

Foreword

Our town and city centres are important for many reasons. They are where the important businesses and services we rely on are concentrated; they give places and people a sense of identity, and they are major employers and drivers of growth. However, the past decade has been a challenging one; our traditional high streets have been battered by a storm of disruption with many major retailers going out of business. To understand and support high streets, the Economic and Social Research Council invested £1.5m to investigate the changing nature of retail and town centres, with the expectation that new technologies, original research and knowledge exchange between academics, practitioners and policymakers could also help the renewal process. The High Street UK 2020 project, led by the Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University, was one of nine projects to receive funding from this scheme – and this Special Issue of the *Journal of Place Management and Development* contains the findings of the work.

Through bringing together the UK's leading experts in retail, economic geography, place management, place branding and planning and governance as well as working in partnership with the Association of Town and City Management, 10 UK town centres and a variety of other partners, the High Street UK 2020 project has identified, through scientific means, not only the 25 priorities that will improve the vitality and viability of the High Street but also a helpful framework for town centre renewal. This Special Issue, which is freely accessible to any business, local government official, politician or concerned citizen provides the evidence and guidance for those wanting to change the prognosis of their town centre – from decline back to health.

I would like to personally thank all those academics, retailers, trade associations, property owners, Councillors, MPs, local authority officers and local people that have worked together on this project to develop such a useful and accessible body of knowledge. The findings contained in this Special Issue and the impact the project has already had demonstrate how our town centres can be regenerated through partnership working.

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