

Winchester District High Streets' Priorities Plan 2021-22

Revised final Sept 2021

A tactical one-year plan to reinvigorate our District's high streets post COVID-19, to support our businesses to reopen and innovate and to enable people to enjoy social and cultural experiences again.



The need for a Winchester District High Streets' Priority Plan

Over the past year we have all had to respond to, and cope with, the extraordinary times and challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about. The social and travel restrictions, coupled with businesses being required to close to in-person services have particularly impacted our retail, hospitality, leisure and cultural sector. This sector is a major element of our economy accounting for nearly 28% of employee jobs¹ and making up 25% of our enterprise². These businesses, attractions, events and festivals also make Winchester District a cultural hub and our city and market towns interesting and vibrant places to visit and spend time.

The impact of the past year has seen headline news about major business closures – Debenhams, Laura Ashley – and whilst these were already facing difficulties from changing retail needs and demands, COVID-19 has accelerated and compounded these problems. The “future of the high street” was a topic of debate before 2020, with many including government recognising the need to reimagine our high streets. The High Streets Task Force and government’s Town Fund were established for this very reason.

The need, therefore, to develop a tactical plan to ensure Winchester district’s high streets are vibrant places where people want to come to has never been more pressing. The city council takes these challenges seriously and will lead and collaborate with others to reinvigorate our places for everyone to enjoy and where our businesses are resilient and prospering. We will adopt a partnership approach with stakeholders, businesses and residents to help in the implementation of this plan.

It is important to debate and discuss the changes that are happening and those we wish to plan in order for our high streets and centres to remain vibrant, exciting places. Change is difficult but there is clear support for working together to be prepared and ahead of the game. Post COVID-19 the focus need to be on enablement and speed; seize the changes and act and be competitive. The challenge will be the ability to get it all done in the year....

¹ Source NOMIS: Employee Jobs 2021

² Source ONS: UK BUSINESS: ACTIVITY, SIZE AND LOCATION - 2020

The Priority Plan Framework

Our objectives are to:

- **Build on our high streets' brand** and build confidence.
- **Create better connections** between residents and their local centres.
- Strengthen the connection between organisations, businesses and events to **create a whole town experience for the benefit of all.**
- Make more of our **places as social and community hubs.**
- **Celebrate what we have** and our new successes - independent retail, festivals, events, attractions, creative and cultural venues.
- **Foster business resilience** so that our high street businesses survive, capitalise on change, grow and prosper.

We will do this by using the levers available to us:

- **Lead** – be responsible for the things we have control over, recognising we will need others to help achieve these.
- **Enable** – help and support others to deliver through funding, regulation, planning.
- **Influence** – create a shared agenda with partners working to common goals.
- **Complement** – generate added value by aligning programmes and activities with each other.

The success of the work in meeting these objectives will be judged on how well our high streets recover. So, action will need to:

- Bring footfall and unit vacancy rates back to where they were before.
- Increase spend and lengthen dwell time.
- Create a compelling reason for people to come today.
- Strengthen reasons to return.

Specific performance indicators that will be monitored and reviewed quarterly (where data is available) with a full report of impacts and outcomes at the end of the programme in April 2022. They are:

- Footfall
- Vacancy rates
- Business closures / openings
- City Centre WIFI use
- Car parking use
- Marketing response rates and reach

Our High Streets

Winchester city

Winchester city centre is an important hub for not only city residents but for the district and beyond. The concentration of businesses, services, retail, leisure and cultural uses attracts residents, visitors and workers from across Hampshire.

The retail mix is supported by a strong presence of independent shops that offer a different and quality experience over the national chains. Winchester city has around 100 food and drink outlets and 180 retail outlets. In total there are just over 700 businesses in the BID area.

There are a number of key leisure and entertainment venues including museums, theatres, cinema, escape rooms, and significant historic buildings and attractions. These are enhanced by the varied cultural and sporting events and festivals that take place annually.

A visitor survey in 2019, of which 65% of respondents were visitors, showed the predominant reason for visiting Winchester was leisure (86%), shopping (61%) and visiting a restaurant or café (49%).

The Council's 2019 residents' survey found that nearly 50% of respondents visited the city centre at least every week. The main reasons for visiting were retail (70%), to visit a café or restaurant (52%), food shopping (43%) and just a trip out (42%). Asked what would make them visit more 28% said better selection of retail and 17% availability of car parking.

District centres and market town high streets

The market towns of Alresford, Bishop's Waltham, Wickham and Denmead, are important hubs for their communities offering quality, specialist convenience and services. These high streets rely on local residents and visitors enjoying their historic and rural qualities for footfall and trade.

Alresford, Wickham and Bishop's Waltham are visitor destinations. Their historical market town centres and high streets have strong food and drink offers coupled with small independents retailers serving local residents and attracting those from neighbouring towns and villages. Some also have events and festivals that bring visitors and build a brand identity. Others have clusters of special retailers, such as antiques and restored furniture in Wickham which has attracted TV features.

Due to the historic assets in these towns that depict the rural charm of the Hampshire countryside, these district centres and high streets need to continue to promote themselves as destination for a unique experience of independent retail and food and drink offers with easy access to the countryside.

Wickham

Wickham has a mixture of independent retailers and food and drink outlets, with four cafes, and three pubs, there are also three retail outlets (Cheesepeake Mill, Bay Tree Walk and Warwick Lane) specialising in antiques.

Wickham also hosts large events such as Taste of Wickham and the Wickham Festival.

Alresford

The town centre has lots of independent retail shops, with a selection of high end fashion and gift shops. The town also has a selection of restaurants and hotels, including a Michelin recommended restaurant, Pulpo Negro. The Watercress Line at Alresford train station is a popular tourist attraction and has over 120,000 visitors per annum.

Alresford also hosts some popular events including the Watercress Festival, Alresford music festival and a renowned agricultural show. The Alresford Millennium and Alre Valley Trail is a self-guided trail that links together footpaths around the town and along the river with illustrated information boards introducing the history of Alresford, its inhabitants, railway line, wildlife and rural surrounds.

Bishop's Waltham

Bishop's Waltham is a historic market town with a busy high street of independent shops and it also boasts a large English Heritage site at Bishop's Waltham Palace close to the town centre. It also has 11 places offering food and drink and two businesses offering accommodation. The town is also in close proximity to Marwell Zoo, with over 500,000 visitors per year.

Denmead

Denmead village centre consists of 26 small independent businesses in a small parade of shops. It is a popular convenience shopping for local residents and passing residents from neighbouring areas. There are also five country pubs in the area.

Whiteley

Whiteley Shopping Village pre-pandemic attracted 6 million visitors a year and historically has low vacancy rates. The shopping centre includes high street fashion stores and a selection of restaurants, cafes and a cinema. The centre also offers trails, competitions and displays at key points throughout the year to attract families.

Foundations are already in place - Working together

The council, parish and town councils, chambers of commerce, partnerships and businesses have focused their efforts on ensuring people can continue to shop and use our high streets. A sense of collaboration and partnership has emerged, as is often the case in the face of adversity, which creates a strong foundation from which to build, united in our desire to see our high streets return to what they were.

New partnerships have formed with people and organisations coming together to support our places and businesses and this leadership and collaboration needs to be sustained as a legacy and positive outcome from the past year.

The local response to COVID-19 creates a springboard for future growth and change. The following are just a few of the initiatives that demonstrate this strong foundation.

Retail and hospitality businesses have adapted and flexed their ways of working – creating online services, click and collect and take away services for both customers but also those in need within their local communities.

New business models



This small family-run butchers saw a significant increase in demand once restrictions were introduced. The business offered a free local telephone delivery service with no minimum order, and utilised their Facebook page to promote this option. This led to over 50 orders on the first day. Over this time, the business has tripled its weekly turnover and significantly expanded their customer base. Many customers are now doing weekly orders and they hope these new shopping habits will continue with the introduction of a new e-commerce website.

Attractions have created virtual experiences to enable people to remain connected to culture.

Virtual Winchester <https://www.visitwinchester.co.uk/virtualwinchester/>

Marwell and Play to the Crowd



Marwell Webcams



Four Dames in search of a Panto! (On Demand)

The council secured funding to **create safe places and support local businesses** with social distancing signs and pavement demarcations, installing 21 hand sanitiser stations installed in locations across the city and market towns, deploying COVID Marshalls and Ambassadors and helping businesses through grant payments worth £34.6m.

Support local and shop online: <https://www.visitwinchester.co.uk/support-local/>



What more can be done

This is one-year tactical plan captures the actions that focus all our efforts on supporting the district's high streets at this critical moment and as the government implements its four step roadmap to easing lockdown restrictions.

This plan will form part of the longer-term strategic work that was in early stages of development before 2020. This includes the 10-year Winchester District Green Economic Development Strategy, the Winchester Movement Strategy and five-year Destination Management Plan.

It will set the groundwork and future building blocks for the longer-term transformation of our high streets, cultural offer and visitor economy across the district. Now is the time to be proactive and influence the change we want to see.



We recognise there are some sections of our retail, hospitality, leisure and cultural sector that have the potential to attract more people from under-represented audiences, enhance the visitor experience and contribute more to our economy. However, they require strategic and coordinated development in order to realise this potential. In this year ahead it is recommended that work starts on three specific opportunities:

1. Explore what is needed to build a strong, vibrant night-time economy and how can we achieve this.
2. Develop a cultural manifesto with key partners such as Play to the Crowd and Hampshire Cultural Trust, Winchester School of Art and others.
3. Review our street markets so their value and benefit is fully realised and offer a quality experience.

It is important to acknowledge there is much activity and many stakeholders and partners working to support businesses and high streets. We must be alert to the fact we may need to focus on a key footfall driver, and to do one thing that generates a significant level of excitement and profile, and not disperse energies across too many small projects.

Our Objectives

Build on our high streets' brand and build confidence

There needs to be a concerted effort to build more strongly, effectively and collaboratively the profile of the city and market towns to present a compelling offer with different and unique experiences. These could perhaps be ones not expected in historic centres or that have not been seen before; encouraging people to return to high streets will be a challenge and so we have to give good reasons to visit.

Now is the time to seize change, adapting and expanding the breadth of our offer, putting in place new attractors that will interest and excite a wider audience. We want our high streets to be used and enjoyed by:

- families,
- young people,
- local residents,
- daytime workforce,
- home workers,
- visitors (regional to international).

This presents a real opportunity to showcase the character and identity of our different high streets and district centres, playing to our strengths but increasing the leverage we can gain from our brand. We also need to understand the extent of our virtual presence and online footprint and how effectively we are outreaching.

Suggested approaches, especially in the market towns include:

- Promoting trails and unique character
- Group travel – familiarisation and actual group visits.
- Cycling routes and promotion of stops
- On line presence / access to information
- Increase dwell time with “things to do” itineraries and packages of activities
- Information on parking
- Signage to special and unique attractions

Building confidence will require a focus on the quality of place in terms of security and safety and cleanliness and appearance. This is about getting the basics right with attention given to:

- State of bins and frequency of emptying
- Pavement repair – uneven and broken / patching
- Litter, weeds and gutter cleaning

Create a better connection between residents and their local centres

Over the past year with COVID travel restrictions people have rediscovered their local high street and what they have to offer and our Stay local / Love local campaigns have further promoted our local centres and businesses. We have worked with the market towns for a number of years helping to facilitate community events and this provides a platform from which to develop better and lasting connections between residents and their local high streets.

The Vision for Winchester was created through extensive local community participation and it will be important to continue to involve these local residents in the mobilisation of the agreed priorities.

The new daytime population of home workers also need to be given a reason to use the high street, and this can be encouraged by new flexible / co-working spaces. As well as internal shared spaces we need to provide outdoor places for people to meet, more seating for rest and relaxation, and to develop the concept of the 15-minute city/town where everything is close by and easily accessed.

Strengthen the connection between organisations, businesses and events to create a whole town experience for the benefit of all.

Winchester district has developed a reputation for its varied programme of year-round festivals. From jazz to chamber music, fashion to poetry and where all artistic genres are celebrated. Of these some are major events in the calendar that attract large numbers of visitors from far afield, including the Hat Fair, the UK's longest continually running festival of outdoor arts. Others have a more local focus but nevertheless are central to the community's events programme.

Collectively they all create a kaleidoscope of colourful events and festivals that attract a wide and varied audience and demographic. But this opportunity is far from exhausted. Current and proposed new events offer the opportunity to further develop the reputation of the Winchester district and its brand, to attract more residents and visitors, influencing them to stay longer, spend more, return and recommend to others.

The true benefit of the festivals and events programme is what it has the potential to offer holistically. It offers the opportunity for businesses and organisations across the district to directly engage and in doing so the consumer benefits from a themed and joined up offer and the businesses benefit too from increased custom. Making the most collectively of these festivals will enable everyone to benefit and create the sense that the whole place is part of the celebrations. Businesses will be encouraged to support and to be part of these events by for example, creating a product offer that reflects the theme of the event, develop tailored themed promotions, staging themed window displays, creating satellite spaces to host elements of an event to more widely spread the event coverage and so on.

Make more of our places as social and community hubs.

As much market commentary has highlighted the reasons people will use high streets is changing to have greater emphasis on social and community experiences. In the short-term vacant shops and under let spaces could be used for a variety of different uses; more creative and artistic activities or sports such as the pop-up table tennis in the Brooks Shopping Centre. A proactive approach is required to work with landlords, planning, estates etc. to quickly activate shop fronts and vacant buildings so the high street retains its attractiveness and to prevent dead spaces and areas that people start to avoid. A group that brings these stakeholders together is required to enable short term uses to be agreed quickly and any barriers overcome early.

Specifically for the city the delivery programme for Central Winchester Regeneration provides the opportunity to activate unused and new community / social spaces at Kings Walk and Friarsgate Medical centre. There is also the potential to use space at the rear of the Bus Station, off Busket Lane for pop-up events and performances.

The Visitor Information Centre will enhance its role, not only as a one-stop shop for all the latest information and advice on what is happening across the district, but also as a community hub. It will engage further with local organisations and community groups to help support their programmes of activity. This might take the form of drop-in opportunities, showcases, displays and small exhibitions, offering a direct channel of engagement to the resident community.

Celebrate what we have and our new successes

Winchester city and our market towns are blessed with a higher than average share of independent businesses. This presents an opportunity for the district to capitalise on specialist retailing as an attractor to residents and visitors. We will continue to investigate and develop tactical activities and events such as Independent Business Month, as well as Independent Trails and an Independents' Market and an independents' district-wide e-commerce platform amongst others are areas to explore.

The independents are the ones that have been at the forefront of new ways of working and we need to encourage, showcase and support this change.

The VIC will continue its work in showcasing local businesses, both established and start up, in addition to its enhanced community role. This will be reflected in its product ranges as well as working with local businesses and organisations to provide demonstrations, workshops, exhibitions and displays as well as other promotional and engagement activities, maximising the "Made in Winchester" opportunity. To promote this new purpose, it will develop a tactical delivery role in the "Discover" marketing campaigns which have been delivered since March 2020 exploiting the "discover what is on your doorstep" and "discover what is happening today" messaging.

The varied range of food and drink businesses are a key asset to the district, including several award winning and nationally reputed independent and chain restaurants, many

capitalising on local produce. The city will be benefitting from new food and drink offers in what was the Guildhall café and a new tenant in Abbey Mill. Other new and developing food and drink offers will emerge across the district, all of which operate as an attractor as well as forming key elements of a combined experience for visitors and residents. Opportunities to further develop the district's reputation around food and drink exist and tactical opportunities around food and drink trails, themed events and so on should be explored.

Foster business resilience

Businesses recognising, adapting and capitalising on the changing high street landscape and consumer behaviours, emerging pre-pandemic but which COVID-19 has intensified, will be key to forming resilient business models. The council through its regulatory role, e.g. licencing and planning, helps manage and create a supportive environment for businesses to operate.

The Additional Restriction Grants programme, funded by central government, has enabled the council to direct grant to those businesses most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. These include a Hardship Fund and a Transformation, adaptation and diversification grant.

As mentioned earlier, the city council will fund the development and launch of a dedicated independent co-operative e-commerce platform with related combined delivery service.

THE HIGH STREET PRIORITY PLAN
April 2021- March 2022

Objectives	Levers			
	Lead	Enable	Influence	Complement
Build our brand	New campaigns and marketing promotions: trails, things to do itineraries; packages of activities. Target new audiences: residents; families; newly working from home	Street cleanliness and repair for a quality public realm	Commence work on strategic propositions for: 1. Night-time economy 2. Cultural Manifesto 3. Street Markets	Build our virtual presence and online footprint alongside partners activity
Create connections	Stay Local / Love local campaigns. Places to meet information / promotion	Mobilise the delivery of the Vision for Winchester actions. 15 minute city: Culture and Communities	Flexible co-working spaces in local high streets.	
Culture and creativity for the benefit of all	Promote a holistic and curated programme of festivals and events	Support businesses to engage with festivals and events so they are whole town experiences. Hospitality trade to link to local producers / events to offer weekend packages.	Food and drink - Hampshire Fare – work with the providers and producers across the district.	Hat Fair
Places as social and community hubs	Build the role of the VIC as a community hub. Winchester Sport & Leisure Park opens. Organise outdoors social activities e.g. • a summer “stage” in Abbey	Kings Walk and Friarsgate as new outdoor community spaces. Vacant Shop – pop-up and temporary uses. Liaise with planning and business rates, estates teams	Undertake conversations with landlord and letting agents to establish what would enable pop up and temporary uses. One off creative / light trail and show and VR experience.	

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BHPC 0023: Appendix 1.

	<p>Gardens or Busket Yard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outdoor cinemas, • outdoor beach. <p>More social spaces / places to sit and meet.</p>	<p>to identify and resolve barriers to reusing space.</p> <p>Sports based events - outdoor table tennis – coincide with and link to national sporting events / celebrations.</p>	<p>Education style event supported by kid's entertainments – soft play area.</p>	
Celebrate what we have and achieved	<p>Deliver a programme of campaigns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dream Now, Travel later, • Shop local / love local, • King Alf trail, • Wellbeing campaign – connect with others; be active; keep learning, • Digital trails. 	<p>VIC to showcase local independents.</p> <p>Displays – shop windows and pop-ups that can be used by local creative /arts businesses.</p> <p>Offer space to showcase independent businesses in a shared market place / students start-up businesses product testing.</p>	<p>Find ways to get online customer to come to the store so digital online and high-street experience is linked.</p> <p>Supporting businesses to adapt to provide a special experience / up-selling.</p>	<p>Independents' trail and markets.</p> <p>Building connections between complementary businesses e.g. wine shop selling chocolates / cheese shop selling bread....</p>
Foster business resilience	<p>COVID-19 Business Support and Information – Digital Islands.</p> <p>E-commerce platform for local online and delivery collaboration.</p> <p>COVID-19 Marshals and Ambassador patrols.</p>	<p>Business diversification and innovation funds.</p>	<p>Make Winchester Work for You – launches in with Hampshire County Council.</p>	<p>Winchester BID: Street Cleaning, Floral displays, Christmas Lights, Pub/ Shop Watch and Rangers.</p>

Winchester District High Streets' Priorities Plan 2021-22

March 2021

Festival and Events - existing and planned 2021/22

Will be updated / checked against the latest festivals list for 2021-22 (due to postponements)

	April - June	July - September	October - December	January – March
Winchester	Winchester Sport & Leisure Park opens Winchester Chamber Music Festival	Winchester Fashion Week Hampshire Food Festival Winchester's Cheese & Chilli Festival Heritage Open Days Hat Fair Green Week Winchester Jazz Festival (tbc) Writers' Weekend Winchester Comedy Festival Foodies Festival	Flower Festival Wine Festival Fireworks and Bonfire Christmas lights switch on Christmas market Winchester Guitar Festival (tbc) Winchester Poetry Festival Winchester Film Festival (tbc) Mucky Weekend	Winchester Comedy Gala (tbc) Winchester Beer and Cider (tbc)
Market Towns and rural	The Grange Festival Bishop's Waltham Festival	Wickham Festival Open Air Cinema & Theatre – Avington Park Hambleton Wine Festival (tbc) Solent Overlord Show (Denmead) Alresford Agricultural Show		

Winchester District High Streets' Priorities Plan 2021-22

March 2021

Government's Roadmap out of lockdown, 22 February 2021

12 April	17th May	21st June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor leisure (including gyms) open for use individually or within household groups. • Rule of 6 or two households outdoors. No household mixing indoors. • Outdoor attractions such as zoos, theme parks and drive-in cinemas. • Libraries and community centres. • Personal care premises. • All retail. • Outdoor hospitality. • All children's activities, indoor parent & child groups (up to 15 parents). • Domestic overnight stays (household only). • Self-contained accommodation (household only). • Funerals (30), wakes, weddings and receptions (15). • Minimise travel. No international holidays. • Event pilots begin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor entertainment and attractions. • 30 person limit outdoors. Rule of 6 or two households (subject to review). • Domestic overnight stays. • Organised indoor adult sport. • Most significant life events (30). • Remaining outdoor entertainment (including performances). • Remaining accommodation. • Some large events (expect for pilots) - capacity limits apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Indoor events: 1,000 or 50%. ○ Outdoor other events: 4,000 or 50%. ○ Outdoor seated events: 10,000 or 25%. • International travel - subject to review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No legal limits on social contact • Nightclubs. • Larger events. • No legal limit on life events.