitals and other public services) play in local economies and communities has rightly begun to attract more interest from economists and politicians in recent years, for example through the One Public Estate initiative. The quality of local institutions pairs with local assets and strengths to determine the resilience, identity and potential of places. We need to look at embedding institutional strength in towns.

Cuts to local government finance have increased the pressures on local institutions. In many towns, this has reduced their ability to collaborate and provide town leadership. Town economies will be empowered by combining economic and social investment in people from birth onwards, prioritising early intervention, school readiness, preventative health, and better or more tailored education and skills.

How might this be delivered? We recommend that the LEP and partners undertake a review of social infrastructure and consider how these can be supported / improved where there are challenges. There will likely be areas for improvement across the lifecycle in almost every town:

- In **early years**, social infrastructure can be made more accessible or inclusive through the provision of subsidised childcare. Young children will also benefit from improved healthcare offerings, setting them on the course for healthy lifestyles through access to adequate nutrition and health habits from an early age.
- For **children**, towns should focus on attainment in schools, as well as healthcare support to help young people maintain health, active lifestyles as well as providing access to social, emotional and mental health supports – perhaps through provision of 'school challenge'-type initiatives. Whilst recognising that local authorities have limited levers to enforce change, engagement with schools is vital to promoting long-term success as they are important to grow the potential of residents and attract new ones.
- For **older years** residents, supporting at-home healthcare provision, including community-based support, is essential to help manage the growing demands of health institutions.

- For **all residents**, auditing the level of GP provision and working with healthcare partners is vital to ensure a healthy population and workforce. The new Integrated Care Systems provide an opportunity to consider this in partnership with the NHS.

What could success look like? Improving provision of social infrastructure will:

- Support current residents across the lifecycle
- Improve quality of life for current and new residents
- Contribute to towns' attractiveness and appeal for working age populations
- Support individuals and businesses to stay in towns

Assessing and improving social infrastructure will improve towns' attractiveness, but will also help ensure responsible use of public funding. Social infrastructure is often provided or guided by public institutions, and responsible use of funds is increasingly important as oversight and accountability become increasingly important in local governance.

Exemplar: Wiltshire

Providing healthcare services in small towns and rural areas is challenging. Many are remote from healthcare centres, hospitals or childcare, and for those without access to cars it becomes doubly difficult. Healthcare providers, charities and local government are now experimenting with new services to face these challenges.

In Wiltshire, Baby Steps is a council-run childcare programme providing perinatal and antenatal care to mothers in need. The programme supports pregnant people to prepare for the birth of their child, offering them advice in group environments in their towns. Initially set up by the NSPCC and the University of Warwick in Tidworth, the programme targeted expectant parents who were unlikely to attend such classes: people from isolated communities, ethnic minorities and those suffering from mental health issues.

Administered by midwives and family support workers, the programme provides a home visit before the Baby Steps course starts, followed by six antenatal group sessions at the Children's Centre starting when the client is 26-32 weeks pregnant. After the birth, the parents are visited at home 3 weeks after the baby is born and given three group sessions.

In the three years to 2015 185 women took part in the programme. Now taken over by Wiltshire Council's Public Health team, Baby Steps runs in six market towns across the county.

Strengthening identity and community

Work to build the community in places

Aim: Foster community cohesion and identity in order to increase resilience and foster place promotion. Building community will also be vital to improving public health outcomes by providing wellbeing programmes and preventing feelings of isolation.

What needs to happen: Community is one of the biggest assets that market towns can have. Fostering and supporting community links is an important way to address local opportunities and challenges: in terms of skills, in terms of health, and in terms of wellbeing. Places that can get this right are able to ease the pressure of social challenges and maximise the attractiveness of the place to outsiders seeking distinctive and vibrant communities to live in.

How might this be delivered? What is needed in different towns will vary significantly. In some places, community groups will be well-established and functioning at a high level. In these places the challenge will be to engage with groups, to listen to what they need, and to help them to do more. In others, community groups and the sense of community may be limited or confined to specific parts of the community. More work will be needed in these cases to bring people together and to foster networks of likeminded people.

There are a range of things that community initiatives can seek to do. What will be most appropriate will vary from place to place – but can include:

- **Community initiatives to improve public health.** This can include public sporting events / fun runs, community cooking events and competitions, and healthy food festivals.
- **Wellbeing initiatives** such as:
 - Community theatres and art projects
 - public vegetable growing spaces (e.g. Incredible Edible Todmorden)
 - projects such as Men in Sheds to tackle loneliness and social isolation in specific groups of residents
 - befriending schemes, particularly for those at risk of social isolation
- **Community initiatives to improve public spaces.** Matching funds to match community investments of time and money with basic for funding for equipment can help to spur community activity whilst delivering improved public spaces.

What might success look like? Improving community cohesion and identity in the towns will help to:

- Improve public health outcomes through the provision of community initiatives
- Contribute to residents' wellbeing and prevent isolation
- Improve public spaces to foster cohesion and social gatherings
- Ease the pressures of social challenges while maximising the attractiveness of towns

Exemplar: Morecambe, Lancashire

In Morecambe, a community regeneration project is working to revive the town's West End, which suffers from high levels of vacancies and deprivation.

Seaside towns in England have a higher level of deprivation than the English average, and, among these, Morecambe and neighbouring Heysham have some of the highest levels. Since the mid-nineteenth century the economy thrived due to the visitor economy, but, like many other seaside towns, this has declined in the second half of the twentieth century. This has hit the West End particularly hard, as holiday properties and second homes are now derelict or in poor repair.

Set up through Big Local, the lottery funded local development initiative, the West End Million is a collective of different community groups which work together to provide social activities, artistic space, and volunteering support to local people. A key part of the project has been the Exchange, an art shop and a café which then opened studio space. The project has grown in popularity and has repurposed an empty unit in the Arndale Shopping centre into a community studio, with shared workspaces, equipment and private studios.

Attempts to regenerate the West End in the past had focused on drawing in wealthy or middle-income people via the provision of new housing. These strategies fell through with the financial crisis, and their approach disenfranchised existing residents. The West End Million's approach has been more successful, inviting local people to participate and using existing community assets and buildings in imaginative ways, while the Exchange has set its sights on taking over housing, allowing it to offer affordable rents to artists to help keep them in the area.

**Exemplar: Seattle, Washington, USA**

The Seattle Neighbourhood Matching Funds was created in 1988 to provide matching dollars for neighbourhood improvement, organising or projects developed and implemented by community members. The Funds require awardees to contribute an equal amount of capital from the

community, either in the form of volunteered time, donated materials or professional services, or else cash.⁵³

Since its inception, more than 5000 projects have received over \$49m USD in funding, with an additional \$72m USD in community match. The funding is available to neighbourhood groups, community organisations, informal groups and business groups that want to build stronger community connections. Eligible projects must involve community members, improve community, be free and open to all members of the public and occur within Seattle city limits.

One project funded was the Phase II construction of the Beacon Food Forest, which received \$99,960 with \$110,450 matched funding. The Beacon Food Forest produces food for its neighbourhood, provides educational programming and hosts gatherings and events. Phase II of its expansion provided outdoor educational space, compost bins, a tool shed and fruit guild trees. Upon completion, the addition will double the capacity of the site.

Use place promotion to attract visitors and new residents

Aim: Create robust town identities and experiences that draw in visitors as well as new residents, especially skilled young people to supplement ageing. Place promotion will depend to some extent on the effective adaptation of town centres to changing retail and consumer tastes.

What needs to happen: Social media and online tools allow market towns to punch above their weight. Using tools such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, as well as drone photography to capture interesting and dramatic footage, will help build a visual character for a place that will be attractive to visitors and new residents alike. This links to the recommendation above on digital skills. With the right skills training and equipment provision locally, towns and local authorities can encourage local communities to produce and share what is effectively promotional material for their places.

How might this be delivered: Towns should look to attract both visitors and new residents by using place promotion tools, particularly an active online and social media presence to present an attractive public face. The specifics will vary from town to town, but in general towns should be seeking to attract visitors based on their heritage, cultural and local retail offers, as well as their proximity to natural assets. Towns located within commuting distance of productive cities can also turn that to their advantage. Where there is the hotel/visitor accommodation infrastructure locally, developing the local offer to encourage more overnight stays will help grow the local market.

Attracting aspirational residents is a longer-term objective, but one which is made easier by social media tools that allow targeted advertising at particular demographics (e.g. mid-career professionals working in the digital sector in Leeds). This can also be supported by more traditional advertising options – e.g. billboard advertising in major city centre stations – that

⁵³ <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/neighborhood-matching-fund/funded-projects#smallsimpleprojects>

emphasise the possibility of living in a town with a higher quality of life whilst still having great connectivity (transport and broadband).

Again, the specifics will differ from place to place, and this is more applicable to towns with good commuting links to major urban areas. The key point is that promoting the benefits of living in the area to people looking for a different way of living from what is possible in major cities will be one important way of raising the average skills levels and productivity of the towns. Over time, residents attracted to the area may start to work locally, or start-up their own businesses locally – thus boosting the economy of the towns.

The challenge with this recommendation is avoiding gentrification which saps towns of their local character and prices out local residents. Some of the towns in this study are already experiencing some issues with second home ownership and house price affordability. Further research into the issue and development of locally specific policies in certain towns will be important to avoid adverse effects.

What could success look like? Effective promotion of the towns to visitors and our residents will:

- Attract visitors, residents, businesses and industrial opportunities through unique and well-established place offers
- Facilitate high aspirations among residents from all age groups
- Ensure that the benefits of local development reach all resident and local groups
- Require the use of modern tools like social media to improve local identity and awareness

Exemplar Town: Kaslo, British Columbia

The rural town of Kaslo in British Columbia is using a social media campaign to target young people and encourage them to swap the city for small-town life.

Many small towns in British Columbia are struggling to adjust to falling populations. Like in many other countries, urbanisation is having its effect in Canada, putting their economies under strain and social services under-manned.⁵⁴

The BC Rural Centre, a non-profit organisation working to tackle rural challenges in British Columbia, started a competition, asking millennials from big cities to express their interest in coming to Kaslo via their social media accounts. Rural Centre staff worked with existing residents to create videos and social media material to show off the town, and the campaign quickly went, with entrants from all over Canada and even San Diego expressing their interest. The competition winners were given guided tours of the town and its assets, and some made the move permanent.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Attracting Young Urban Creatives to Small Town B.C., British Columbia.

⁵⁵ Ibid

There is a clear trend to exploit using such innovative approaches. In Minnesota, for example, a largely rural state in the American Midwest, from the 1970s onwards, almost every county has gained migrants aged 30-49.⁵⁶ While many of these places lose people in their late teens and early twenties, who leave for work or study, they appeal to young families and professionals who value the quality of life they offer. Appealing to this through promotional campaigns and creative use of social media helps to show off what they offer, their natural beauty, and the communities themselves.



Sustainability and resilience

Encourage companies to invest in sustainable technologies

Aim: ensure that our companies make the best use of available technologies to increase sustainability and resilience.

What needs to happen: There are a range of sustainable technologies that firms can deploy to reduce costs, improve resource efficiency and increase resilience. These include:

- Technologies associated with renewable energy generation, storage and distribution - solar panels, wind power, anaerobic digestion, etc.
- Sustainable vehicles: generally EVs though hydrogen may be applicable in some larger scale uses, and biofuels may also be applicable.
- Circular economy: designing products and supply chains so that resources can be re-used.
- Technologies associated with energy use minimisation - insulation, reclaiming waste heat, heat networks etc.

This is a key focus of the emerging LIS and we concur that this is important for local businesses.

How could this be delivered? Within towns, there is a role for using local networks to share best practice and showcase exemplars. It is important that support is available locally as the application of these technologies typically is not just 'off-the-shelf', it may also require hands-

⁵⁶ A rural brain gain migration, University of Minnesota Extension.

on support and changes to processes to make it work. Sustainability audits aimed at a wide range of businesses can be delivered through a network of advisors supported by signposted online resources.

What could success look like? When local companies commit to investing in sustainable technologies, towns in YNYER and the LEP as a whole will benefit from:

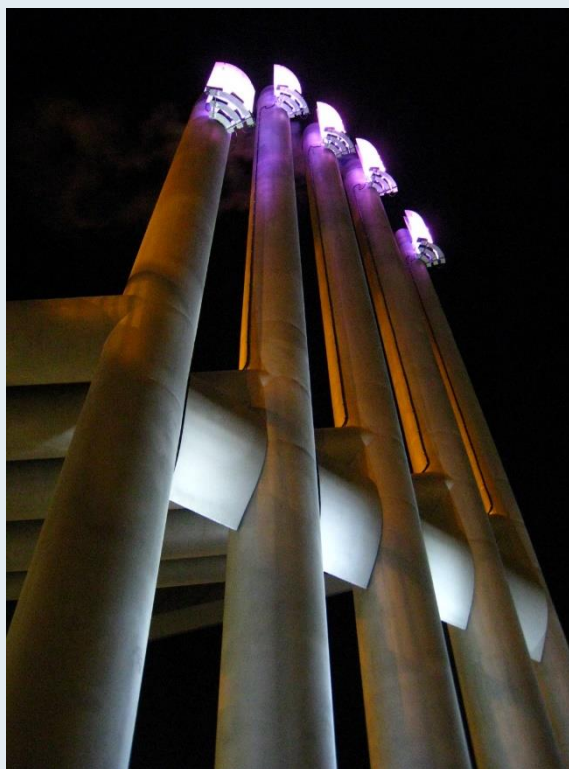
- Improved local sustainability and resilience in the face of forthcoming climate change and shocks
- Active participation from residents and businesses in promoting and using sustainable technologies
- Buy-in for the upcoming LIS, as well as long term engagement with its objectives
- Maintenance of long-term networks and linkages to support institutions and businesses in becoming more sustainable

Exemplar: Industrial Heat Recovery Support Programme

The Industrial Heat Recovery Support Programme is one of the government's recent initiatives to encourage businesses to invest in sustainable businesses and processes. The programme focuses on providing support for energy-intensive businesses to recycle the heat produced by their industrial processes as an energy source for their plants. Businesses that do so lose less energy, generate cost savings and improve the sustainability of their businesses.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has made £18m of funding available for businesses to invest in sustainable heat technologies. Accessed through competitive bids, the money can be spent on feasibility studies, preliminary engineering design or delivery. Emphasis is placed on helping firms to understand where they could reduce energy waste, and how they could repurpose it into productive uses.

Even without such funding, businesses have clear and sometimes urgent incentives to invest in sustainability. In the manufacturing sector, energy costs can absorb huge amounts of resource, and for small businesses often make up the majority of expenses. Ibstock Brick, a building materials manufacturer, has invested significant amounts of money in energy efficiency, ensuring its new manufacturing centre in Leicestershire meets the highest standards for energy efficiency, and retraining staff to moderate their working practices to conserve energy. Ibstock has a closed loop energy system in many of its sites, utilising the energy from waste products: it generates 13.6MW of generation capacity from landfill gas in total. In 2019, the company was named a winner in the category of Most Ethical / Sustainable Manufacturer of the Year at the Made in the Midlands Awards.⁵⁷



Prepare towns to take advantage of clean growth economic opportunities

Aim: Prepare the towns to face the challenges of climate change and provide local people and companies with the skills they will need to meet the economic challenges it will bring with it.

What needs to happen: The accelerating rate of climate change and the short amount of time left to prevent temperatures rising beyond acceptable levels means that major reforms are required within the immediate future. The UK as a whole is transitioning to cleaner energy production, and places across the country will need to think about how to support their natural assets.

In practice, increased investment in sustainability will create a range of employment opportunities – in terms of construction (e.g. installing solar panels, building insulation, green boilers), utility engineering and maintenance (e.g. supporting onshore and offshore wind installations, building new distributed energy infrastructure, and building combined heat and power networks), and enhancing natural capital (e.g. tree planting, bioscience and conservation professionals).

We need to ensure that local people can train and retrain for these new professions, that we support local provision of these services through intelligent procurement, and that we encourage businesses to make the transition to sustainable practices to drive demand for these skills.

⁵⁷ <https://ibstockbrick.co.uk/news/ibstock-brick-wins-regional-business-award-for-our-commitment-to-sustainability/>

How could this be delivered: Existing colleges in the towns will be vital for providing these skills, though the methods of provision and the range of content and courses may require reform in some places. Engaging with employers will be vital to understand need, and collaboration on course content from firms and colleges should be encouraged. Working with schools to help young people (and parents) understand the opportunities will help align supply and demand from learners. Considering the role of existing local authority owned land to supporting the natural capital agenda should be encouraged.

What could success look like? Expanding the provision of green skills in the towns would:

- Create ‘future-proofed’ economic opportunities for local people
- Establish the towns as areas of expertise in green technologies and places to invest
- Help encourage swifter investment in sustainable infrastructure and building upgrades.

Exemplar: Ceredigion

Ceredigion County Council has been working over the long term to reduce emissions and increase sustainability across its towns and villages. The council has put out three ‘five-year plans’ over the last 15 years, proposing wide-ranging measures to transition to renewable energy production and energy efficiency. Since 2007/8, the council has reduced its carbon emissions by 45%, and in the last five years invested £2.1m in energy efficiency and renewable energy, saving £4.2m in the process. With its latest carbon management plan, Ceredigion has targeted 15% reduction in emissions by 2023.

One of its successful schemes has been to explore the potential of district heating in Aberystwyth and the rural town Tregaron. By connecting key public buildings, including the university, secondary school, library and hospital, spare energy generated by these buildings could be shared between them for heating. Its assessment shows that in Aberystwyth, this could lead to a 10% reduction in total carbon emissions for non-domestic buildings.⁵⁸



Work with planning authorities to make homes future-proof

Aim: Provide adequate and appealing housing to new and existing residents of all ages, including older populations as well as younger skilled workers. These homes will need to integrate technologies of the future, withstand changes to the climate as extreme weather events such as flooding become more common, and will need to connect via transport links and accessible routes to town centres.

⁵⁸ [District Heating Feasibility Study Report](#), Ceredigion 2020.

What needs to happen: Many of the towns are either experiencing growth in housing or are planning for housing growth over the next ten years. New housing should be developed to future proof it in relation to the trends we have already examined. Where possible, towns should also look to retrofit housing so that existing housing is also future-proofed. Such futureproofing should include:

- Building homes with generous space standards that make them more appealing to aspirational owners and more flexible for changing use patterns.
- Making homes more accessible for older people, enabling them to live independently at home for longer. Also, building larger family homes that provide space for extended families to live together, and / or supporting homes with ‘granny annexes’ to enable greater care provision at home.
- Ensuring that homes are well linked to town centres. The appropriateness of town centre living will vary by place. Where there are important nightlife uses, town centre living may be less appropriate.
- Providing for high speed broadband connectivity as standard.
- Build low carbon homes - making provision for home renewable energy generation and storage as far as economically viable.
- Retrofitting existing housing to modern energy efficiency standards to increase sustainability and address energy costs.
- Ensuring that the power distribution network is adequate for home EV charging and to enable the sale of renewable energy generated by these homes back to the grid.
- Preventing building of homes in areas at risk from flooding, and investing in flood defences to protect existing areas or enable new development in areas that are currently at risk.
- As well as this, housing can be used to make our communities more future proof, by providing adequate affordable housing for key workers in towns where housing affordability is more of an issue.

How might this be delivered? Local planning authorities and the LEP should work together to develop a design guide based on established national principles. This should be forward looking and ambitious. This should be used in negotiations with developers. Where there are existing local authority owned housing companies, these should be supported to play a more active role in developing the housing we need in places.

What could success look like? If the towns and planning authorities provide adequate, appealing and future-proofed homes, we will:

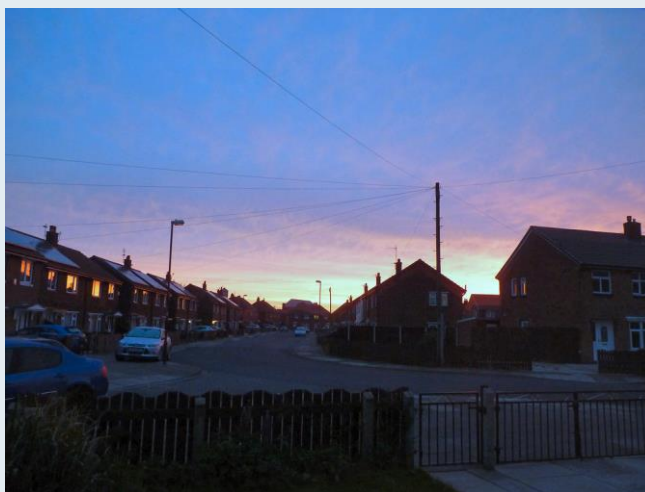
- Ensure residents at all stages of the lifecycle have access to affordable and adequate housing.
- Make housing available and appealing to young and skilled workers in towns.

- Ensure that we have the low carbon sustainable housing we need for the future – reducing energy costs for our residents.
- Foster community cohesion via linkages between housing developments, businesses and town centres, providing for economic growth and town centre identity.
- Make homes accessible for older residents, enabling them to live independently at home for longer.
- Protect our communities from flood risk and climate change.

Exemplar Town: Wigan

Wigan has embarked on a house building programme for older people to guarantee their physical and mental health. With its Sustainable Community Strategy, the council has placed an emphasis on creating purpose-built housing for the aged, providing one- and two-bed apartments in large community developments close to shops and local amenities. The council's strategy has been to redevelop former mining land for these schemes, helping to keep people within the town centre and reuse existing brownfield land in a sustainable way.

Wigan's approach was informed by Greater Manchester Combined Authority's assessment of future housing need, which estimated that 75% of growth needed across the authority was for households aged 65 or older.⁵⁹ Faced with this future demand, Wigan has been proactive in building housing to address its long-term needs.



⁵⁹ *Local Authority Direct Delivery of Housing: Continuation Research*, Janice Morphet and Ben Clifford, Royal Town Planning Institute, 2019.

6 Delivering a transformation in the towns

The previous section set out a series of recommendations that together represents a comprehensive approach to help the towns benefit from future opportunities. We have made suggestions as to how these initiatives could be practically delivered individually. This section now considers how to deliver these initiatives as a whole, in places.

We focus on two main elements:

- Local leadership and ownership of the concept of 21st Century Towns
- Behavioural and attitude change

The aim of this section is not to set out a detailed timeline or plan for implementing the recommendations. Rather, it is to reinforce the point that how these initiatives are delivered is as important as the nature of the initiatives themselves. Local ownership of the concepts set out in this report, couple with a renewed optimism in the potential for change, and supported by strong networks between places to share experiences and best practice will all be crucial to achieve the transformation anticipated in the Local Industrial Strategy.

Local leadership and ownership

Partners we have engaged with as part of this research have stressed that you have strong town councils in these towns. This local leadership will be vital for providing continued drive to implement transformation. Central to this will be the LEP engaging with town councils and district councils around these concepts and helping to consider how the ideas in this report and the proposals of the LIS can best be taken forward locally.

Town Councils will need to find ways to strengthen and widen local partnerships within their places. From our perspective the key elements of this will be:

- **Finding local champions** who will provide commitment over the longer term especially where Council (at every level) resources are stretched. This will need to be someone who provides day to day support and coordination to the wider partners. Without this any local partnership or town team will falter as they will find it difficult to navigate the local issues, permissions regulations etc. needed to implement specific actions.
- **Providing dedicated resource to make these initiatives happen.** A number of local authorities have developed ‘umbrella’ schemes whereby one or more officers are responsible for the coordination of a number of locations. This approach does however require local champions with whom the local authority can work and also who become a focal point for the specific location to enable a focused dialogue to be had with the local

council in order to get things done. Ireland is a good example of this kind of activity within a small town / rural context. This kind of work is essential to create common resources for all towns and to help stop places ‘reinventing the wheel’.

- Whilst local leadership needs to think long-term, **a short term, focused plan** is often the catalyst to galvanising people into action and once improvements are delivered (and seen locally), they are often more receptive to continuing for the longer term. Again local government support is key, as are budgets/financial resources.

In some cases, a Business Improvement District (BID) model may help bring together local businesses to support the kinds of town centre improvements suggested in Section 5. There are numerous BIDs operating in small town locations, including a number in Yorkshire. These include place such as Ilkley (set up in 2019), Skipton (currently in its third term), Lanthwaite (est. 2016 in first term), Brighouse (est. 2019), and Keighley (est. 2016). Larger BID locations include Harrogate (est. 2019), Hull (in its third term) and York (est. 2016).

Resources and funding for these activities are important. Many of the Town Teams set up during the Portas initiative were community-led with local people with a passion for their area coming together over a particular problem. These tended not to last for more than a couple of years as people moved on or grew tired of the constant battle between interested parties or local government who had little resource to support them.

Therefore, it is important that community groups are supported to achieve visible ‘wins’ to encourage them to continue to be involved. In order to provide strategic leadership the LEP may wish to establish more focused support for Place through a dedicated resource, linked to the LIS, or via a funding pot to support delivery on the ground. Criteria should be set which is aligned to the objectives of the LIS and LEP delivery ambitions to support towns across the geography to implement change on the ground. This should include a focus on developing local partnerships, support from their local council, as well as their plans for future sustainability.

Recent funding initiatives from central government have created impetus once again to support high streets and town centres including through both the FHSF and the Towns Fund. The work which has been and is currently being undertaken in these areas should not be lost once the outcome of these competitions is known.

Partnerships and Boards which are brought together to bid for funding should continue to operate and focus on their places with a view to exploring alternative options for delivery. The LEP, as part of or as a supporter of these bids, should provide leadership by aligning growth fund opportunities, as well as possible shared prosperity funding, to enable future delivery to continue.

Behavioural and attitude change

The success of the recommendations in many cases is dependent upon supporting behavioural change and changes in attitudes / aspirations amongst local people. Key examples are:

- Helping to demystify digital technologies and skills for residents and businesses.
- Encouraging more people to get involved in community initiatives.
- Incentivising a shift in transport modes from private vehicles to cycling and walking.

This will not be easy, but recognising that behavioural change is required will be important for ensuring that many of these initiatives succeed. The focus should be on infusing behavioural change into all practices and programmes. In general, this will include:

- Local champions to lead initiatives – e.g. local digital schools champion
- Providing an ‘entry-level’ / easy route in for people to make a change – e.g. cycle to work / school days.
- Presenting change in optimistic and relevant terms to people – e.g. digital skills for older people to help them video call their family living in other parts of the country.

7 What to do next

The recommendations set out in section 5 reflect a long-term programme for the area. In the short term we suggest that there are a smaller number of things that towns and local authorities should be doing to advance this work. This is especially true given that the Government has a strong policy focus on towns at present. We recommend that over the next year:

- **Each town develops a town futures team** - including members of the town council, any local BIDs / TCMs, local businesses and residents groups. The LA should provide a small amount of resource to help support this work (principally staff time).
- **Each town futures team develops a local vision, informed by the LIS and this study.** The vision should have a clear mandate to look long-term and the purpose should be to improve the economy of the town. It should be informed by the evidence on how the town is performing and what the challenges are. It should look at the physical assets and lay-out of the town and how this could be better configured, but it should also look at wider socio-economic opportunities and challenges. The vision should be consulted on locally to gain buy-in.
- **Local authorities should undertake a quick town centre audit for each town** using the checklist provided in the ‘High Quality Places and Connections’ recommendation in Section 5 (page 54 of this report). The aim is to find quick wins that can improve how town centres function – e.g. signage, basic street furniture, lighting, etc. These investments should be made by the local authority in a way which is integrated with the town futures team, so that these teams can demonstrate immediate results and momentum.
- **The LEP should prepare a digital skills strategy** that provides a clear way forward on this important agenda. It should aim to quantify the level of provision at school and FE level, and the level of business demand for these skills locally. It should aim to assess what kinds of skills are needed locally to grow the economy. It should make practical recommendations to enhance skills provision within towns.
- **The LEP should work with Local authorities to roll out the gigabit approach pioneered by the York Digital City team** as part of the Digital York Programme to ensure that all towns have the quality of broadband provision they require. This includes managing the communications challenge around why this infrastructure is needed and why the attendant disruption is worthwhile.
- **The LEP should support local town deals** as exemplars for what can be achieved and share best practice from these processes.
- **Local authorities should develop an active network to share best practice.** Towards the end of this period, the LEP and local authorities should work together to network the towns so that best practice is actively being shared between town futures teams.

Photo credits

The photos and images used in this document are for commercial use. Where not referenced directly in the document, credits are listed below:

Picture credit: Flickr / National Assembly for Wales

Picture credit: Flickr / Kai Hendry

Picture credit: Unsplash / Headway

Picture credit: Flickr / goforchris

Picture credit: ell brown

Picture credit: Unsplash / Naseem Buras

Picture credit: Wikimedia commons / El Pollock

Verkehr in Zahlen, Stadt Münster, 2019.

Birth preparation classes - learn movement and breathing techniques for a positive birth" by [DaisyFoundationLeeds](#)

Flickr / Mike

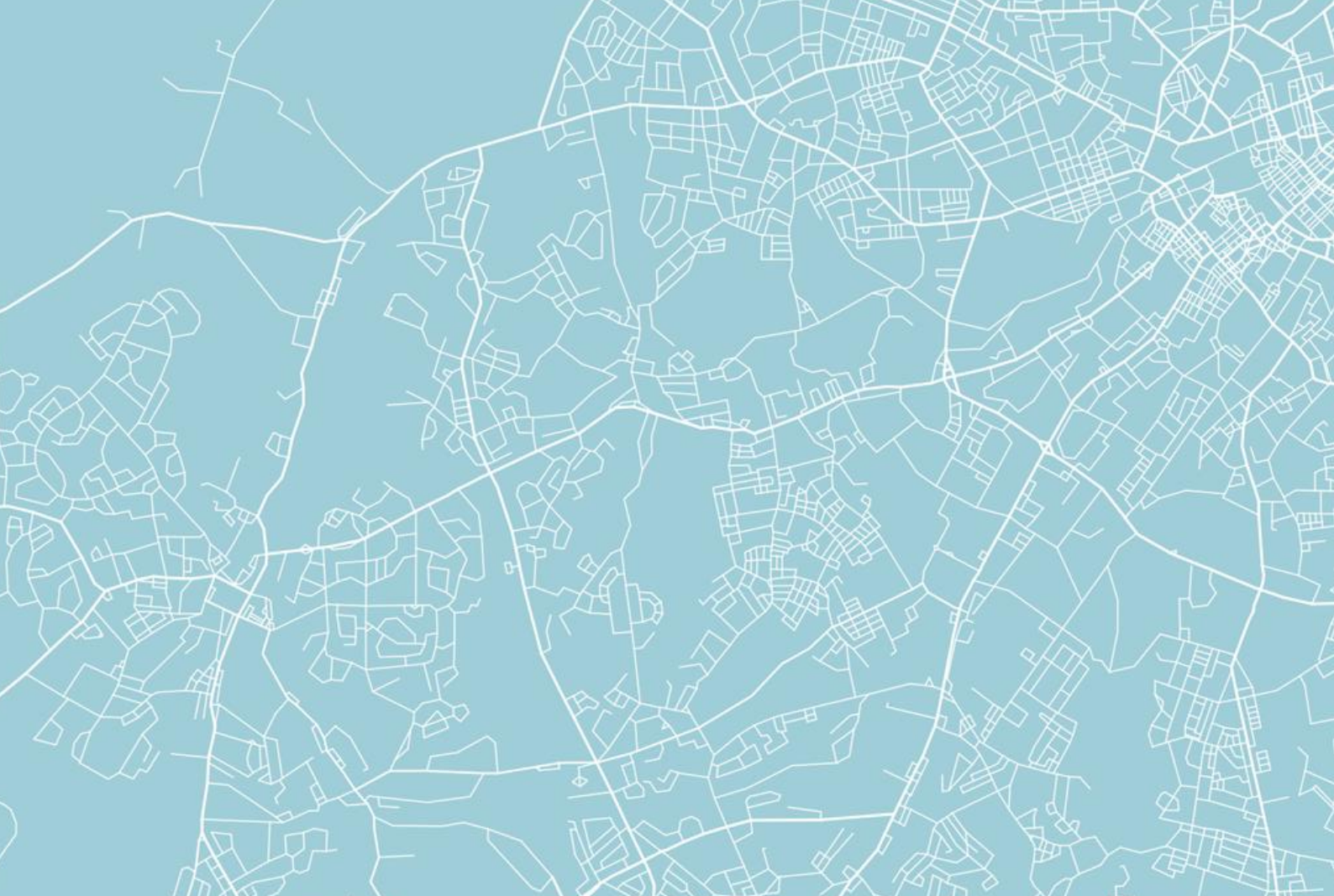
Screenshot taken from /tourenplaner-muensterland.de

Picture credit: Flickr / Mark Jones

"Urban Sunrise" by [LeeRobertsMe](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

Picture credit: Flickr / >littleyiye<

Picture credit: Business Finland



Metro — Dynamics

3 Waterhouse Square
138 Holborn
London
EC1N 2SW

020 3868 3085

Elliot House
151 Deansgate
Manchester
M3 3WD

0161 393 4364

