

# TOWARDS AN ACTIVE KIRKBY TOWN CENTRE

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report aims to outline a bold and inspiring vision for Kirkby to become an “active” town centre. Town centres are gradually diversifying away from their core retail function into a wider and more sophisticated range of services (Local Government Association, 2022). As a result, future-proofing opportunities in cultural, leisure, and experience development need to be further explored to enhance the efficiency, resilience, and competitiveness of Kirkby Town Centre (KPMG, 2021).

By reviewing historic trajectories of British town centre development and emerging challenges, as well as the definition of “activity”, a checklist of indicators has been applied to assess Kirkby Town Centre performance. Following the health check on topics of shopping, land use, culture, living, entertainment, and digital adaptability, a SWOT analysis has been undertaken to look forward to opportunities and challenges based on pre-existing assets. Policies and initiatives from multi-tier government bodies and diverse organisations have provided valuable guidance for the formulation of the town centre strategic framework.

Established on robust evidence and policy support, four key strategies were proposed to fulfil the vision of a town centre full of **“Diversity, Vitality, and Density”**, primarily through:

- Enhancing Existing Community Values, to maximise the strengths of commercial, cultural and institutional assets and form a synergy effect between local expertise;
- Activating Underused Land, to create active and co-living lifestyles and promote social inclusivity as a way to boost town centre retail incomes and cultural diversification;
- Vibrant Night Economy, to generate additional jobs and economic gains, as well as a strong “sense of place”;
- Digital Insight, to support economic and social benefits with futureproofing capacity.
- Feasibility and viability are key issues to be considered in coping with the external challenges (e.g., COVID-19) posed to high street vitality. A phasing delivery path will be introduced into the process from the pre-development stage to the implementation stage, with stakeholders’ effort throughout the process.

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# Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

Town Centres have long been the pillars of UK's economy. The latest NPPF states that vibrancy should be established in town centres, through the transformation of traditional roles and functions such as retail, leisure, entertainment, office and residential (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government , 2021). However, in recent years the town centre had been in decline due to excessive competition, financial turmoil, and the rise of the internet (House of Commons, 2019).

Decline in high streets and town centres across the UK has worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Guardian, the virus had led to the closure of many shops on the high street and in town centres and consequently to the loss of thousands of jobs (Osborne, 2020). Fortunately, this epidemic has also contributed to the process of repositioning the town centre's role since the financial crisis. A new report by the Local Government Association (2022) has suggested that, given the immediate impact of the virus and the permanent lifestyle changes caused by it, in the post-pandemic period the high street and town centres will be transformed into resilient and integrated spaces for social and experiential activities. However, the new positioning and the new norm will bring new development strategies, opportunities, and challenges. This is because the traditional place-

people relationship, or economy of movement, has been gradually destroyed over the last few decades by the prosperity of the internet and the blockade policy in response to viruses (Carmona, 2021). Therefore, this report will discuss the current situation, development, and strategy of Kirkby town centre in terms of positioning the town centre in the post-epidemic period.

The report will be split into 7 parts. It will start with a literature review to introduce the history and the trajectory of the town centres and their challenges, which will also discuss the definition of vitality of town centres and the criteria for health check with several strategy studies. Next, a baseline analysis of Kirkby will be carried out applying the proposed indicators including the demographic information, the retailers, land uses, culture, and digital situation. Then, it will discuss the current policies that support the vitality from national to local scale. It will next advise 3 visions, the vitality, identity, and the density, which will be followed by the strategies based on them to promote current property, utilise undeveloped space, enhance night economic, and establish digital centre. Finally, there will be a reflection to review the strategies and give some further suggestions for implementation.

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02

## Literature Review

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## 02 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Historical Trajectory and Context

The town centre and High Street were mainly regarded as centres of retail function as the traditional role since the post-war reconstruction in 1950 until the financial turmoil and the rise of the internet in 2008 (Local Government Association, 2022). While retail-led post-war reconstruction accelerated economic recovery, it also generated excessive competition because of the prolonged over-emphasis on retail (Kefford, 2020). By the 1970s and 1980s, an oversupply of retail led to an expansion of out-of-town retailing, which also provided the first pressure and opportunity for the transformation of town centres and high streets from retail-orientation (Hallsworth and Coca-Stefaniak, 2018). However, in the late 1980s, in response to this strong competition, TCM (Town Centre Management) was established to regenerate and redevelop town centres to energise the town centre by developing, managing, and promoting them (Otsuka and Reeve, 2007; Stubbs, Warnaby and Medway, 2002). This action succeeded in promoting economic growth and extending the life of the traditional positioning for about 20 years at that time, which, at the same time, sowed the seeds of a decline after 2008.

The financial turmoil came along with the rise of the internet, which consequently ended the previous 50 years of traditional views of the town centre and the

High Street. The economic decline and falling incomes have further contributed to the decline of high streets and town centres and the rise in vacancy rates (Jones and Livingstone, 2017). To deal with this shock and the change in role, the 2012 edition of the NPPF also added a boost to the vitality of the town centre where mixed-use and multi-function were mentioned (Parker et al., 2017). However, COVID-19 led to a dramatic acceleration in the change of the role of town centres and high streets in the UK. after the arrival of the virus, prolonged closures, drop in footfall, and online retailing became the main factors leading to changes in the shopping street landscape. (Mumford et al., 2020; Nanda, Xu and Zhang, 2021). These factors, along with changes in people's lifestyles, have further shaped the new role of commercial centres in the post-epidemic era, which is the location for socializing, experiencing, housing, and other purpose (Bicquelet-Lock, 2021; KPMG, 2021; Local Government Association, 2022).

Therefore, by summarising the trends over the past 50 it can be concluded that in the post-epidemic years ([Table 2.1](#)), in the new era, town centres should be multi-functional and not limited to retail and commercial so that the vitality and health would be promoted because the chronic over-emphasis on retail and the neglect of other functions cannot be adapted to the new norm.

Years	Role of Town Centres and High Street
1950s-1980s	Retail Centre
1990s-2000s	Retail Centre and other functions
2010s-2020s	Repositioning Period
2020s and Future	Comprehensive centre of retail, leisure, social entertainment, and experiences

[Table 2.1](#). Role of Town Centres and High Streets in History  
(Jones and Livingstone, 2017; Kefford, 2020; KPMG, 2021; Local Government Association, 2022)

## 2.2. The Current Challenges

In addition to a deeper understanding of the positioning of town centres and high streets, the legacy of the traditional development model of the past 50 years, together with the invasion of the internet and pandemic, had also brought 3 main challenges.

The first challenge is the change in lifestyle. According to the Local Government Association (2022), pandemics have led people to prefer online shopping and to want more social and leisure experiences offline. This means that the economy and vitality of the town centre would decline even further if it continued to rely on the traditional experiences and achievements of the past.

The second challenge should be the high vacancy rate. The long-term decline of the town centre over the past 10 years has resulted in many vacant shops (Jones and Livingstone, 2017). Figure 2.1 also shows that 14.5% of high street shops are vacant. This shows that the vitality and economy of the town centre is currently at a low ebb.

The third challenge could be the clone towns. The impact and substitution of chain shops on the local retail industry will reduce the vitality and diversity of the economy (Duignan, 2019). This means that local culture is disappearing as local shops are being replaced.

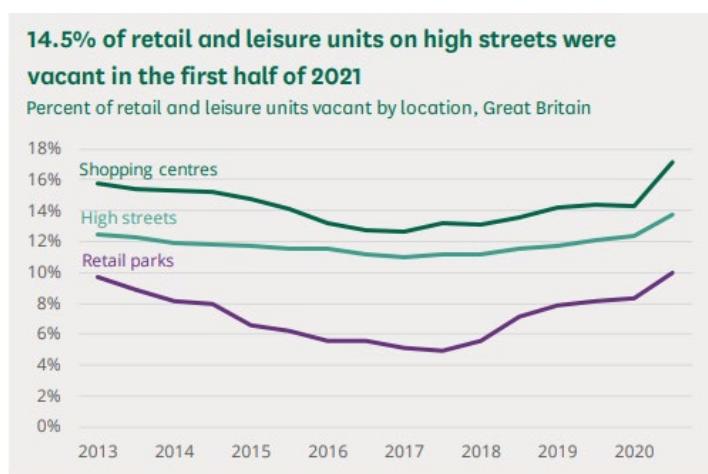


Figure 2.1. Vacant Rate in 1st Half of 2021 (House of Commons, 2021)

## 2.3. Activeness, the Wellspring of the Town Centre

The definition of town centre vitality is very broad. Highly vibrant town centres were initially defined as busy centres with a high investment positioning, good infrastructure, and high visitor numbers (Ravenscroft, 2000). However, after the financial crisis, the rise of the internet, and the pandemic, just as the role of the town centre has changed, the vibrant town centre should also be redefined. The vitality of a town centre should not be limited to numbers and curves on economic statements but should be felt by residents and visitors. According to the House of Commons (2019), A vital town centre should be activity-based, community-based and able to be a place where people can gather while ensuring the potential for future development. In addition, the town centre in future should also be flexible, green, and meaningful to the local (Local Government Association, 2022). Therefore, a vital town centre in future should be:

- diversified with a balance of various functions to attract more visitors and revitalise the town in the post-epidemic era

- characterised by local culture and local anchor shops to avoid the formation of clone towns
- digitalized to respond to future life changing trends, improve the visitor experience, and support new economic model such as online shopping and night economic
- devolved to ensure the coordination and management of the community, the interests of all stakeholders, and equality
- lowly vacant to enhance the view, boost the local economy, and recover from pandemics and declines.

The vitality of the town centre will not only boost local employment and economic performance, but will also create healthy competition within and between the many town centres and give them the resilience to grow further and respond to the challenges of the future (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2020, Local Government Association, 2022)

## 2.4. Indicators for Health Check

Originally, government established the indicators to detect the economic decline of high streets and town centres such as the number of vacant shops, crime rate, and footfalls (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2010). However, given the significant changes of the past 10 years, the criteria should also not be limited in economic aspects. For instance, Local Government Association (2018) considered that the success of a vibrant city centre should be viewed in six areas: foundation, function, model, folklore, foundation, and future planning. Thus, based on the articles and documents (GVA, 2011; Local Government Association, 2022; Parker et al., 2017; Public Health England, 2018), the health check should include 3 aspects, the external factor, the economic factor, and the culture factor.

As for the external indicators, it should consider:

- Demographic information of catchment area, including age, deprivation, ethnicity, and education level;
- Geo-spatial information of the town, including the distribution of deprivation level, day- and night-time; population, categories of family, and types of houses;
- Current vision and strategy of the town, such as the policies and investment opportunities.

A check of external factors will allow a preliminary assessment of the overall local population and its geographical distribution as well as the current local operational support to establish a foundation for further strategic feasibility.

## 2.5. Strategy Studies

As a response to the town centre priority, many towns have designed and implemented their own development strategies through health check. The Scottish Government (2015) had developed several strategies to enhance the vitality of the town centre, such as its enterprise and Business, Marketing and Promotion, Public Services, Town Centre Living, and Digital Strategy. At the same time, London is developing its strategy to respond to the evolving economy and consumption, making the most of vacant plots, creating a thriving culture, bringing in community engagement, and using digital tools to support businesses (Mayor of London, 2021). Their

As for the economic part, it should consider:

- Current situation of retailers, including their diversity, profitability, vitality, and impacts of anchor stores;
- Land use, including vacant space, underutilised plots, and inactive public land;
- Active hour, like the operation hours of commerce and services ;
- Digital adaptation, like trends of shopping online.

The examination of economic factors can help to understand the overall economic situation and the level of economic activity in the city centre today as well as the impact of the digital economy on the physical economy to ensure that the next strategy is effectively targeted at the issues and challenges.

As for the cultural aspect, it should consider:

- Local leisure, such as café and bars;
- Local library, gallery, and education;
- Local cultural commerce, such as marketplace ;
- The detection of cultural factors can identify the uniqueness and attractiveness of the local culture to enhance; the local applicability and compatibility of the next strategy with the local culture.

experience can provide a valuable lesson for further development. The strategies can be divided into five directions:

- Preservation of existing culture and assets, such as the Worthing Borough and Coventry
- Development of unutilised space, such as London
- Development of the night-time economy, such as Lambeth and Tokyo
- Support for marketing and branding, such as Harlow
- The creation of electronic platforms, such as Warwickshire and Chesterfield.

03

# Kirkby Town Centre Health Check

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## 3.1. TOWN CENTRE PROFILE

Kirkby is the largest town in Knowsley, North West England (Figure 3.1). Adjacent to four major routes and Kirkby railway station, Kirkby Town Centre has a built-up area of 16.5 km<sup>2</sup> accommodating 41,495 people (Knowsley County Council, 2020). In contrast to the declining population of Knowsley, Kirkby is featured by a sustained growth, relatively younger while more deprived, less unqualified and ethnically homogeneous demographic structure compared with the national and local average (Figure 3.2).

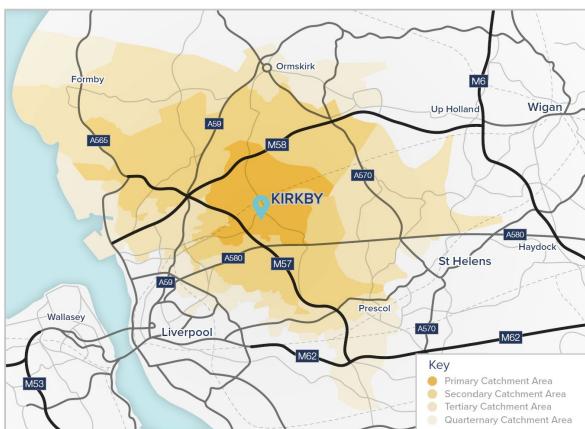


Figure 3.1: Kirkby location (Knowsley Council & New River, 2020)

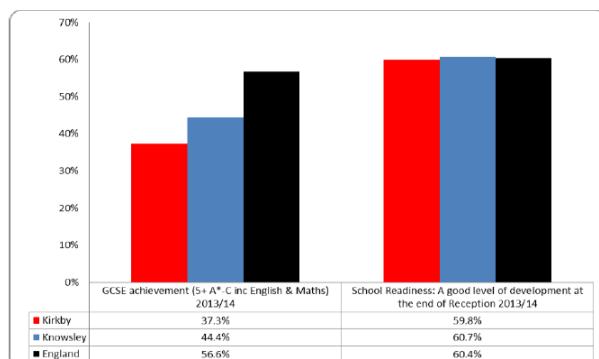
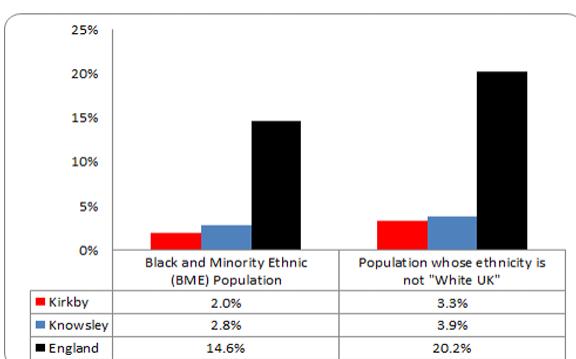
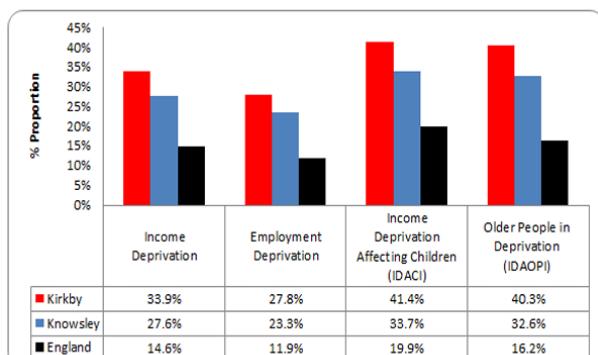
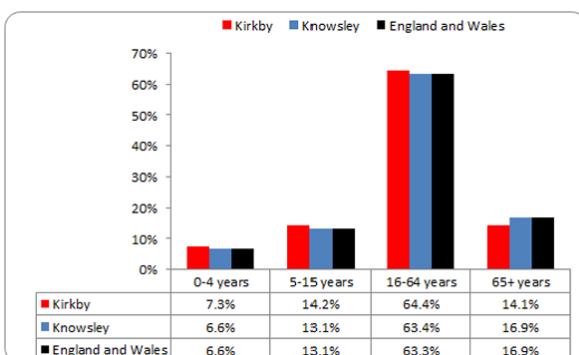
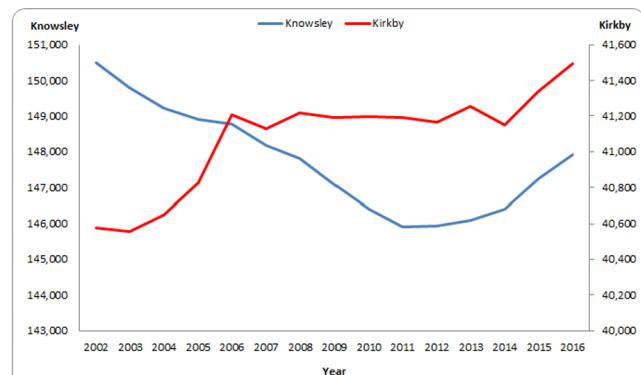


Figure 3.2: Population change, 2002 to 2016 (ONS, 2016)  
Age structure & Deprivation statistics & Ethnicity & Education qualification (ONS Mid-year population estimates, 2016; Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2015; ONS, 2011; Department of Education, 2014)

The boundary of Kirkby Town Centre is determined based on current policies and future development opportunities (Figure 3.3). Kirkby Town Centre is defined by Knowsley Council as a triangular area framed by County Road, Hall Lane, and Cherryfield Drive (Figure 3.4). Given the importance of town centre leisure activities, the Eastern boundary is extended to include the proposed cinema-anchored leisure development (Figure 3.5). Additionally, two parcels of vacant land are classified as residential investment opportunity areas, thereby forming the Southwestern fringe of Kirkby Town Centre (Figure 3.6).

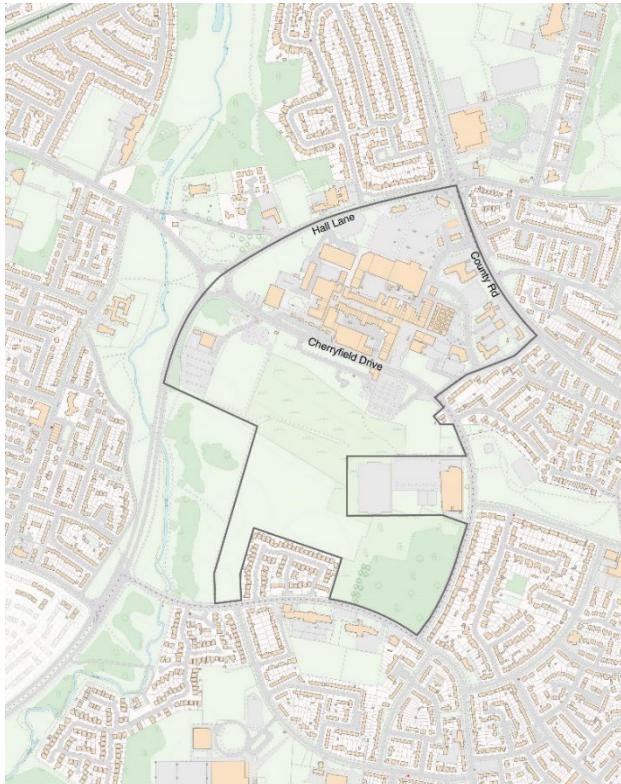


Figure 3.3: Kirkby Town Centre Boundary



Figure 3.5: Kirkby Town centre (Knowsley Council, 2015; Knowsley Council & New River, 2020)

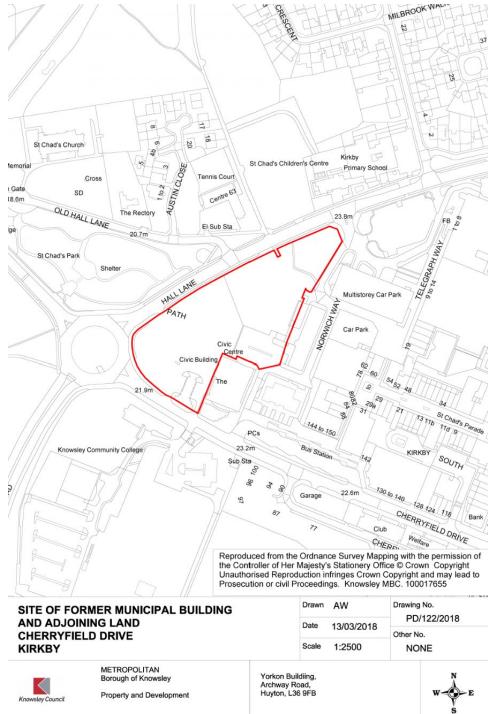


Figure 3.6: Residential investment opportunity (Invest Knowsley, 2020)

## 3.2. TOWN CENTRE SHOPPING

Retail offers in Kirkby Town Centre include convenience and comparison stores, retail, leisure, and financial services, as well as cultural and civic facilities (Figure 3.7). Retail high street, well-known chain stores and informal market space are three main types of shopping facilities comprising Kirkby town centre retail offers.

Category	Function	Number
Convenience	Department store	7
	Electrical and phones	1
	Food	7
	Newspaper	1
	Tabacoo & alcohol	2
	DIY/Home improvements	5
Comparison	Fashion, jewellery, clothing and footwear	11
Retail services	Beauty	8
	Electrical and phones	4
	Funeral shop	2
	Gift shops	2
	Health	7
	Newspaper & magazine	1
Financial and business services	Pawnshop	3
	Financial services	4
	Law services	1
	Cafes and restaurants	10
Leisure services	Gallery	1
	Travel agents	1
	Ambulance centre	1
	Car renting	1
Others	Charity	4
	Delivery	1
	Fire station	1
	Gambling	3
	Government	1
	Gym	1
	Job centre	1
	Library	1
	Police station	1
	Post office	1
	Police station	1

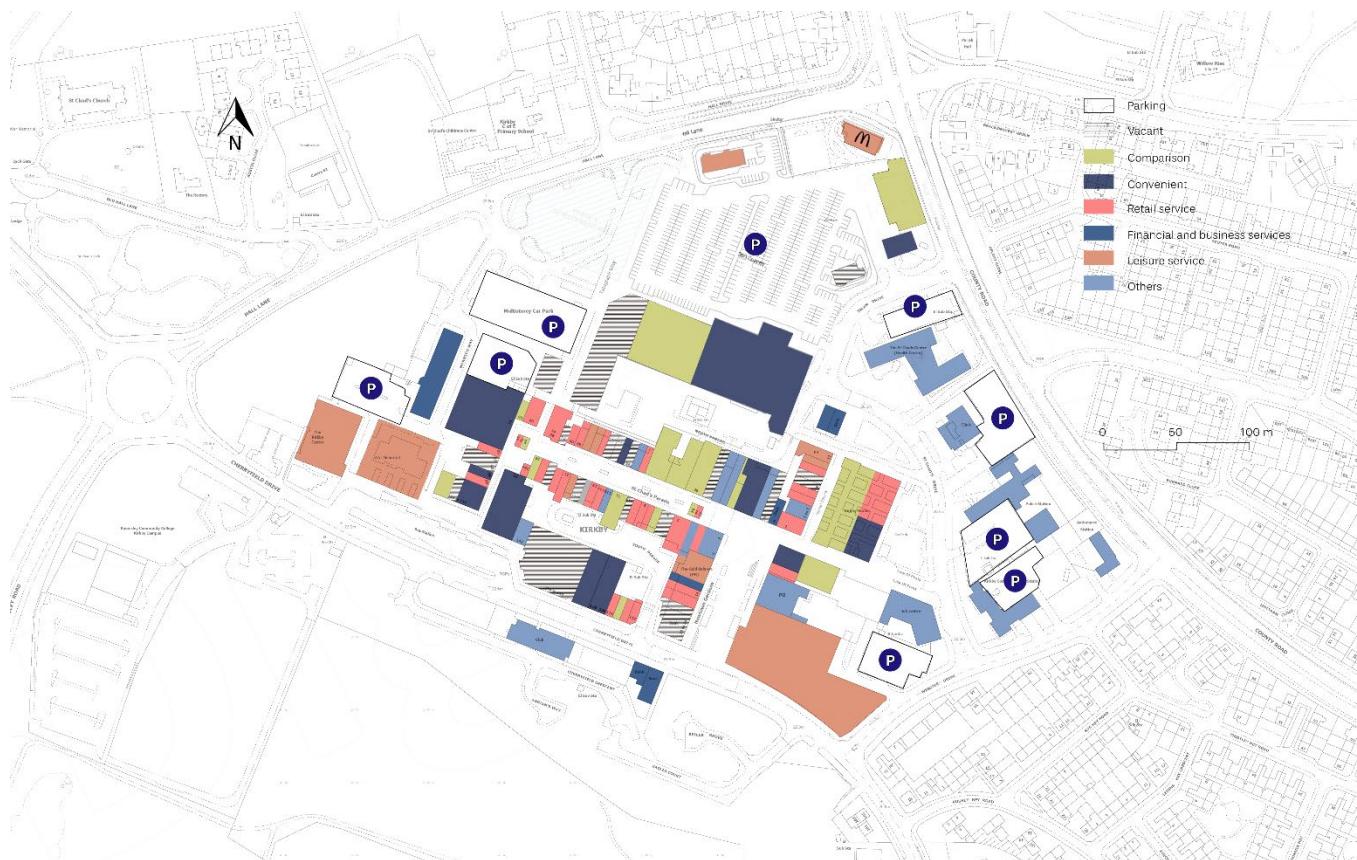


Figure 3.7: Land use map, category suggested by Wirral (2019), The Scottish Government (2015) & DECLG (2012)

## 3.2. TOWN CENTRE SHOPPING

By comparing its retail floorspace and unit composition with West Kirby town centre, the UK average, and Liverpool City Centre (Figure 3.8), the retail sectors in Kirkby Town Centre can be regarded as low in **diversity, profitability and vitality**.

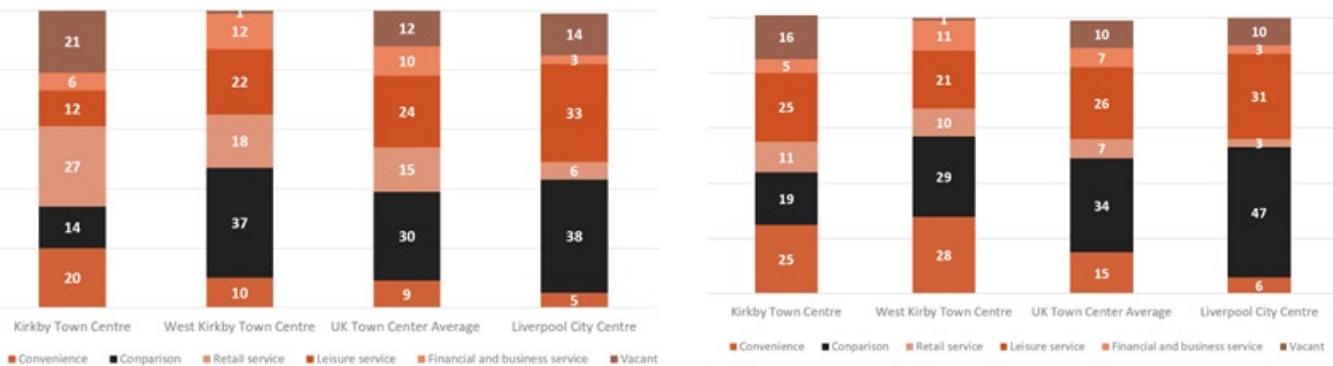


Figure 3.8: Composition of Retail Centres by Commercial Floorspace & Commercial Units (%)

**Diversity and profitability:** Partly due to high income deprivation levels of its immediate surroundings, Kirkby Town Centre has the lowest comparison goods supply and turnover for a town centre in Knowsley and has its convenience and retail services dominated by small-scale discounters and fast-food restaurants (Figure 3.9). Moreover, Kirkby Town Centre has experienced a significant decrease in floor area and the number of comparison goods units over the last decade, and as a result, its place in the retail rankings has steadily declined due to a generally higher profitability of comparison goods (Knowsley Council, 2013).



Figure 3.9: Low-price retail offers and typical examples

## 3.2. TOWN CENTRE SHOPPING

**Vitality:** So far, 21% of the store outlets area as well as 22% Kirkby Market plots remain vacant (Figure 3.10). The vacancy rate of the entire retail offer is 6%-7% higher than national average. In comparison to the 2008 situation, there is a 7% greater vacancy rate and much more unoccupied premises (Figure 3.11-3.12), highlighting the juxtaposition of shrinking high street performance and untapped potentials of attracting new investors and retailers.



Figure 3.10: Vacant store outlets

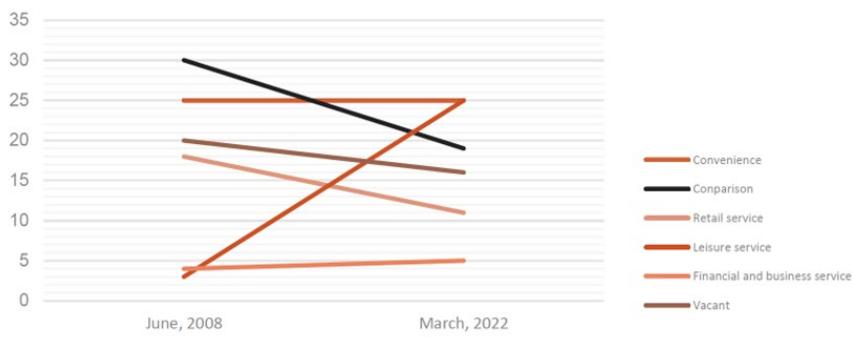


Figure 3.11: Change In Composition of Kirkby Town Centre by Commercial Units (%)

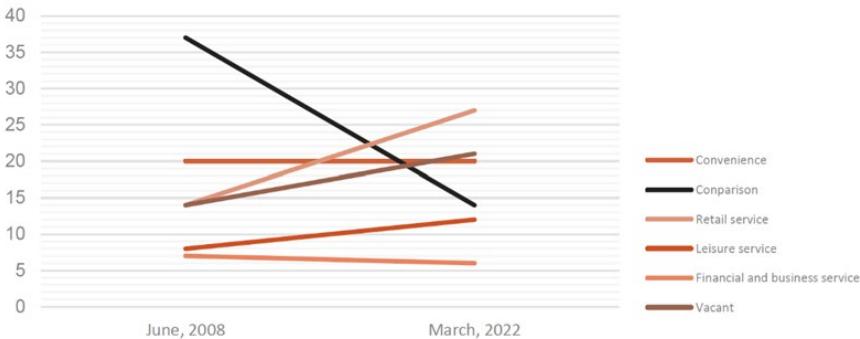


Figure 3.11: Change In Composition of Kirkby Town Centre by Commercial Units (%)

Figure 3.12: Changes of vacant units in Kirkby Town Centre, 2009-2022



Vacancy units in June, 2008 (Knowsley Council, 2009)



Vacancy units in March, 2022

## 3.2. TOWN CENTRE SHOPPING

**Anchor store:** Morrison presents intense competition to locally based merchants, who play a crucial part in the vibrancy and diversity of town centres. A massive demolition that happened ten years ago has radically changed the town centre's retail profile, in which almost 10,000 square metres of convenience and comparison goods run by local people were replaced by large anchor store or corporate discounters (Figure 3.13).

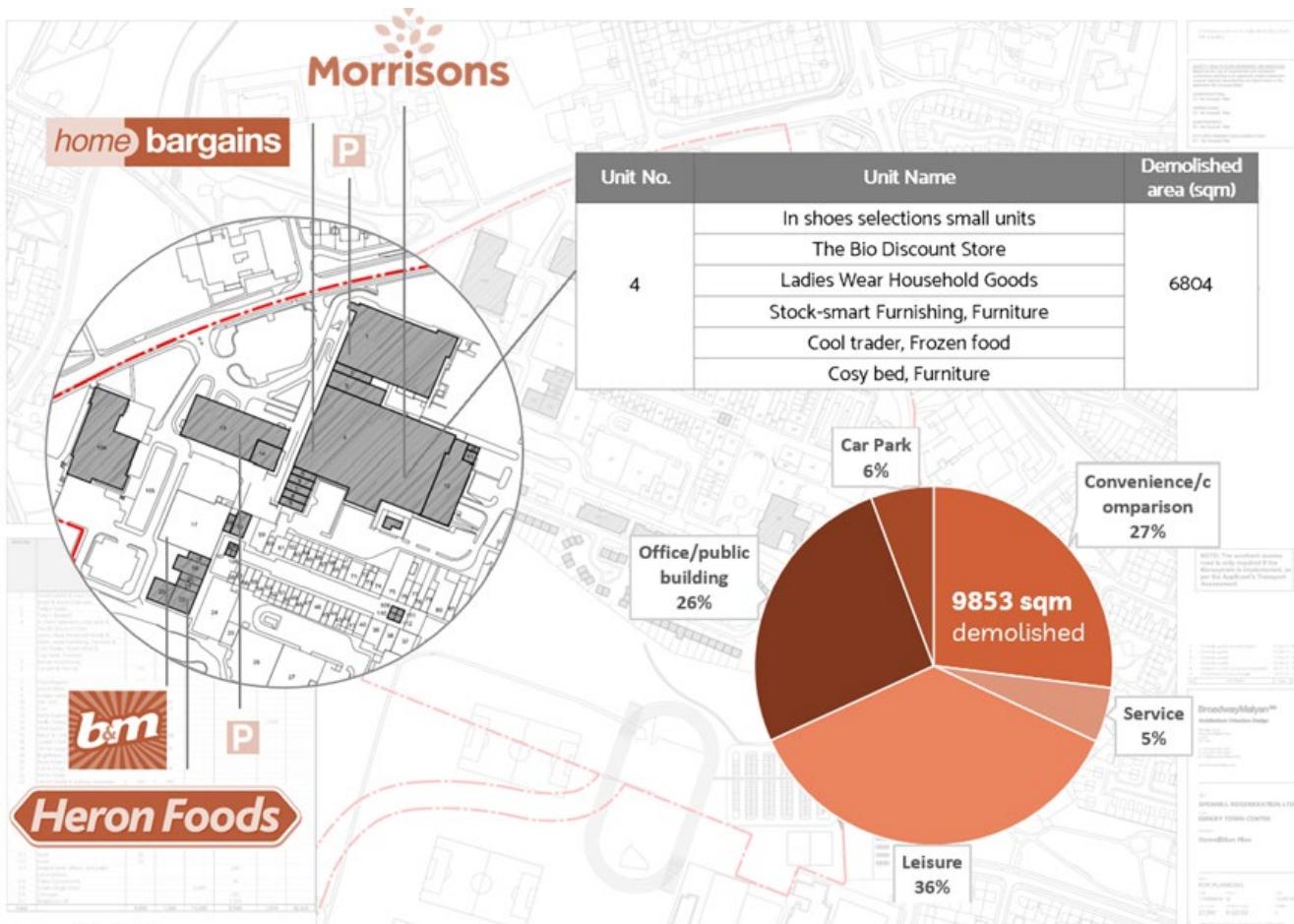


Figure 3.13: Morrison replacing locally based merchants & Kirkby Town Center Demolish Plan  
(Spenhill Regeneration Ltd, 2011)

### 3.3. TOWN CENTRE LAND USES

Kirkby Town Centre has large spaces for **underused car parking** and inactive public realm. Kirkby Town Centre has 1398 parking places, which is about three times the number in Huyton Town Centre (Figure 3.14). While offering enough parking spaces may give incentives for automobile owners, too many parking spaces would lead to wasteful land use. The 470 spaces in front of Morrison only allow for up-to-three

hours short stay (Knowsley Council, 2019), which is not enough to combine multiple trips to different destinations by just parking once, resulting in low occupancy of the vast parking lot. Furthermore, car park in front of Kirkby Market is mono-functional, serving limited purposes and failing to support local shops and businesses (Figure 3.15).

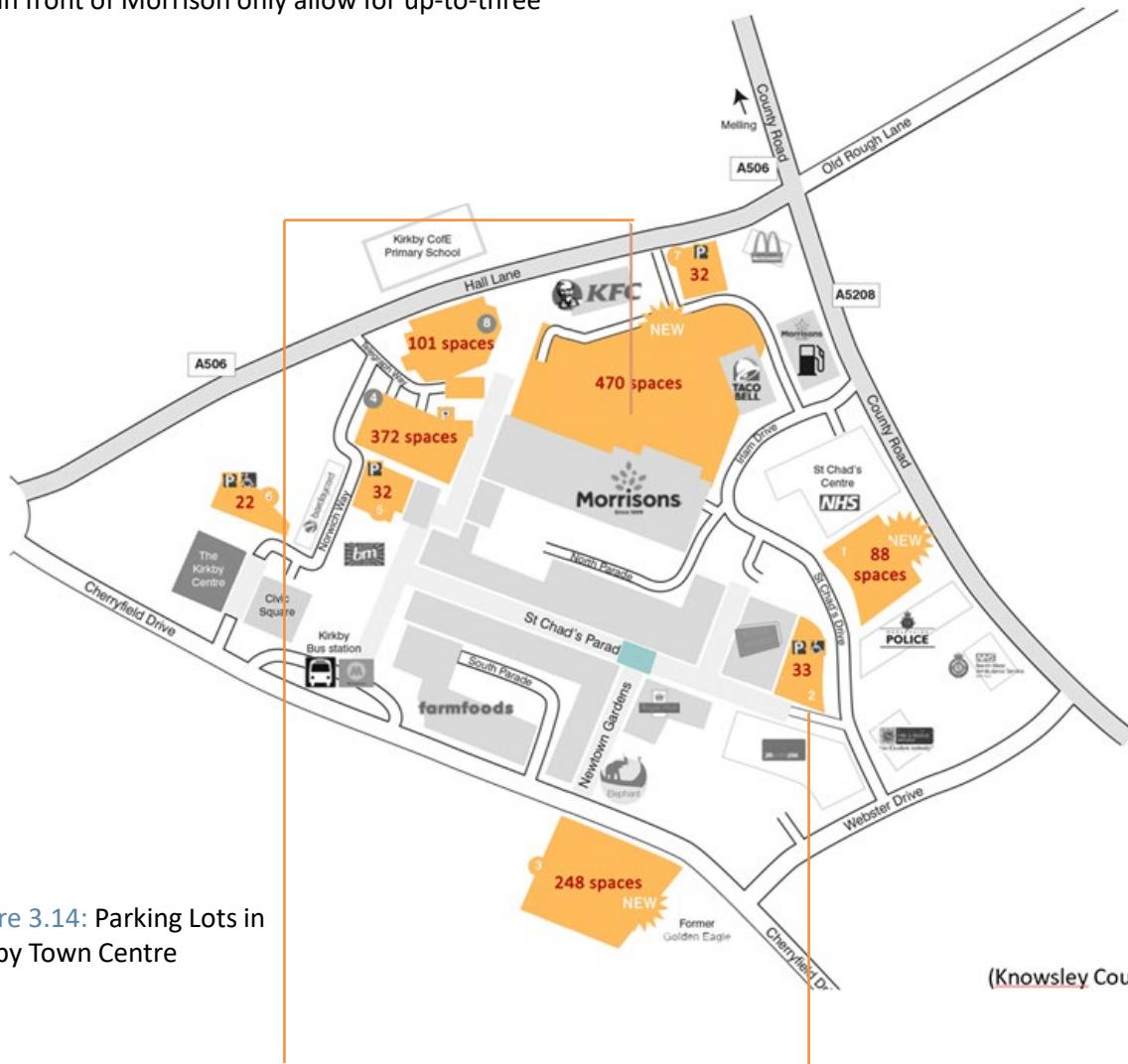


Figure 3.14: Parking Lots in Kirkby Town Centre

(Knowsley Council, 2019)



Figure 3.15: Car park in front of Morrison



Figure 3.15: Parking Lots in front of Kirkby Market

### 3.3. TOWN CENTRE LAND USES

The public realm, including the high streets, pedestrian plazas, and courtyard spaces, lacks a dynamic scene or structure for private or public transactions in retail, leisure, and other commercial activities (Oc & Tiesdell, 1997; Figure 3.16).

Although these places are sometimes used to hold communal events, public art exhibitions, and celebrations such as the Aqualux light installation, revenue-earning activities are limited, and most of the time, these places remain unused and under-managed (Figure 3.17).



Figure 3.16: Public realm in Kirkby Town Centres



Figure 3.17: Aqualux light installation and Christmas celebration (Kirkby Town Centre, 2021)

## 3.4. TOWN CENTRE CULTURE

Although a wealth of leisure and cultural assets and many institutions surround Kirkby town centre, providing abundant opportunities for experiential consumption, connections between these institutions remain to be strengthened.

**Many cafés and bars**, such as The Premier and The Market Tavern, are popular community gathering places that encourage long-time visits, which helps reinvigorate the local market and retail high street (Figure 3.18). The proposed development of a cinema-anchored leisure centre promises to enhance the town centre's role in experiential consumption.

**Kirkby Market** is an informal but dynamic retail market accommodating small-scale food, handicraft and fashion vendors of strong local identity. However, the current layout of Kirkby Market appears to be cluttered by stalls, bins, benches, A-boards, and hangers, which tend to creep forward and extend onto aisles, causing congestion for pedestrians and negatively affect their pleasant shopping experience (Figure 3.19). These items also have a negative visual impact, obscure the characteristics of each shop and devalue the businesses of the entire market place.

**The Kirkby Gallery** (Figure 3.20) is one of Merseyside's best contemporary art galleries, with a diverse and ambitious exhibition programme that draws on collections from a variety of national and regional partners, such as the Arts Council Collection. The gallery's offerings include annual open exhibitions, schools, and community arts initiatives, as well as a diverse selection of art courses.

**Kirkby Library** (Figure 3.21) provides free access to PCs, E-books and home delivery to surrounding schools and residence, and has a variety of training events targeted at groups of all ages. Students from **Knowsley Community College** may help sustain the town centre's culture and entertainment services and encourage businesses to extend opening times to the late-night.



Figure 3.18: Local café & pubs: popular meeting places



Figure 3.19: Vibrant local market



Figure 3.20: Kirkby Cultural Centre (Gallery & Library)



Figure 3.21: Knowsley Community College

## 3.5. TOWN CENTRE LIVING

The population profile within Kirkby Town Centre's 2km catchment area demonstrates a mix of age and income, and thus a great potential for mixed-use development (Figure 3.22). Its commute pattern has typical polycentric features, with most population living in surrounding neighbourhoods travelling to work in the Eastern Industrial Zone and Kirkby Town Centre. The concentration of workplace population in Kirkby Town Centre indicates the potential for town centre housing development, since it will reduce commuting costs and encourage sustainable shopping trips, whilst densely populated residential areas at night reveal an untapped market for town centres evening activities.

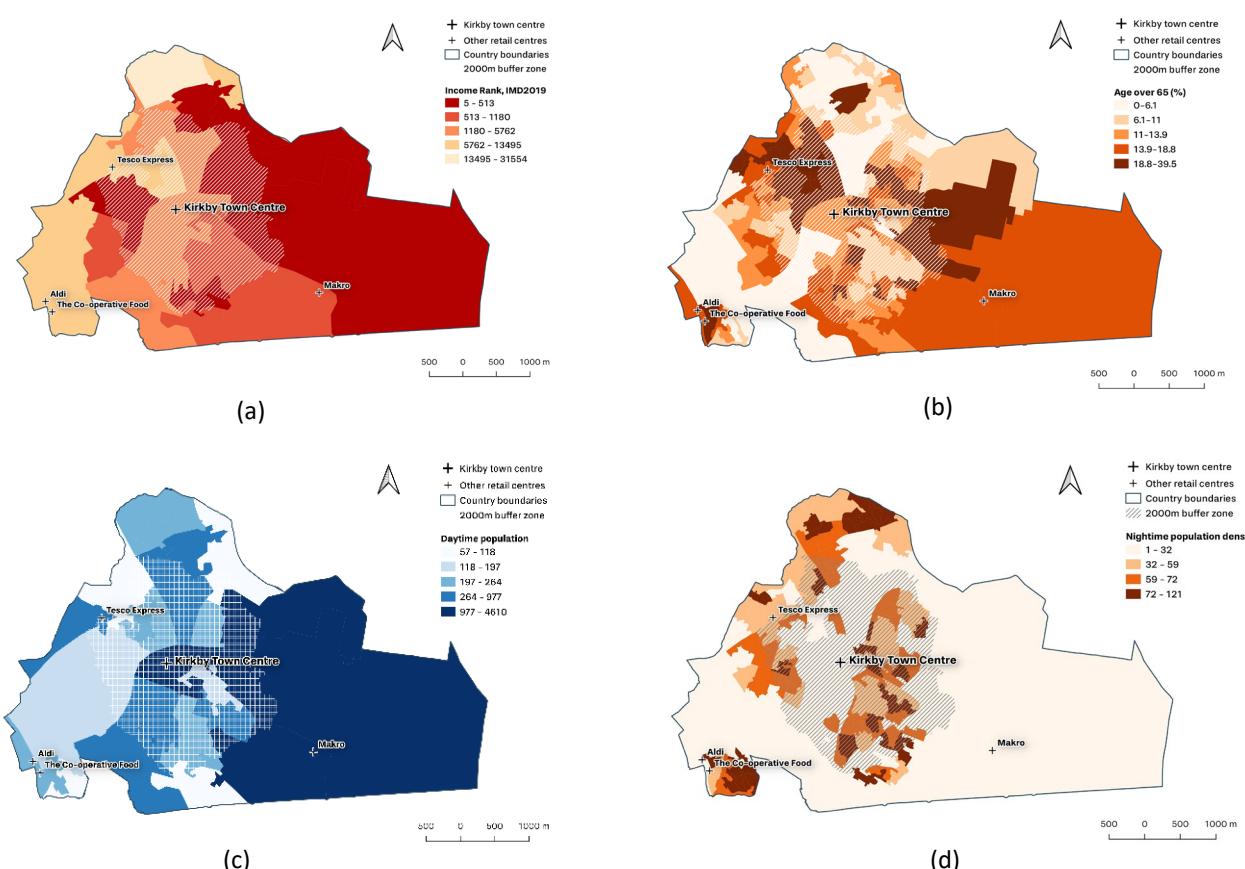


Figure 3.22: (a) Kirkby Town Centre Income deprivation level, IMD, 2019 (Data: MHCLG, 2022); (b) Age Profile (Data: ONS, 2011); (c) Daytime/workplace (Data: ONS, 2013); (d) Night-time population (Data: ONS, 2011)



Figure 3.24: Families with one dependent child (DigiMap, 2022)



Figure 3.25: Lone parents (DigiMap, 2022)

Currently, the types of residential houses in Kirkby are mostly terraced and semi-detached and account for nearly 80 percent of the housing market (Figure 3.23). The dominance of the two housing types is likely to worsen the situation of segregated communities and threaten the future of social mix. Moreover, people from different family structures and income levels would prefer different types of houses, which is not sufficiently fulfilled by the current housing supply in Kirkby. For instance, around 10 percent of the population near Kirkby Town Centre are lone parents that are likely to need houses with smaller sizes than families with two parents and children (Figure 3.24 & 3.25).

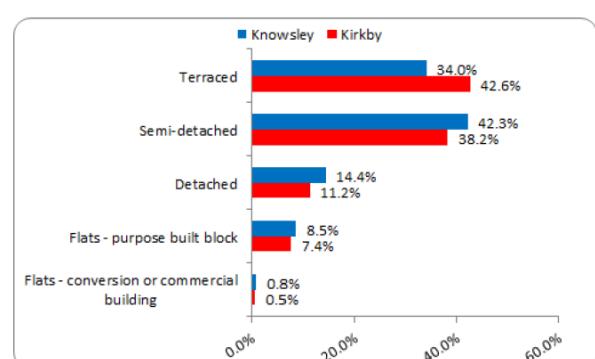


Figure 3.23: Type of housing (Hometrack System, 2018)

## 3.6. TOWN CENTRE EVENING

A scatter chart reveals that the most shops in Kirkby Town Centre open between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. From 9 p.m. onwards, there are almost no shops open in the town centre and most stores close at 5p.m.. Although different shop types have varying opening hours, only a limited number of shops prolong their opening time to the evening (Figure 3.26 & 3.27).

A study by the Town Centre Management Association (2018) on trading hours shows that sales are typically

50% higher between 5pm and 8pm than in the morning, a growth opportunity that Kirkby has not yet fully exploited. Additionally, the crime rate in Kirkby is among one of the highest in Liverpool City Region and little night-time economic management is implemented (Knowsley Council, 2018; Figure 3.28), which has threatened the safety of town activities.

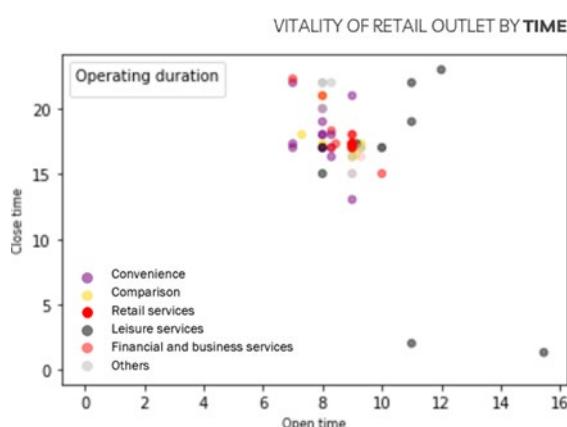


Figure 3.26: Operation duration of retail outlet (Data: Google Maps)

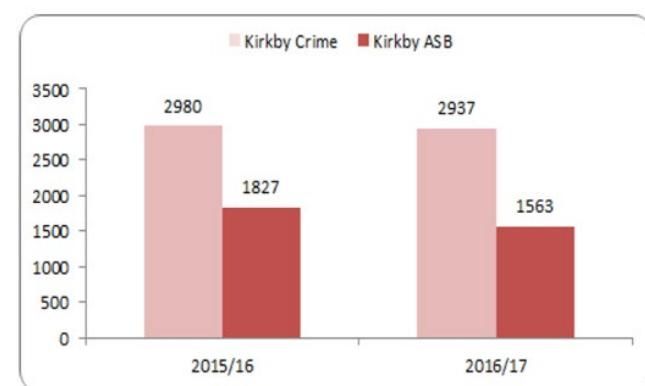


Figure 3.28: Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour figures (Merseyside Police, 2017)



Figure 3.27: Operation duration of different services

### 3.7. TOWN CENTRE IN DIGITAL ERA

Over the last few years, the digital transformation has led to a decline in high-street retail performance while also creating a lot of value and revolutionising retail (Hänninen, Smedlund, and Mitronen, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has spawned online shopping prevalence, such as click-and-collect facilities, and the momentum remains after the pandemic (Figure 3.29). However, the current figures for Kirkby's show a downward trend in the overall number of online consumers than the Knowsley and UK averages (Figure 3.30), indicating Kirkby's low digital adaptability.

Such disadvantages are equally applicable to Kirkby Town Centre, as there is inadequate free Wi-Fi coverage, online retail platforms, electronic identification, or timely updated number of available parking spaces. Although the town centre webpage and its social media accounts are kept updated with ongoing retail offers and business activities, their overall influence is far from desirable.

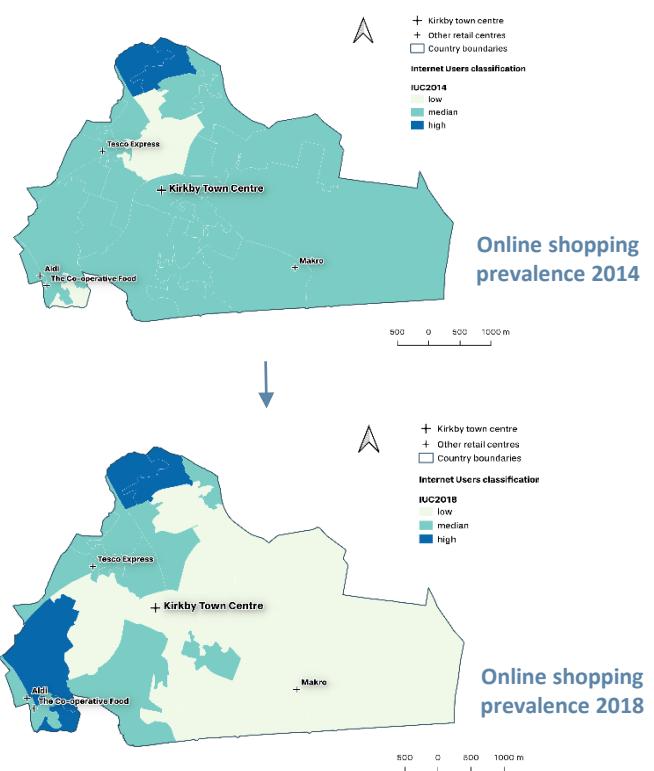


Figure 3.30: Change in Kirkby by Time: Declined Residents Shopping Online (CDRC, 2018)

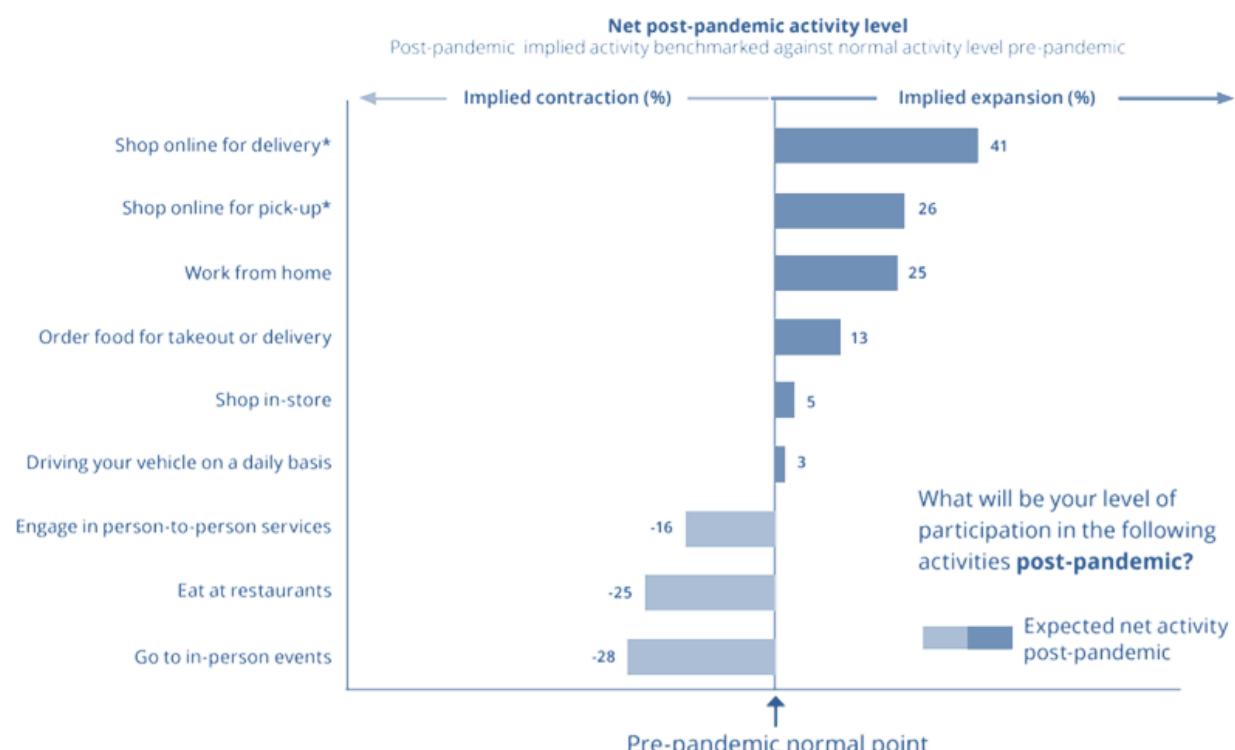


Figure 3.29: Online Shopping Trend, Before & After Covid (Deloitte Global State of the Consumer Tracker, 2021)

## 3.8. SWOT ANALYSIS

S

### TOWN CENTRE CULTURE

- Vibrant Kirkby Market
- Abundant leisure and cultural assets
- Public-engaged events and art exhibitions

### POLICY SUPPORT

- Policy support diverting from national to local
- Public-supported Covid-19 recovery framework

O

### TOWN CENTRE LAND USE

- Substantial potentials for utilising car parks and vast spaces of public realm for revenue-generation activities

### TOWN CENTRE CULTURE

- Possible connections between cultural and leisure resources to create job opportunities
- Opportunities given by LCC's new job delivery plan

### TOWN CENTRE LIVING

- Diverse demographic features for possible social mix development
- Town centre as a major workplace giving possibility to local housing development
- Unfulfilled housing demands of low-income and minority groups, possible for densification
- Large night-time residential population gives potential for night economy

### TOWN CENTRE IN DIGITAL ERA

- Additional values created by the advance of digital technologies
- New 5G and fibre investment in LCR

W

### TOWN CENTRE SHOPPING

- Mono-functional retail offers
- Unprofitable small discounters
- Inactive and vacant retail outlets

### TOWN CENTRE LAND USE

- Underused, excessive and mono-functional car park (Morrison & Kirkby Market)

### TOWN CENTRE CULTURE

- Informal layouts and clutter at Kirkby Market

### TOWN CENTRE LIVING

- Identical housing types without enough apartments for low-income/minority groups

### TOWN CENTRE EVENING

- Short opening/operational hours of shops

### TOWN CENTRE IN DIGITAL ERA

- Low digital adaptability

T

### TOWN CENTRE SHOPPING

- High deprivation level challenges retail retrofit
- Intense competition between anchor store and locally based producers

### TOWN CENTRE LIVING

- Homogeneous ethnicity in Kirkby threatens social mix development

### TOWN CENTRE EVENING

- High crime rate

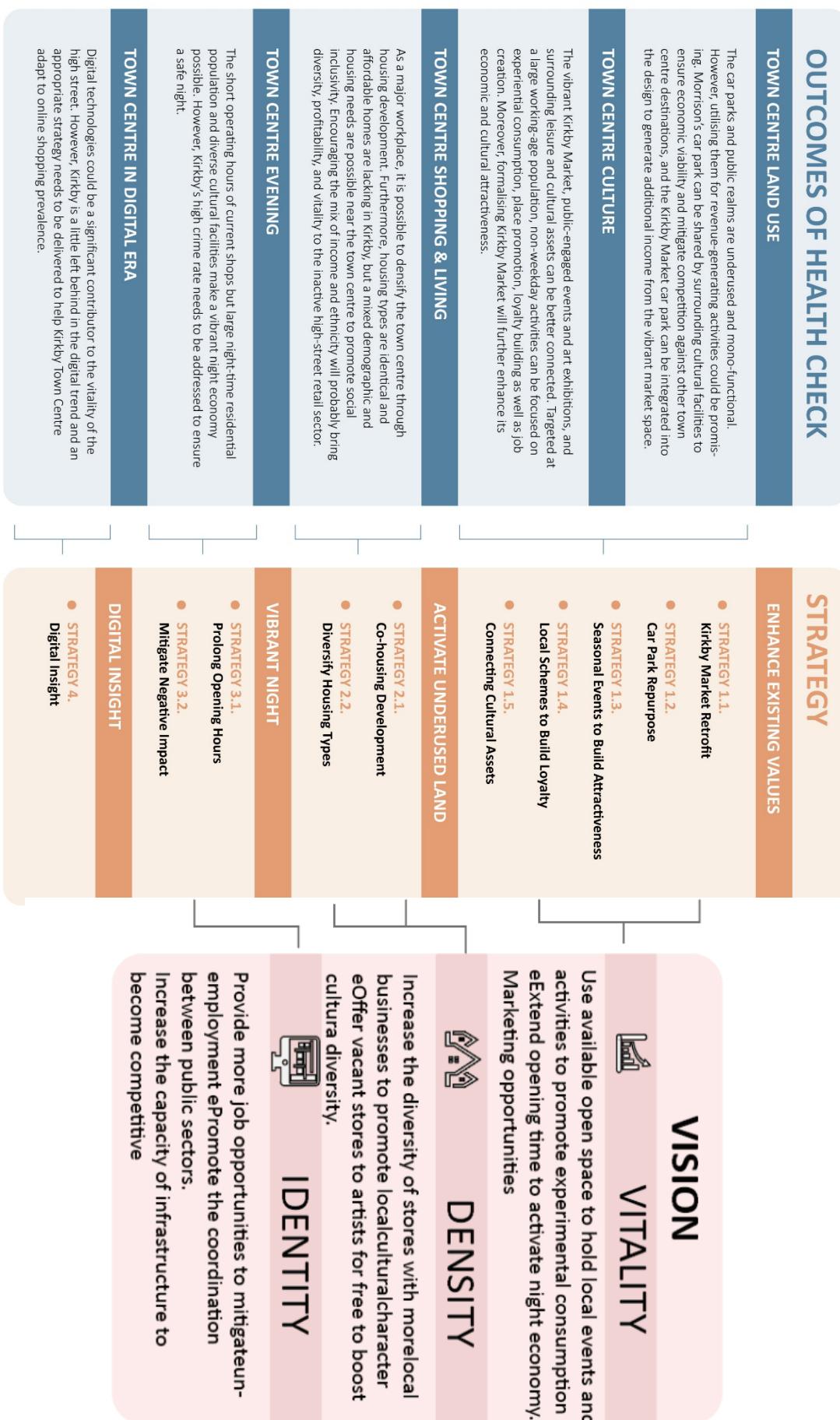
### TOWN CENTRE IN DIGITAL ERA

- High street decline caused by online shopping prevalence, lifestyle change and clone town

### EXTERNAL THREATS

- Brexit, Covid-19 pandemic and budget cuts

# 3.9. VISION



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04

# **Policy and Discussion**

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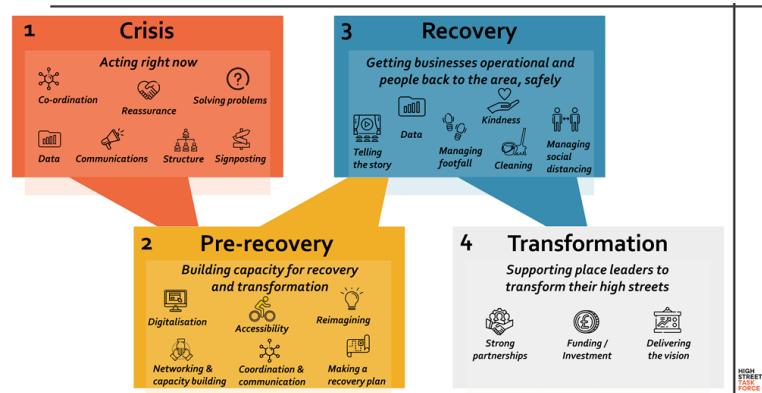
## 04 Policy and Discussion

### National Level

At national level, the HM Government and High Street Task Force proposed relevant development policies and recommendations. The NPPF emphasises the vitality of the town centre and calls for long-term and sustainable development, as well as the multi-functional character of the centre, such as retail, leisure, office, and housing (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021). This means that at a national level, town centres are positioned as diverse entities providing a range of services to support and meet the demands of their communities such as leisure, socializing, and entertainment. However, a more complex centre also means greater traffic flow. At the same time, lifestyle changes following the epidemic have caused that more people would be likely to choose private cars over public transport (Vickerman, 2021). Therefore, while supporting the vitality of the town centre, the design

of the parking spaces should be enhanced in addition to the above-mentioned factors.

The High Street Task Force (2020) established a recovery framework ([Figure 4.1](#)). It identifies four stages of the recovery framework. The town centre is currently in phases 3, 4, where the managers collect data to help residents while also preparing to build social partnerships, attract funds and investment, and beginning to think and deliver vision about the future. This also means that the town centre is beginning to return to normalcy, but a new normal shaped by the pandemic (Local Government Association, 2022). Therefore, given the changing lifestyles and the current situation in town centres, new community coordination and management structures should be established to invite a wider range of stakeholders and support a new economic model in the post-epidemic era.



[Figure 4.1](#). COVID-19 Recovery Framework (High Street Task Force, 2020)

### Regional Level

At regional level, Liverpool City Region Authority has also developed policy documents to support the region's economic recovery and digital development. In its economic recovery plan, the role of culture and the visitor economy is emphasised and supported, and the town centre is repositioned as a multifunctional community centre with housing and access (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, 2020a). This means that future town centre development should preserve and value local culture as a basis for economic activity and should play more of a role than simply retailing to

promote the vitality. The local digital strategy states that the government will invest more in fibre and 5G with the intention of improving lives, reducing inequality and, promoting local dynamism through digital platforms, as well as improving the quality of life, environment and public services and promoting sustainable development (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, 2020b). In other words, digital infrastructure such as free Wi-Fi and wider broadband and a comprehensive e-platform should be created to provide a faster and more comfortable experience for residents.

### Local Level

At local level, Knowsley council supported the development of town centres. For Kirkby, it is redefined in the new plan as a community retail and leisure centre rather than the purely retail purpose of the 2016 policy, with a local plan that supports its regeneration, transformation, recovery, and cultural development, as well as bringing 500 new jobs

(Knowsley Council, 2016; Knowsley Council, 2022). This is in line with the new national and regional policy and provides the foundation for the development of a vibrant local economy and the transformation of roles. Keeping up to date with the latest understanding of town centre positioning will help to enhance its vitality after pandemic and maintain its competitiveness in the wave of repositioning town centres.

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05

# Strategy

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# STRATEGIES

## STRATEGY 1: ENHANCING EXISTING COMMUNITY VALUES



Figure 5.1: A Future Vision of Kirkby Market (Pinterest, 2022)

### STRATEGY 1.2. KIRKBY MARKET RETROFIT

Although informal market layouts add vibrancy to town centres, informality is more commonly linked with being unattractive, large amounts of litter, criminality, unsanitary conditions, and infrastructural deterioration (Thale, 2002). Clutters such as A-board and bins in the Kirkby Market Place can cause a negative visual impact and congestion to pedestrians, obscure the characteristics of each shop, devalue the businesses. Unnecessary items

and monotonous advertising messages should be removed, repositioned, hidden, or combined through hand-on renovations and creative shopfront design, thereby stall locations can be formalised (The Scottish Government, 2015). Improving the appearance of Market place could significantly strengthen the market's character, helping to encourage further investment.

#### **Key Actions:**

Since the market is located on council-owned land, this problem could be addressed in two ways (Davis, 2002):

- Coordination between relevant experts and local vendors in a regular forum to operate and plan the layout;
- Formulation and adoption of a series of "best practice" standards based on local on-site experiments;
- The informal decision-making process should be publicly supervised to avoid amplifying the loudest voice.

## STRATEGY 1.2. CAR PARK REPURPOSE

### 1.2.1. KIRKBY MARKET CAR PARK

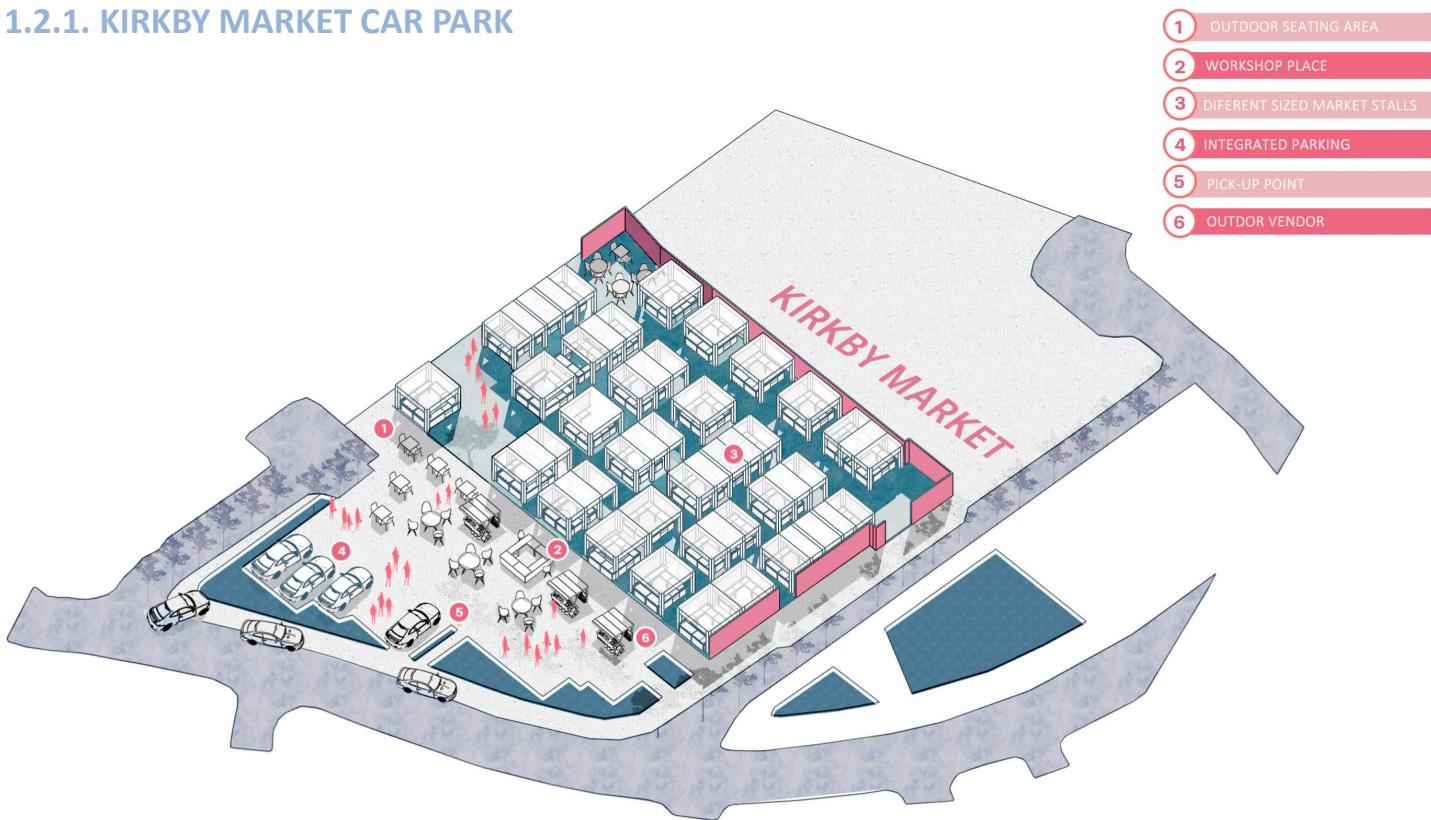


Figure 5.2: Proposed Kirkby Market Car Park Retrofit Plan

A balanced strategy that incorporates car park into design could maximise the availability of footprints for revenue-generating uses on empty parking lots (LEAP, 2019). Enhancing the original design and functionality of parking lots next to the Kirkby Market could help boost revenue for the market area and promote efficient use of space (The Scottish Government, 2015).

#### The existing lots are suggested to be repurposed into:

- Branding and sales environment: Enabling market stalls/pop-up vendors to move their goods and advertising message to the open air, especially for the florists or other seasonal merchants. This could also be a method to decongest and formalise internal market aisles;
- Curb-side drive-through pick up zones, which would also serve last-mile delivery cargo bikes and parking to reduce vehicle traffic and consolidate logistics network;
- Art, exhibition & workshop space: Supports pop-up spaces to facilitate further innovative ideas or provide outdoor training in prominent local business sectors;
- Use parallel and angled parking spaces and shared surfaces to support future events and street closures and create open-air dining options.
- Pilot schemes could be firstly launched in the Kirkby Market and then expanded to activate public realms within the town centre

## **Key Actions:**

- Assess parking lot assets and outline existing issues based on available local data and research, such as a shortfall or surplus in supply or a general imbalance between supply and demand;
- Liaising with partners within the local authority as well as representatives of local business owners to develop a parking strategy that not only commensurate with the context of Kirkby Market (e.g., transform the straight-in parking into angled and parallel parking spaces to fit more cars in less areas), but also represent the outcomes that stakeholders would want to achieve regarding new economic activities.

## **Case study: Releasing car park footprint**

Too much parking has been a great issue for Easton Town Centre but provided opportunities for an influx of developments to convert these spaces into an extension of the sales floor, operations or a platform for entertainment and guest engagement.

In the pandemic age, repurposing the parking to pick-up areas have benefited those vendors with an omnichannel platform in place, and that conversion brought a possibly more viable source of income.

In addition to meeting seating capacity inside restaurants and social distancing requirements, the expansion of outdoor dining experiences into the public realm still provides an amenity for guests after covid restrictions removed.



Figure 5.3: Car park as curbside drive-through pick up zones



Figure 5.4: Car park as community gathering place

### 1.2.1. MORRISON CAR PARK

As the largest anchor store, Morrison presents both intense competitions to locally based shops and great potentials to channel footfall and activity into the whole town centre and its immediate surroundings. Its large parking facility (470 lots) can be shared efficiently by different peak-time land uses, combining the trips to multiple destinations (Kirkby Market, drive-through restaurants, schools, and parks; Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2021). During the off-peak times, supplementary functions,

including public realm events with ground floor pedestrian links, can be created to maintain economic viability.

To mitigate negative competitions to local merchants, initiatives such as BIDs can be used to persuade them to secure their financial contribution to the town centre economy or collaborate with small-scale retailers in retail offers (LEAP, 2019).

#### **Key Actions (MAPC, 2010):**

- Ensure the physical layout of the development to ease pedestrian access from the parking spaces and Morrison supermarket to different destinations;
- Identify the type of users typically parking at each type of facility, and their parking patterns; Use analytic methods and time-of-day parking utilization curves to calculate the total number of parked vehicles expected for each use during different peaks ([figure 5.5](#));

Weekday	Evening	Weekend
Banks and public services	Auditoriums	Religious institutions
Offices and other employment centers	Bars and dance halls	Parks
Park & Ride facilities	Meeting halls	Shops and malls
Schools, daycare centers and colleges	Restaurants	
Factories and distribution centers	Theaters	
Medical clinics	Hotels	
Professional services		

**Figure 5.5:** An example of land uses by time of peak parking and demand (MAPC, 2010)

#### **Case study: Morrison shared car park**

There had been a decades-old agreement between Morrisons in Hatch End, North West London and the neighbouring venues that visitors could use the car park without any restrictions. People would often combine a trip to Harrow Arts Centre or Elliott Hall Medical Centre with shopping at the supermarket. Unfortunately, a new two-hour parking limit was introduced in 2020, meaning that careful management and calculation must be in place to guarantee the cost-efficiency of shared car parking.



## STRATEGY 1.3. SEASONAL EVENTS TO BUILD ATTRACTIVENESS

Organising events throughout the year could help Kirkby Market attract new visitors and maintain return visits, generate positive experiences and boost local pride (The Scottish Government, 2015). Kirkby has a large working-age population, which leads to a higher concentration of shopping and leisure activities on non-workdays. However, Kirkby Market has to compete with Liverpool City Centre for holiday and weekend trade. Experiential consumption may help develop what differentiates a town centre from its competitions, which will enable visitors to Liverpool

City Centre to deviate from their regular shopping routes (Hart, 2018). These activities could also create extra income-earning opportunities for those who work out-of-centre on a monthly or seasonal basis. Moreover, place marketing aimed at creating the area's experience economy assists with bringing new businesses and investment to the area (Morgan, 2007). Lastly, greater engagement in community activities by local groups may lower anti-social behaviour and crime rates and improve the town's public image (Flint and Nixon, 2005).

### Key Actions (LEAP, 2019):

- Enlist community volunteers and consult specialists to run initiative with support from local businesses and council;
- Create online and physical platforms to facilitate communication between high street stakeholders and market the programme;
- Programme a series of community events, with specific goals to grow resources and willingness to participate.

### Suggested themes include:

- Seasonally farmers' markets
- Live music & Art festival
- Spectacular dance performance on memorial occasion
- Cooking demonstrations
- Wine, drink and food festivals
- LGBT+ Pride parade
- Firework displays
- Family performance/Children's shows

### Case study: Fraserburgh Super Saturdays

Super Saturdays is a community run initiative, developed and managed by Fraserburgh Development Trust with support from local businesses and Council.

The footfall on Saturdays has increased substantially as a result of the popular events, and the shops, cafes and restaurants that take stalls have benefited from increased custom in their normal premises.

Super Saturdays have also provided an effective communications channel for local groups, with the result of greater participation in arts classes, sports clubs and other community activities as well as cutting antisocial behaviour.



## STRATEGY 1.4. LOCAL SCHEMES TO BUILD LOYALTY

Methods of building customer loyalty include supermarket-style card points and local currency schemes, with the former serving a specific market area while the latter would keep more money circulating locally. Card earning points will be rewarded to those who spend or participate in Kirkby Market, providing additional incentives for both the consumers and the sellers. Typically, money from a local area goes into the financial system of big companies and out into the volatile global market, but local currency must stay in a designated area (The Scottish Government, 2015). "Town pound" will

provide an institutional infrastructure to alternative consumption, as it promotes local development by integrating locally rooted producers and communities into a continual circulation of currency (Blanc & Fare, 2015). They will also present as a cultural brand to attract tourist consumption by celebrating the diversity and richness of Kirkby's independent traders. However, establishing a successful local currency system requires investing significant time and resources in the start-up and maintenance to help it survive the market force (Kim et al., 2016).

### **Key actions (Kim et al., 2016):**

- Increase merchant buy-in and recirculation of local currency through advertisement and training, such as public media campaigns, setting up booths at community events, distributing mailing lists and newsletters;
- Establishing a sustainable financial system by employing innovative fundraising strategies, charging merchant fees, and using the return exchange rate to generate revenue;
- Hiring regulated financial institutions and a group of coordinators to manage electronic accounts;
- Establishing a non-profit social enterprise to support small independent enterprises through shared technology;
- Participatory governance and collective decisions on money values incorporated in the mechanism require essential screening monitoring processes for the providers;
- Pilot schemes could be firstly launched in the Kirkby Market and then expanded to support town-wide independent traders

### **Case study: Bristol Pond**

The Bristol Pound is the UK's first city wide local currency with electronic accounts managed by a regulated financial institution. The Bristol Pound supports independent business by helping people commit to spend locally and businesses to forge new local spending relationships. Already more than 100 firms are signed up, including the Tobacco Factory Theatre, the Ferry Company and dozens of small cafes, local cider makers and family bakeries. The concept behind the scheme is to ensure the diversity of Bristol.



## STRATEGY 1.5. CONNECTING CULTURAL ASSETS

Kirkby Town Centre is surrounded by abundant but disconnected cultural assets. However, the long-term economic value with education, skills, health, and well-being can be further enhanced by strategically reprogramming public space to promote civic activities and interaction between these institutions. Kirkby Library is likely to become a multifunctional hub (LEAP, 2019; Figure 5.6), connecting Kirkby Gallery, Knowsley Community College, the primary and high schools, and supporting their employees by holding charged activities, including youth projects, career advice, adult education, computer classes, or second-hand book market (Figure 5.7).



Figure 5.6: Library as a multifunctional hub (LEAP, 2019)

Educational achievement levels in Kirkby are significantly below the local and national average. Improved digital access and literacy, cultural and creative enrichment, and personal wealth are deemed the outcomes that library services may contribute to the individuals and communities in their areas (DDCMS, 2016). In turn, higher community wellbeing is associated with higher consumption levels in Kirkby Town Centre.

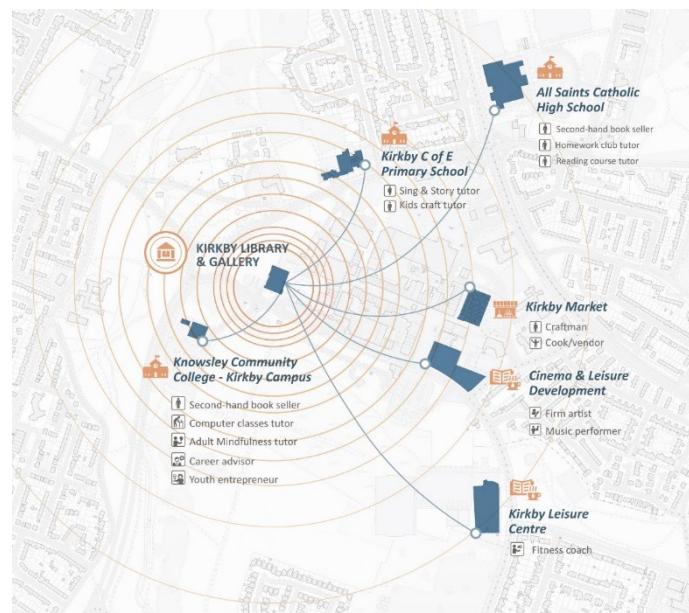


Figure 5.7: Flow of talent between Kirkby Library and cultural facilities

### Key Actions:

- Identify changing needs and challenges for extra services and reprogramming;
- Work with partners by offering part of the library space to promote a course or activity.

### Case Study: Foleshill Library

Foleshill Library is a branch library in one of Coventry's poorest areas. It celebrates the city's equality and diversity, and the city's efforts to make services more available to local residents. This has entailed working both at the library and in the community, as well as securing more funds to employ a youth worker and pay for the activities of young people. Computer tutorials, homework clubs, arts & crafts, sports and dancing sessions are all examples.



## STRATEGY 2: ACTIVATE UNDERUSED LAND

As an active hub for the local community, the town centre is not limited to economic activities. A supporting and interactive lifestyle between people and places is crucial for the future sustainable growth. Therefore, it is proposed to activate the open land in

Kirkby Town Centre as co-living neighbourhoods and increase the housing types to strengthen the inclusiveness for people from different backgrounds. This would in turn promote retail diversification, profitability and vitality.

### STRATEGY 2.1: CO-HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

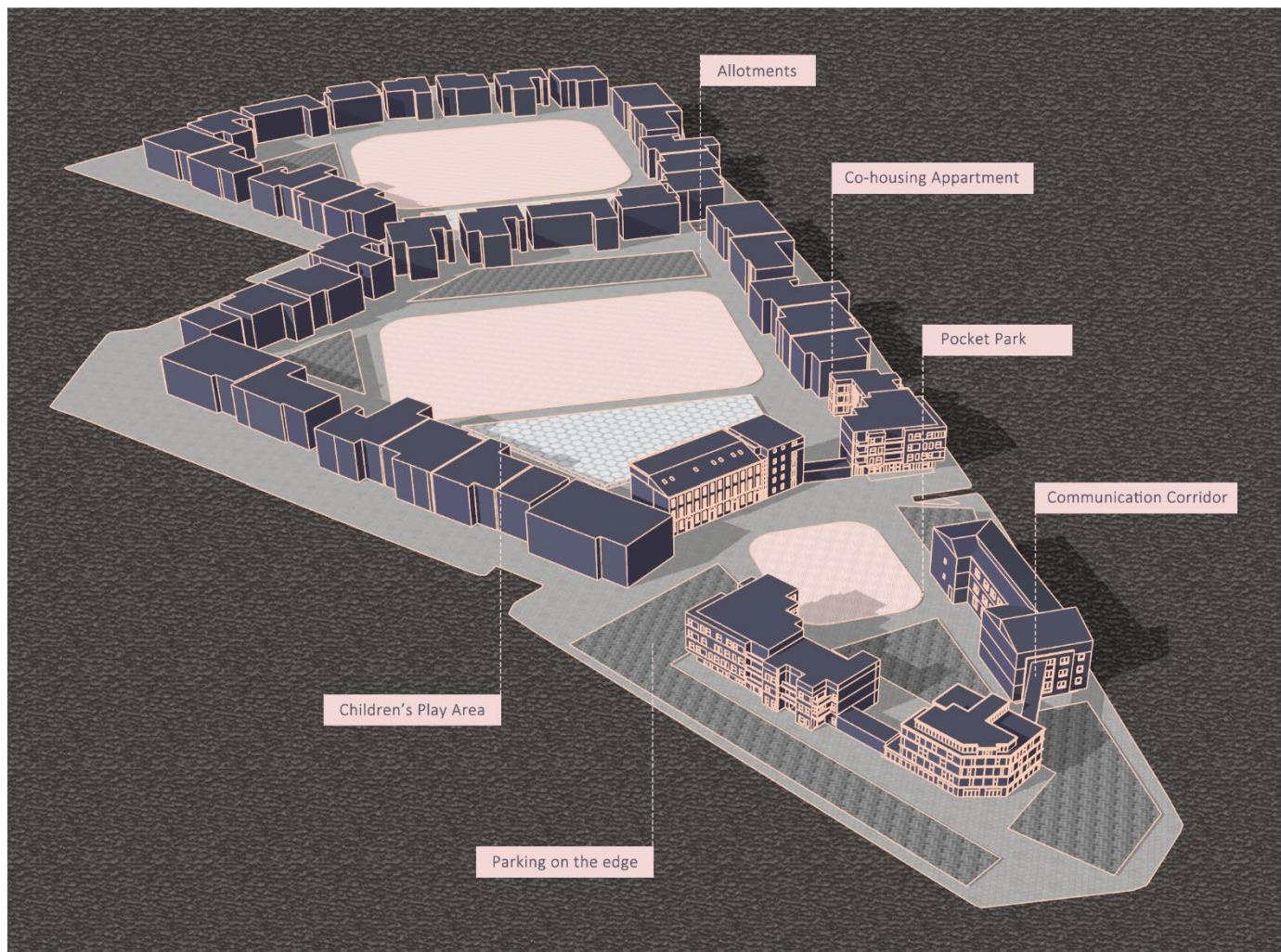


Figure 5.8: Proposed Co-housing Neighbourhood Development

In Kirkby, residential houses are the major land use, which is a crucial contributor to the dynamism of local economy and community. However, there are relatively smaller number of houses available adjacent to the Kirkby Town Centre, resulting in the centre as a vehicle-oriented retailing destination. The low pedestrian accessibility between the town centre and surrounding areas have reduced local activeness, as well as generated tremendous unused parking spaces. Moreover, the ethnic diversity in Kirkby is significantly

lower than the England average while the deprivation in Kirkby is higher; people from minor social groups are not well connected to the local neighbourhoods (Knowsley Council, 2018). Based on the current situation, a piece of land close to the town centre can be used as a co-housing residential community to enhance the supply of affordable houses and encourage a diverse and dynamic neighbourhood development.

Co-housing communities refer to the self-regulated communities where the residents can share their life together with public activities while still have private space (UK Co-housing, 2022). The common house share facilities such as cooking and dining areas, meeting and playing areas, laundries, and guest rooms. This may result in lower rent for the residents because of the smaller private dwellings because residents have access to common facilities. A cohousing project frequently includes shared outdoor space for gardens, children's play, parties, and food growing (Figure 5.9).

By providing mixed houses and flats, the diversity of residents can be sustained. The common house and area allow various activities held regularly in the community to enhance the sense of belonging. Furthermore, everyone can contribute to the management of the community and take shared responsibility for a shared goal. The community is governed in a non-hierarchical manner, with many decisions made by consensus. All residents are invited to participate in decision-making and work for the community for a specified number of hours.

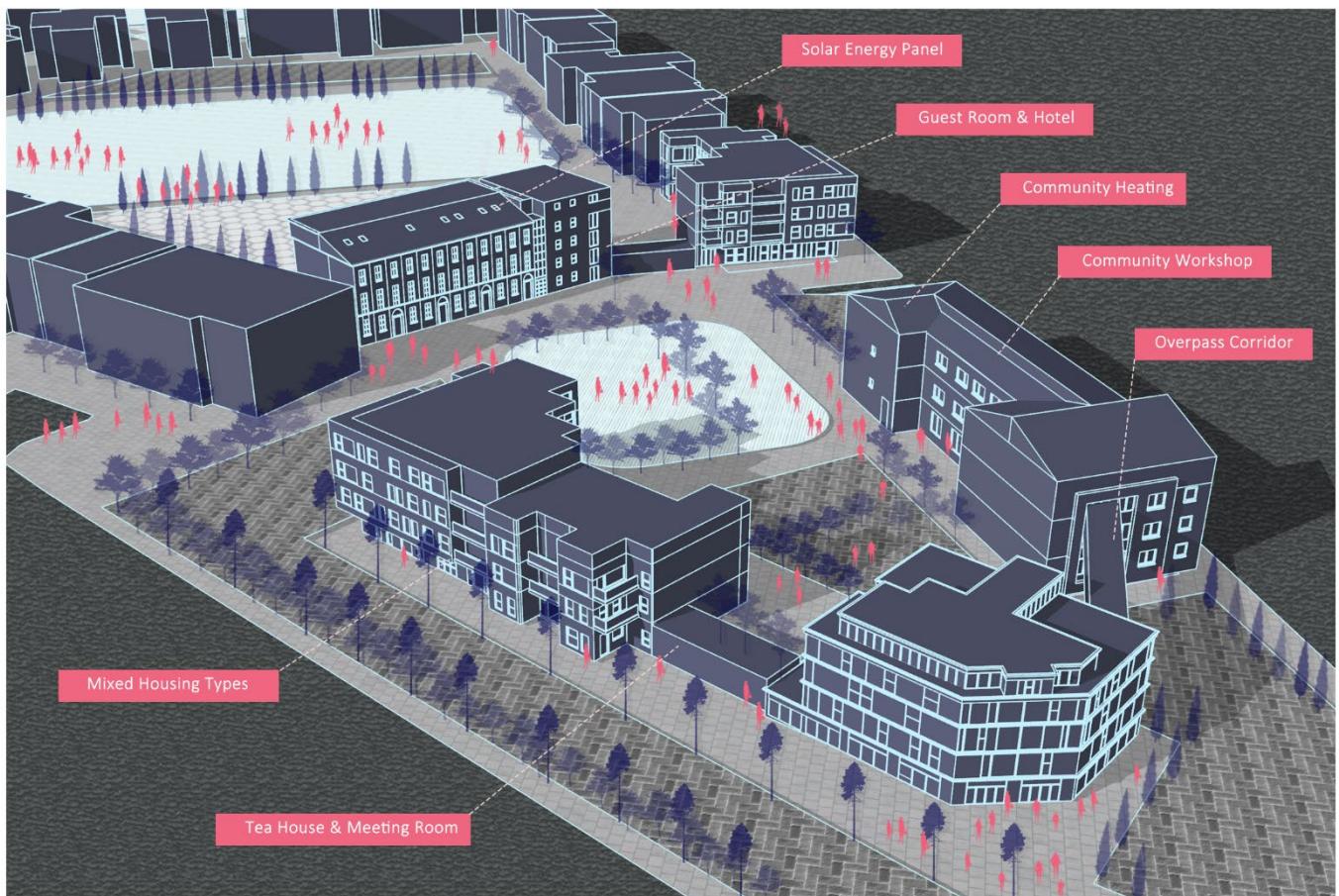


Figure 5.9: Proposed Functions of Co-housing Neighbourhood



Figure 5.10: The opportunity land near the west of Kirkby Town Centre. Invest Knowsley (2022a)

## **Key actions:**

- Provide affordable mixed houses and flats to the disadvantaged groups.
- Create a shared common area in the community to encourage interaction and communication among residents.
- Initiate a community management system run by the residents to promote empowerment of everyone.

## **Case study: New Ground Co-housing**

As a first co-housing group aiming to provide help for the older women in the UK, the community has emphasised the principle of mutual support, where every resident needs to take responsibility to the daily management such as cleaning, planning and organising (Ye and Wu, 2021). Moreover, the 25 houses facing the courtyard with a communal space in the centre have built a connection between privacy and public area. The diverse retailing options and easy accessibility of transportation enable the co-housing community with sustainable and age-friendly development (Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11: New ground co-housing ground floor plan (Ye and Wu, 2021)

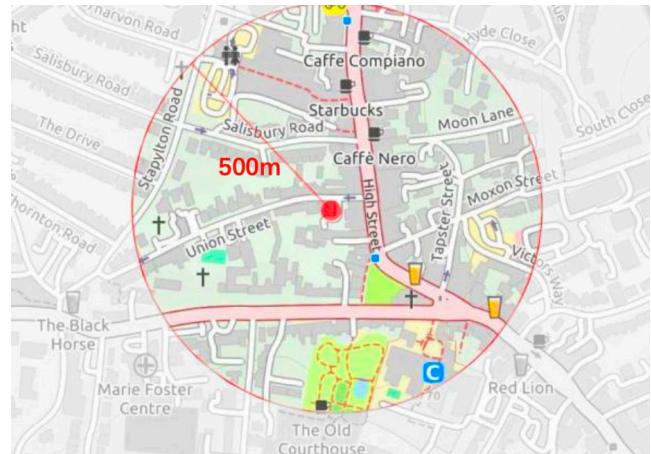


Figure 5.11: New ground co-housing public service 500m walking circle diagram (Ye and Wu, 2021)



Figure 5.11: Older residents cooking together and manage the future of their dream house (Ye and Wu, 2021)

## STRATEGY 2.2: DIVERSIFY HOUSING TYPES

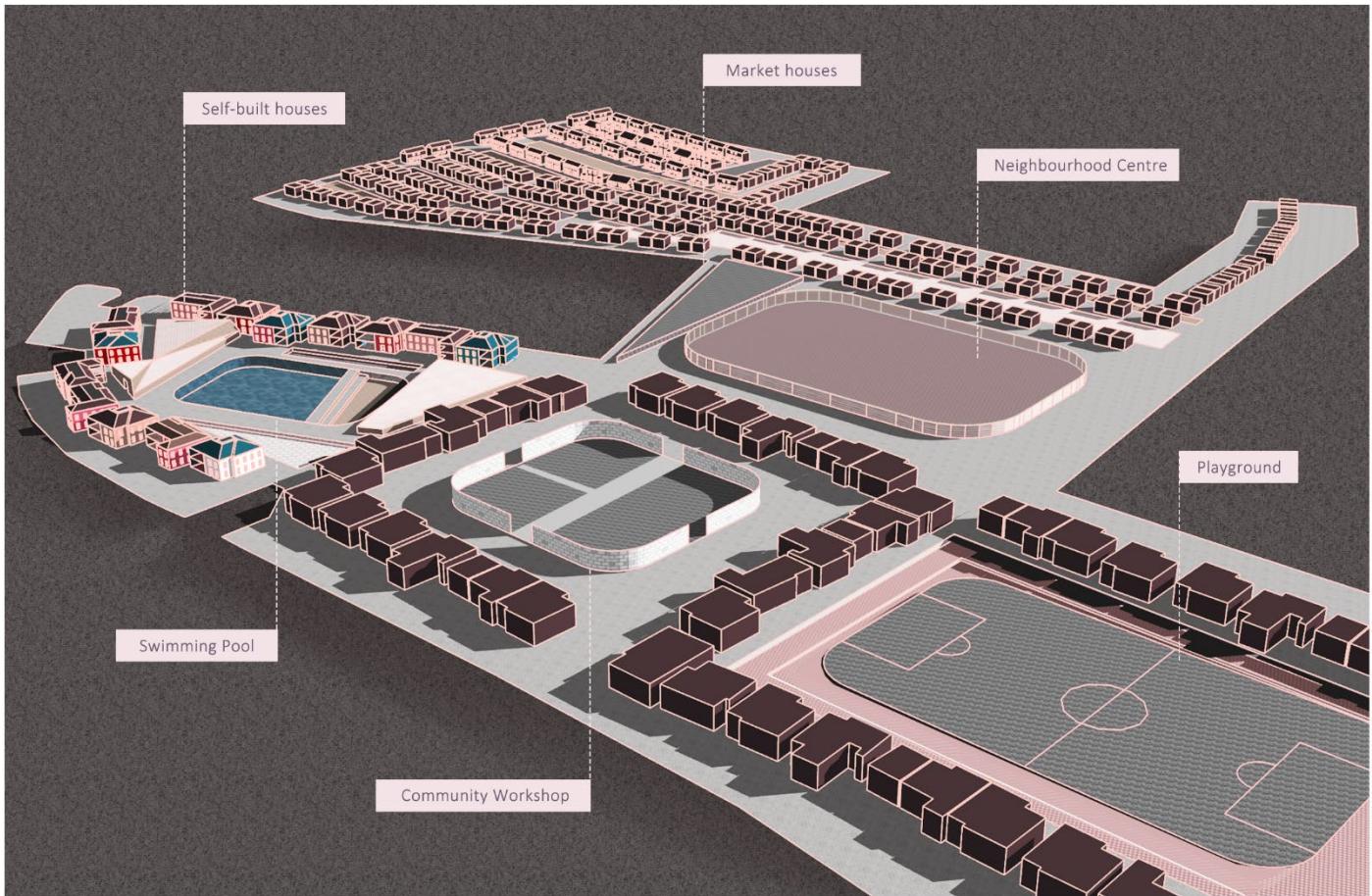


Figure 5.12: Proposed neighbourhood in the context: mixed market homes & self-built houses

The dominance of terraced and semi-detached housing types is likely to threaten the future of activeness. Moreover, the needs of people from different family structures and income levels are not sufficiently fulfilled by the current housing supply in Kirkby. Thus, it is proposed to develop a combination of social and market houses in the land to the south of the town centre to satisfy various demand of housing types and promote community diversity and social mix, according to the design preference of the homeowners (Figure 5.12).

The open land will be used for residential use with social and market houses. As some residents with low-income level cannot afford to purchase or rent big houses, the social houses are proposed to be built with half of space and left the other half for customised construction. In this way, the residents can have a place to live with a low price and expand the space based on their own demands. Basic public infrastructure such as water pipes and electricity will be prepared in advance and regular workshops is planned to assist with the customised construction.



Figure 5.13: The opportunity land near the south of Kirkby Town Centre. Invest Knowsley (2022b)

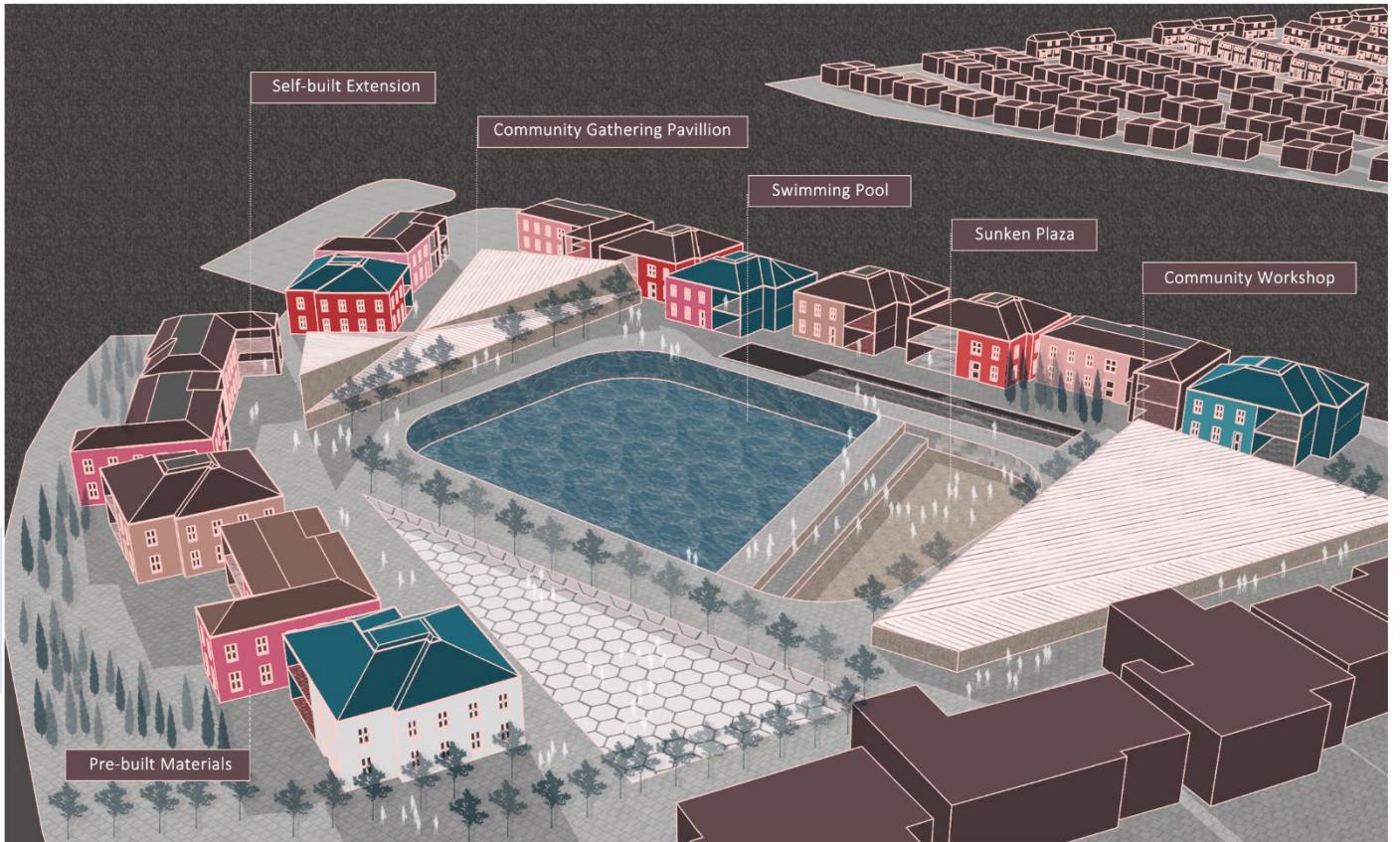


Figure 5.14: Proposed self-built development neighbourhood

Market houses are semi-detached and completely built to attract people with higher income, which helps ensure the provision of infrastructure and gather revenues for the construction of affordable housing. More importantly, a combination of affordable and market houses can encourage social mix, which

promotes the social mobility and opportunities for active community development and high-end retail brands coming in. People from different ethnic and cultural background can promote retail diversity with various shopping preferences (Figure 5.14).



Figure 5.15: Houses under construction in "Half A House" project in Constitución (Ziliacus, 2016)

### Case study: “Half A House” In Constitución

The project in Constitución, Chile aims to promote incremental buildings to make low-income houses affordable. The low-income families cannot afford a well-built large house and are therefore frequently given smaller homes or building blocks. The design idea is to build half of the standard houses and leave the other halves unique (Ziliacus, 2016). The first floor is made up of unfinished concrete floors, while the second is covered in unfinished plywood. Everything that families would struggle to build on their own, such as concrete foundations, plumbing, and electricity, has been completed for them. Residents can take part in building workshops facilitated by Elemental, and every house comes with a manual covering possible ways to expand using standard building materials, avoiding the need for anyone to buy expensive custom resources. The goal is for residents to construct nicer house than they could have built entirely on their own or with regular state funding (Figure 5.15).

## STRATEGY 3: VIBRANT NIGHT ECONOMY

*"The night-time economy is about creating towns and cities for all ages, cultures, creeds and genders"*

– Shain Shapiro, Sound Diplomacy

Kirkby's Town Centre is not fully exploiting its potential to generate additional jobs and economic gains creating a safe, vibrant and balanced evening and night-time service is a challenge but has incredible potential for growth. A dedicated strategy shifts the way local authorities deal with the night

and it can make effective use of the resources available to Kirkby to add a sense of vibrancy and uniqueness, improve the sense of safety at night, enhance the local economy and develop diverse cultural activities.

### STRATEGY 3.1. PROLONG OPENING TIMES

Entertainment and bars are the backbones of the night-time economy, and the city culture comes alive at night: entertainment and food, live music, and bars while Kirby's entertainment venues, close too early and the diversity of night economy types are limited (World City Culture Forum, 2020). Therefore, in line with the principle of making the most of

Kirby's existing assets, it is important to initially promote Kirby's night-time economy by encouraging shops in the town centre that can contribute to the night-time economy to stay open longer, which can not only gain more economy values but diversify the hospitality sector.

#### Key actions:

- Carry out research to establish the case for longer opening hours to develop guidance to help boroughs, landowners and developers create a welcoming, safe and vibrant public spaces at night.
- New late activity is encouraged to be developed around the existing hospitality offer, starting with cultural organizations such as museums, galleries, theatres and music venues – some of which are experimenting successfully with later hours.
- Extended opening hours for public facilities, such as libraries and leisure centres.

#### Case Study: 'Light Night' Initiative in Liverpool:

Liverpool's implementation of the 'Light Night' project aims to collaborate with local museums, theatres, shops, restaurants, and pubs to open late into the evening during the festive season. The creation of large festive infrastructure has enhanced the attractiveness of town centre which has encouraged people to engage in ongoing activities. Moreover, the lighting and safety facilities has improved the safety for retailing and leisure experience.



Figure 5.16: Liverpool Light Night

## STRATEGY 3.2. MITIGATE NEGATIVE IMPACT

Although there are some events and activities in Kirkby Town Centre at present, it fails to create a distinctive town image to the customers and visitors. Moreover, the current night time economy is mainly based on pubs, which lacks diversity and leaves opportunity for further development as well as contributes to a higher crime rate that gives rise to safety concerns. Therefore, it is proposed to

promote the uniqueness and diversity of the town at night and provide marketing, events and online resources for the night associated lighting devices and security protection makes the municipality's nights easily synonymous with crime and violence to make memories that resonates with the community through festivals and events held in the evenings.

### **Key actions:**

- Develop a sense of festivity and celebration in busy areas and opportunities for public art and culture after dark.
- Establish a Night Time Enterprise Zone fund.
- Partner with local businesses, BIDs, night workers, community groups and police to establish a night-time forum that collaborative defines the brief for the strategy and helps deliver its actions.
- Plan land use and designing clusters of night-time activities to create systems that complement daytime use.
- Initiatives to further help train and support companies to diversify their activities and implement best practices.

### **Case Study: Havering Night Partnership (Havering London Borough, 2018)**

The Safe and Sound Partnership brings together the council, companies, the police, and volunteer organisations to make Romford safer at night. Street pastors and the Deeper Lounge are operated by volunteers from local churches and offer assistance to the public. On weekends, the police give the door security staff instructions so they are aware of possible problems. Taxi marshals, who are paid by TFL, help in driving customers home safely. The Council's licensing policy opposes vertical drinking businesses while encouraging diversified restaurant services. The council's community safety team is holding a Best Bar None campaign to celebrate other night-time venues.



## STRATEGY 4: DIGITAL INSIGHT

Establishing electronic infrastructures and platforms helps promote Kirkby's economic vitality as it can contribute to retail sales and support the night-time economy (Kutnjak, Pihiri and Furjan, 2019; London Night Time Commission, 2019). To achieve this goal, it is suggested to work on the aspects of consumption and transport.

Real-time population statistics, flow volume, and product price fluctuation should be provided to assist government workers, investors, and customers in making purchasing decisions. Stock levels and order quantities are required to be updated to enable stores to decide on stocking dates. Furthermore, different payment channels such as Visa, Mastercard,

JCB, Union Pay, and others are helpful for easier payment. Launching e-platforms may also help to enhance local economies and showcase local assets, as well as stimulate market innovation and marketing opportunities (Veleva and Tsvetanova, 2020). Coordination between storage, logistics, and stores, for example, can open up new market prospects (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Reinartz, Wiegand, and Wichmann, 2019). Customers travelling by private automobile should have access to an electronic platform as well as electric vehicle charging stations and intelligent parking systems, and public transportation information is critical for promoting shopping visits with a sustainable trip.

Aspects	Key Actions	Case studies
<b>Shopping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance free WIFI coverage of the town centre to allow customers to connect to the internet;</li> <li>Provide wider broadband to cope with greater network traffic;</li> </ul>	Warwickshire has been using digital technology widely to collect high street data since 2018. Their GeoSense visitor flow collection system is designed to detect visitor activity throughout the city centre and can be analysed in real time. The data collected can help the council and other managers understand the place and in turn help improve local development.
<b>Marketing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publish offers and marketing messages to attract consumers;</li> <li>Provide a platform for collecting customer feedback to improve merchant business strategies;</li> <li>Link up with other social media and advertisement.</li> </ul>	Partnership between Chesterfield Council and the East Midlands Chamber provides local high street traders with a professional e-business consultant to assess and advise on the development of shops' current e-marketing and social media campaigns, offers local traders a year's membership to the Chamber of Commerce, and provides digital literacy courses for shopkeepers. It can increase the turnover of shops, attract residents and visitors, and develop a larger market.
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Synchronise public transport timetables so that customers can choose when and how to get there;</li> <li>Provide sufficient delivery point to delivery services (Figure);</li> <li>Provide e-ticketing service for easy access;</li> </ul>	Mosman's intelligent parking system is capable of acquiring real-time data via sensors, introducing dynamic parking spaces and thus providing parking availability in real time. In shopping centres and busy retail neighbourhoods, a poor parking experience can affect customer traffic and retention. This will make parking more convenient and improve the customer shopping experience.

Table 5.1: Key Action of Digital Insight



Figure 5.17: Proposed Delivery points

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06

# **Implementation and Reflection**

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# IMPLEMENTATION

## PRE-DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

### Phase 1: Preparing a Town Investment Plan Running a Town Deal Board

The Town Deal Board is tasked with overseeing the flow of funding for town deals, producing town investment plans that reflect local objectives, and collaborating with local businesses and communities to develop a clear vision and strategy for the town.

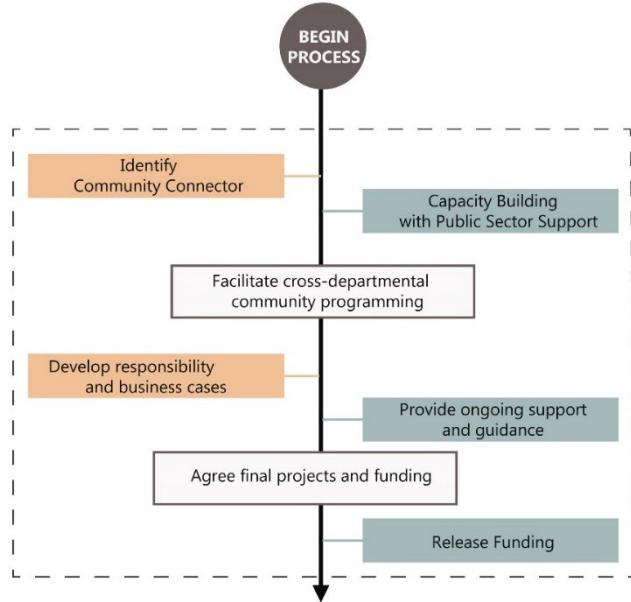


Figure 6.1: Phase 1 process

### Phase 2: Alignment with initiatives and funding

Strategies	Outcomes	Alignment
<b>Strategy 4: Digital Insight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of smart civic Infrastructure</li> <li>Promotion of digital shopping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 1.1. Kirkby Market Retrofit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remediation of vacancy or dilapidated sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future High Streets Fund projects or other government regeneration schemes</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 1.2. Car park Repurpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction of new public space</li> </ul>	
<b>Strategy 2: Develop Underused land</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction of high-quality housing or business area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Growth Fund</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 2: Develop Underused land</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local branding and marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future High Street Fund projects</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 1.5. Connecting Cultural Assets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening the connection of culture facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culture Development Fund</li> <li>Arts Council National Lottery Projects Grants</li> <li>Discover England Fund</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 1.3. Seasonal Events to Build Attractiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breadth of supply to meet local skills needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local skills plans</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 1.4. Local Schemes to Build Loyalty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the availability of new or adapted skills facilities.</li> <li>Increases the benefits of public education in the long run.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further Education Capital Fund.</li> <li>The Adult Education Budget</li> <li>Local Digital Skills Partnership</li> <li>Civic University Agreements</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 1.5. Connecting Cultural Assets</b>		
<b>Strategy 3: Vibrant Night Economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish longer opening hours for night economy.</li> </ul>	
<b>Strategy 1.3. Seasonal Events to Build Attractiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the sense of festivity and celebration.</li> <li>Redefine anchor store/supermarkets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Industrial Strategy</li> <li>DIT Capital Investment work</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 1.2. Car Park Repurpose</b>		

## **Phase 3: Develop a detailed projects and business case**

After the investor has agreed to the first investment plan, the town must prepare a detailed project and an accurate and comprehensive business case based on the TIP's strategy.

## **Phase 4: Provide ongoing support and guidance**

Under the guidance of the committee, the town shall analyse and monitor the funded project and produce performance reports to the government and donor to ensure that it is delivered successfully. The relevant departments will determine whether or not the project fits their requirements. A clear overall vision and plan that matches the investor will be required for successful finance delivery.

## **MARKETING**

Experiential consumption benefits through a collaborative marketing strategy with input from businesses and public agencies (Scottish Government, 2015). Compared with Huyton Town Centre, the pictures used on Kirkby's official website are mostly official logos rather than on-site photos, which do not show the characteristics of what culture, events, and leisure the town centre offers, and some features such as guiding maps and site plans are still lacking. Compared with Swindon Town Centre, Kirkby is more successful in social media marketing, whose Twitter carries a lot of promotional information.

Branding may be an enticing and important step in reinventing a shopping street. It is a long-term commitment in both the physical and digital worlds. A successful community-driven place branding campaign can be a great way to engage residents and share their views on a commercial street (Association of town and city management, 2022).

### Who will market

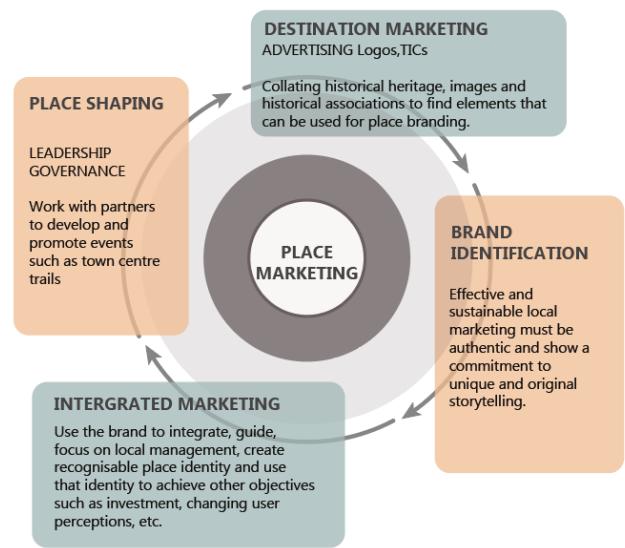
- Setting up a Marketing Sub-Group involving local stakeholders.
- Campaign develop a brand for Kirkby that all parties can sign up to and a marketing campaign with clearly defined outputs.

### How will it be marketed?

#### **Online Marketing**

- Develop a dedicated website for the town centre and make arrangements to ensure that this webpage is regularly updated.
- Investigate how Kirkby town centre can be promoted using social media.
- Develop a shared online resource to create flexible place branding and marketing materials for use by a diverse range of local stakeholders.

#### **Place Marketing (Figure: 6.2)**



#### **Case study:**

The Summertime Sheep Trail successfully transformed Harlow Town Centre into a destination, generating excellent media relations on all levels and branding advertisements raising over £2,000 for charity during an ordinarily quiet period (Association of town and city management, 2022).

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Typically, participation from involved stakeholders and communities runs through the strategic planning process (Albrechts, 2004). Feedback from a wider 'self-organisation' helps widen the evidence base, determine the scope, foment the development strategy and ensure its delivery trajectory (Healey, 1996). Before the development, communities are

enabled to submit a fund application to the Town Deal Board. In order to better protect community value and informal networks, residents should be consulted and kept them informed of the plan's formulation and implementation progress. In the final stage, citizens should be mobilised to participate in and monitor property and vacancy management.

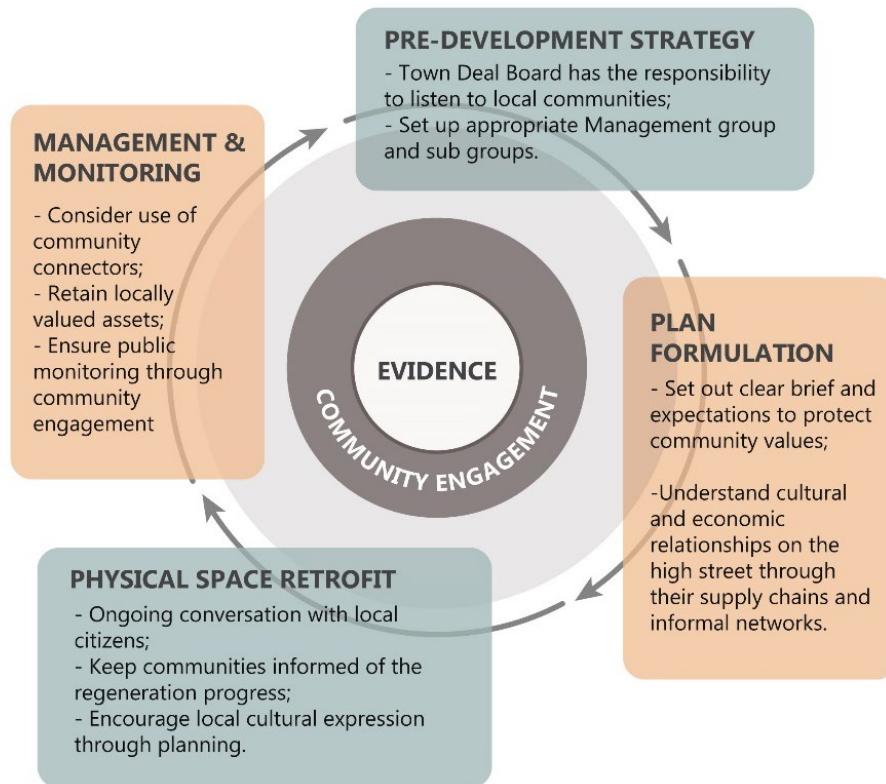


Figure 6.3: Community engagement process

## MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

The first stage is to use public funds to fund a particular employment post for a community connector with sufficient local expertise and networks to match vacant buildings or temporary locations with interested community groups. A paid employment, as opposed to volunteer work, is more likely to ensure consistent devotion. This position will receive

property management training, community capacity building, and temporary programming through the integration of cross-departmental action teams. Eventually, the community connector will eventually develop into a self-sustaining property management agent beyond project-specific time frames.

## Community connectors are responsible to manage the vacancy through several helpful asset management instruments (Figure 6.4):

- Retain locally valued assets through long-term involvement and maintenance of recognised valuable assets in the community. Keep anchor assets and operators who generate social value on the street. Ensure that the high street continues to serve the community and support innovative ideas.
- Request developers and landowners to bring their property back into use, and negotiate the grants and loans necessary to obtain the consent they require.
- A Vacant Possession Tracker (Figure 6.5) will be implemented to track ownership, leases, local authority influence, and community values to

enable public participation in monitoring the management process. The rateable values, which are based on financial and societal advantages, will be shown using a colour-coded tracker and a plotted map.

- The connector needs to develop in-depth partnerships with Knowsley Council in order to use statutory powers including Compulsory Purchase Orders and planning applications to get planning approval for strategic locations.

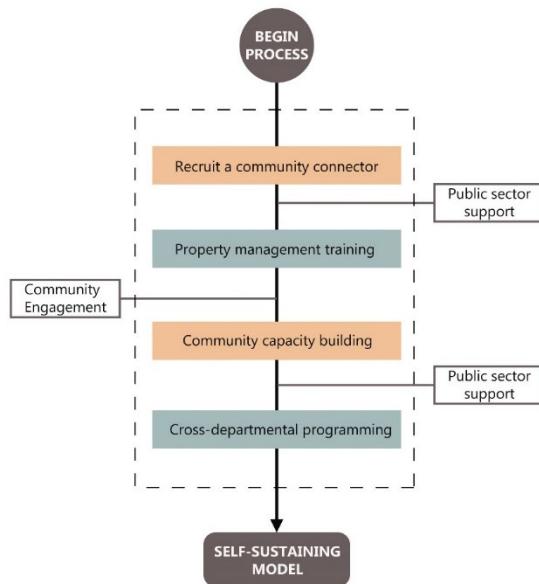


Figure 6.4: Community connector

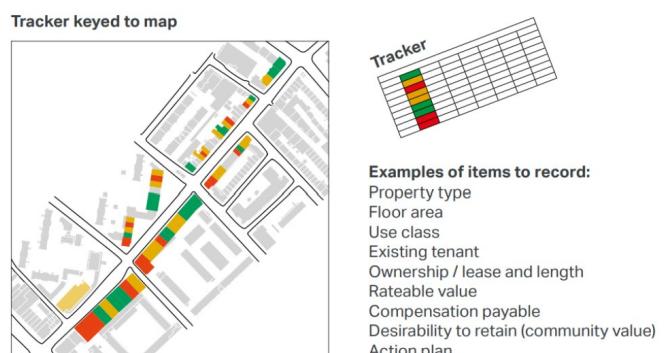
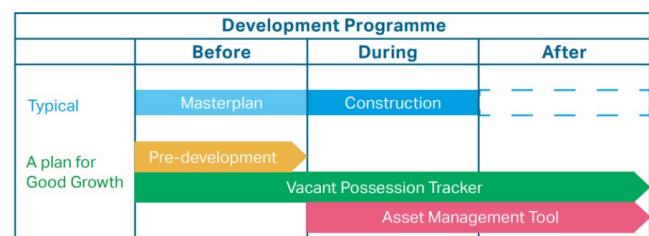


Figure 6.5: Vacant Possession Tracker

## REFLECTION

This paper summarised the changing trends in the role of town centres and the current situation in Kirkby before proposing 3 visions and 4 strategies to address the current challenges in the town centre for promoting the vitality. Town centres are gradually evolving from their traditional role as retail centres to become more sophisticated and offer a wider range of services (Local Government Association, 2022). With this role the town centre of the future should be resilient and serve retail, social, leisure, and experiential functions to improve its activeness (KPMG, 2021). Along with this transformation came excessive competition, the financial crisis, internet retailing, and the pandemic, which severely damaged the vitality of town centres and high streets and led to the current challenges, changing lifestyles, high vacancy rates, and loss of culture. To deal with the problems, a health check criterion of the town centre was established, covering three main areas: external, economic, and cultural. Using this criterion, Kirkby was found to have a complex distribution of living standards, poor preservation of cultural and local assets, low levels of commerce, many underutilised plots of land, a digital infrastructure that needs to be

improved and almost no night-time economy. In the meantime, from the national level to local level, there are many policies supporting the transformation of role, recovery of economics, and enhancement of digital platform and infrastructure.

Based on the situation and policy, three visions were proposed: Diversity, Vitality, and Identity. Following these three visions, four key strategies have been developed to enhance the vitality of the town centre, namely the reinforcement of existing assets to preserve local culture and markets, the development of underutilised land, the enhancement of the night-time economy, and the improvement of digital infrastructure and platforms. At the same time, a series of phased actions including investment plans, fund allocations, business projects, support and guidance, community coordination and collaboration, branding, and marketing were. Ultimately, this report reviewed the proposals, identified some shortcomings, and provided recommendations to monitor and ensure the implementation of the strategies.

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07

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