



## Peak District Partnership: Future Proofing the Peak District's Town Centres

29-01-2020

### Call to Action

The following recommendations emerged from the 2019 PDP Think Tank, which was attended by 50 key decision makers from across the Peak District. The think tank took place on January 29<sup>th</sup> 2020 (delay caused by the calling of the General Election in December 2019) and had as its focus the future proofing of the Peak District's town centres, by ensuring they remain relevant to the communities they serve (including businesses, residents and visitors).

### The challenges

1. The Peak District's town centres are experiencing a challenge in respect of their purpose, role and identity, which is being impacted by a decline in retail shopping as shopping habits change and high rental charges.
2. Short-term decision making can undermine attempts at longer term planning e.g. to address the climate crisis, across both the public and private sector.
3. Local planning decisions may for different reasons not always reflect the low carbon green agenda
4. There is a lack of co-ordinated action between key decision-makers tasked with driving the future development of the Peak District's town centres, as they are not recognised as part of an integrated whole and this results in missed opportunities.
5. There can be a reluctance on the part of some residents and businesses to embrace change, especially if they feel that they have not been involved in the decision making process that has given rise to the call for change.
6. The Peak District's town centres do not cater sufficiently for some sections of the community e.g. young people. This is contributing to an imbalance in the demographic profile of the community as younger people move away.
7. Historical and infrastructural limitations mean that the Peak District's town centres are not well placed to benefit from the green transport revolution and unless addressed, this is likely to undermine their future growth potential.
8. The Peak District's town centres suffer from poor public transport systems, which undermines key aspects of the economy e.g. the night time economy.
9. The night time economy and the general vibrancy of most of our town centres suffer from a lack of town centre residents.
10. Many of our town centre premises have vacant or under-utilised accommodation e.g. above high street retail outlets.

11. There is insufficient consideration given to innovations that could drive efficiencies e.g. multi-functioning retail spaces.
12. The barriers to new business start-ups are more significant in the Peak District's town centres when compared with the surrounding towns and cities.
13. The Peak District's town centres are not benefiting from the emerging trend towards self-employment amongst the younger working population.
14. The Peak District's town centres are at a technological disadvantage when it comes to digital connectivity and this can limit the opportunities for new business start-ups.
15. The benefits of rural living are not being effectively communicated to would-be residents and business owners.
16. The absence of an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem, including affordable co-working spaces and integrated business support services, can inhibit new business start-ups and growth. At the same time, it is recognised that the delivering of viable spaces in a rural context has its challenges
17. There are certain UK wide trends e.g. land banking, that require a national level policy shift.

### **The opportunities**

1. There needs to be effective inter and intra-agency and between-town collaborations across the Peak District, in order to maximise the opportunities for our town centres to become places where people wish to live, work, visit and play.
2. Ensure effective cross-community engagement including the business and resident community, in order to build the vision, proposition and messaging for each of our town centres.
3. Harness the energies of passionate individuals to deliver innovations, whilst ensuring that the views of the broader community (refer to 2) are respected and reflected in the developments alongside financial viability considerations.
4. Further work is needed to introduce new schemes and support existing schemes that can support inter-generational and inter-community engagement in delivering on the collective vision for our town centres.
5. Ensure a shared top level identity, whilst ensuring that themes are identified and developed for each town centre that draws on the unique identity of the town and resident community.
6. Deliver high quality experiences not just for visitors but residents to increase dwell time and try to ensure that the needs of young people are adequately addressed.
7. A vibrant events programme should be part of the product mix for each town centre, but one which builds an annual calendar of events across all of the town centres of the Peak District.
8. Look to innovate through the creation of some multi-functioning spaces, including pop-up outlets e.g. in libraries, public houses etc.
9. Encourage and drive an entrepreneurial strand throughout our communities, which starts in our primary and secondary schools and helps to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that includes shared co-working spaces, incubation units and low cost business grow-on accommodation.
10. The local authorities and other providers including East Midlands Chamber, the D2N2 Growth Hub and the University of Derby, should work together to ensure an effective business support service as a second key component of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.

11. Consideration should be given to incentivising business start-ups and growth through subsidised rent and a rates relief scheme where possible.
12. Ensure that the low carbon green agenda is reflected as far as possible in all future town centre developments as part of a sustainable approach.
13. Look to embed the UN's Sustainable Development Goals within the regeneration work needed to transform our high streets.
14. The town centres should investigate how best to adopt best practices drawn from smart cities across the globe, for digital solutions and connectivity, including the potential roll-out of augmented reality schemes.
15. An integrated public transport system is required to bring both local residents and visitors into and out from our town centres. This is especially important if we are to ensure a vibrant night time economy.
16. Greater consideration needs to be given to the infrastructure that needs to be in place to support a green transport revolution.
17. Town centre businesses to focus wherever possible on the local sourcing of produce and products for economic, social and environmental reasons.
18. There is a need to drive initiatives that increase the number of people living in the town centres and one mechanism for delivering this is to ensure that all space is put to effective use, including the first and second floor accommodation above high street retail outlets.
19. There needs to be targeted and innovative messaging to promote both the unique identities of our town centres, as well as the opportunities for our town centres to serve as hubs for entrepreneurial activities. The messaging should be used to target key audiences including those who were born and grew up in the towns, but who have since moved away. It should also promote the benefits of rural living not least from a health and wellbeing perspective.
20. Lobby government in order to address the challenges of land banking and excessive rental terms.

## **Addendum**

The emergence of the COVID-19 related public health crisis, will inevitably impact on the ability of key decision-makers across the Peak District to address the challenges and opportunities referenced within this document. However, the crisis also presents an opportunity to re-imagine and re-position our town centres for a 'new normal' and to embrace many of the identified opportunities as catalysts for positive change.

## **Next steps**

1. Members of the PDP Executive to review and build on the above points before finalising a draft text, which will then be circulated for review and feedback to the CEOs of DDDC and HPBC, as well as the CEO of PDNPA, the MD of MPD&D and the Chair of BPD.
2. PD to call a meeting of the above to collectively consider the challenges and opportunities document and agree tangible steps to begin to deliver the necessary changes.
3. The key stakeholders to take steps to begin to deliver changes including through collaborative initiatives.
4. The first part of the 2020 Peak District Think Tank, which will be scheduled to take place in mid-December 2020, will provide the key decision makers (referenced at 1) an opportunity to feedback on measures they are implementing to address the challenges identified during the 2019 Think Tank event.

**Dr. Peter Dewhurst**  
**Chair, Peak District Partnership**

