

# West Bridgford Commissioners' Report

November 2017





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## Background and Context

In December 2014, Rushcliffe Borough Council agreed to establish a Strategic Growth Board for Rushcliffe. Within this, a sub group – the West Bridgford Growth Board – was established. West Bridgford has a population of just over 41,000 people and has a reputation for a high-quality, thriving and diverse retail, leisure and business sector. To maintain this success in the future, the Board identified the need to utilise independent, external expertise and knowledge to support the overall objective for growth and help steer the course of the local economy in West Bridgford.





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Three Independent Commissioners were appointed in November 2016 to lead a consultation exercise and to report to the Growth Board in the autumn of 2017. Part of their role was to assess current opinion on the street scene, atmosphere and ambiance, and to identify different options for improving the target area. The Commissioners were appointed in a voluntary capacity and consisted of Mick Burrows, former Nottinghamshire County Council Chief Executive and local resident, Kim Cassidy, Professor of Retail Marketing and a retail specialist from Nottingham Trent University and Tim Richmond, an experienced entrepreneur, chartered accountant and local businessman. The Commissioners' brief was to focus on the Central Avenue, Tudor Square and Gordon Road areas and seek views of local residents, businesses, partners and community groups.

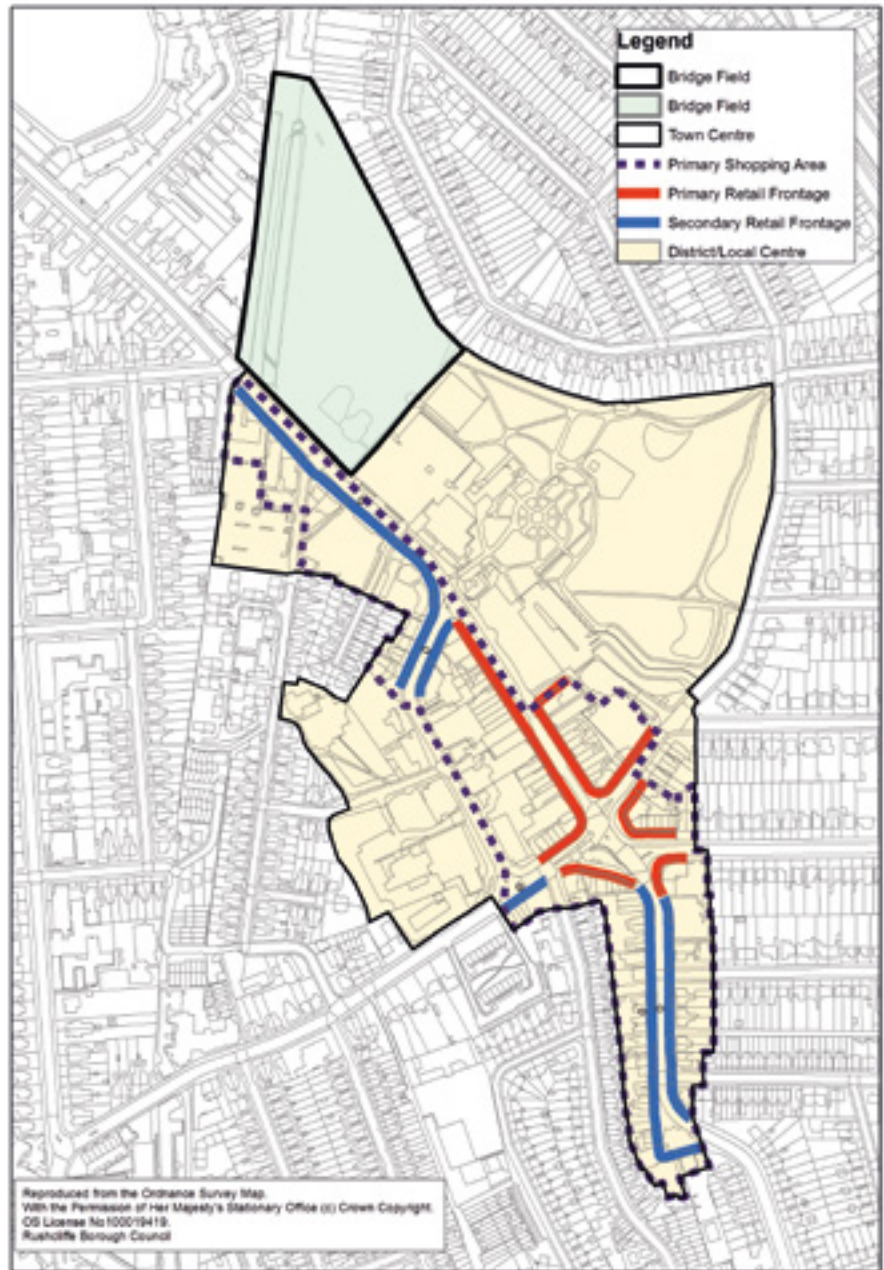


From left to right: Mick Burrows, Kim Cassidy and Tim Richmond OBE

Rushcliffe Borough Council also commissioned two other projects. Firstly, the Chairman of the local history group was asked to create a Heritage Trail for West Bridgford. This has been completed alongside a project to develop a cycle route for the town. Both are seen as timely and complementary to the Commission.

The Commissioners also had the benefit of advice from Bill Grimsey, author of the Grimsey Review, a comprehensive review of the state of the UK high street retail sector.

The future of UK High streets nationally has attracted (and continues to attract) widespread interest from retailers, government agencies and citizens. 'There was a time when the shopping experience belonged exclusively on the high street. Now there are no boundaries. The growth of online shopping has changed everything. Cities, towns, villages, parades, shopping centres, retail parks, shopping parks and leisure parks all compete for their share of consumer spend' (the Grimsey Review p.8). The evidence suggests that many UK towns and cities share the same characteristics and challenges as West Bridgford in striving to maintain a vibrant, thriving and economically prosperous retail community in the face of a rapidly changing retail landscape. For the purposes of this report, this has meant that the Commissioners have had access to an extensive range of secondary reports and material, with examples of 'best' practice throughout the UK and Europe, which have been used to benchmark developments in West Bridgford.



## Activities

The Commissioners embarked on a programme of structured data collection, which involved extensive consultation with a variety of stakeholder groups. This took the form of questionnaires, informal interviews and interactive presentations, and discussions with interested groups including individual meetings with key stakeholders including the Police, Rushcliffe Business Partnership, property developers, Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, Friends of Bridgford Park, the local History Society and local business. Young people were engaged through a series of presentations to schools and also discussions at the Young People’s centre. A poster competition, devised with Rushcliffe School, also captured young people’s ideas. The West Bridgford Wire and Rushcliffe Borough Council websites also served as valuable resources for updates.



The Commissioners made contact with as wide a cross section of residents as possible using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The Consultation took place between February and July 2017. The Commissioners also attended scheduled meetings of the West Bridgford Growth Board to provide an update on progress but also to ensure the findings were informed by wider initiatives and projects commissioned by the Board.

This section of the report and tables 1 and 2 provide a detailed summary of the timescales and activities involved in the consultation process and the stakeholders who have been involved. The report does not identify individuals in order to protect the objectivity and autonomy of the report findings.

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**Table 1: Timescale and Activities**

<b>January – February 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of call for primary research to gather views of local residents and visitors, and key stakeholders identified</li> </ul>
<b>March – July 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversee primary data collection</li> <li>• Presentation of emerging findings to the West Bridgford Growth Board</li> </ul>
<b>September – October 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review all findings and prepare detailed report with proposed considerations and recommendations</li> <li>• Cross reference report findings with parallel activities to identify common themes and potential outcomes</li> <li>• Present report to West Bridgford Growth Board</li> </ul>
<b>November 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare report for wider circulation and comment</li> </ul>
<b>January 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review progress against recommendations and make any further recommendations</li> </ul>





Table 2: Details of Consultation

Month	Consultation Activity
February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of Consultation</li> <li>• Features in the West Bridgford Wire, Nottingham Post and other local media.</li> <li>• Launch of Postcard consultation with residents and visitors. Cards placed in local outlets (64 individual responses)</li> <li>• Meeting with the Growth Board</li> <li>• Individual and Group meetings with Rushcliffe Borough Councillors and Nottinghamshire County Councillors.</li> <li>• Engagement with Bill Grimsey</li> </ul>
March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed and analysed responses to questionnaire distributed via Survey Monkey (369 individual responses received)</li> <li>• Responses to West Bridgford Wire feature on Commission (4 pages of feedback)</li> <li>• Ongoing one to one discussions with retailers and service outlet owners</li> <li>• Presentation to Jesse Gray primary school years 5 and 6</li> </ul>
April 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation and discussion with Rushcliffe Business Partnership (2 pages of feedback)</li> <li>• Meeting with Chairman</li> <li>• Feedback to Growth Board</li> </ul>
May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with West Bridgford Local Area Forum</li> <li>• Meeting with Friends of Bridgford Park</li> <li>• Detailed Consultations with the following stakeholders; Police, Cricket Club, Registration Service, tenants of Bridgford House and the West Bridgford and District Local History Society</li> </ul>
June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with property developers</li> <li>• Interviews with owners of restaurant and service outlets</li> <li>• Visioning competition with schools and young people</li> </ul>
July 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation to West Bridgford Growth Board</li> <li>• Discussion with architects</li> </ul>





In parallel with the primary data collection, the Commissioners also reviewed an array of relevant secondary information documenting how high street managers and other stakeholders are responding to some of the broader challenges facing West Bridgford. These include publications available through the Government supported, Great British High street initiative [thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk](http://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk) as well as data from academic centres such as the National Retail Research Knowledge Exchange Centre at Nottingham Trent University [nrrkec.org.uk](http://nrrkec.org.uk) and the Institute of Place Management [placemanagement.org](http://placemanagement.org).

Most notable as a piece of relevant information, was the study from Kerching Retail commissioned by the West Bridgford Growth Board in 2016 to focus specifically on retail trading in West Bridgford. This was an independent review of 120 business premises in West Bridgford town centre and the Saturday Farmers' Market. The report benchmarked activity against national figures and, based on the analysis, offered ten recommendations on how trading could be improved and maximised. The review excluded a detailed study of retailers outside of the designated town centre, as identified by Rushcliffe Borough Council. Musters Road, Loughborough Road, Melton Road, and Radcliffe Road were only viewed, and considered, for their impact on the town centre.

It is encouraging that many of the recommendations made by Kerching Retail mirror and reinforce those presented here. It is clear that there is some agreement about exactly what changes are necessary to future proof this magnificent location.









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## Analysis and findings

It is clear that overall, people really like West Bridgford. It is regarded as unique locally, hence the appearance of Oliver Bonas and Jo Jo Maman Bébé. It has many assets that inward investors will seek including good schools, housing and sporting facilities, nice places to eat and drink, and being near to amenities. The majority of residents see it as a great place to live with excellent schools. It is friendly with a pleasant overall ambience and atmosphere. Locals and visitors come to the town for a number of reasons – such as shopping, as well as a wide range of leisure activities with nice places to dine and relax. Cricket matches are seen as very valuable to the local economy.

Many stakeholders commented on the quality of the cafes and restaurants, which helped to create a vibrant atmosphere through the day, but also in the evenings and at weekends. The majority felt that the proximity of Bridgford Park, and other green spaces, contributed to the pleasant atmosphere.

The enthusiastic response the Commissioners received to the consultation process was overwhelming. People engaged with insight, enthusiasm and passion, anxious to have their say in shaping the future of the area. There was a strong sense of identity with the place within all age groups and shared responsibility for helping to shape the West Bridgford of the future.

**Six themes emerged from our analysis of both the primary and secondary data. Within each theme, we have tried, where possible, to support the commentary with direct quotes from stakeholders.**



## Theme 1 | Accessibility

This includes references to parking, all forms of transport (including cycling), traffic flow, pedestrianisation, mobility and all forms of digital activity including WiFi access

- Parking problems are a key concern
- There is a strong interest in sustainable transport solutions, most notably cycling access routes and stations
- Concerns about barriers to physical access to West Bridgford and traffic congestion
- There does not appear to be a clear or shared understanding about where the heart or centre of West Bridgford lies
- There is relatively little evidence of digitisation supporting access to and promotion of retail services in West Bridgford

### Parking

Many expressed significant concerns about parking, particularly in light of the recently changed charges (which have since changed again). Participants had mixed opinions about the need to create increased parking that is more flexible and the need to reduce facilities for cars altogether and encourage greener approaches to access.

*'Parking is a nightmare for those people wishing to just 'pop' in to shops and banks which I'm sure must be the majority of folk visiting. The best way to make it more accessible would be to remove/restrict/ban the cars that bring the people in...!'*

From the online survey, 30% of respondents wanted improved parking availability, cheaper parking prices and longer times. 27% of respondents wanted measures to encourage greater use of public and green transport.

There was also concern about the number of unauthorised cars travelling along Central Avenue. This was seen to generate a lot of ill feeling, potential disputes and complaints to the Police.

Despite these concerns, residents had a number of constructive suggestions about how parking might be improved

*'Free parking on Gordon Road and Bridgford Road for 2 hours during the day, increasing the size of the Co-op car park and revising the parking rules. Investigating parking options on land currently utilised by the Police and Ambulance stations on Rectory Road'.*

We acknowledge this land is now under development, however it would have been a useful site for a car park on this side of the town. The issue of parking is a controversial one for local authorities across the UK. A range of solutions have been implemented to control and police car access, including sensors for short term use, and underground or over ground car parks (see Braintree District Council for an example of a successful scheme). As with other solutions, align with the strategic plan developed for each centre (for a good practice guide on parking provision see page 31 of 'Re-Think! Parking on the High Street: Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres by Ojay McDonald).





### Cycling and alternative transport

On balance, there was support for better storage facilities and access routes for cyclists. This mirrors some of the findings of the public consultation events that have taken place about the development of 'strategic cycling routes' in West Bridgford. In a recent survey, there was 90% support from participants for the principle of improved cycling routes in West Bridgford. In our survey, 11% explicitly asked for improved co-ordination of cycling routes and storage facilities. The support for cycling reflects sentiment elsewhere in the UK and Europe, where many town centres have sustainability as a key platform in their strategic plan for high street development and have positive measures in place to encourage cyclists.

Participants considered bus availability and frequency to be good overall. The proximity of the bus stops to the centre was viewed positively although some expressed concern about diesel fumes and engine noise pervading some of the leisure areas.



*'Sort out the junctions at the south end of Central Avenue and the junction near the Police station'*

*'It would be better to install pedestrian lights (green man) instead of zebra crossings to improve traffic flow'*

*'Replace the zebra crossings with light controlled crossings'*

The question of pedestrianisation generated a mixed response. Although 11% of respondents wanted a better layout that routed traffic away from the centre, only 17% of respondents wanted to see pedestrianisation of Central Avenue. Like parking, this is a controversial issue, which continues to challenge many authorities across the UK. Although there are various alternatives to full pedestrianisation (i.e. shared zones) the preferred solution for many appears to be a mixed approach with access restricted for events, public holidays and market days rather than a permanent traffic ban.

Other physical access concerns related to those with disabilities or other specific circumstances.

*'Improved access for pushchairs and wheelchairs into shops and restaurants. Lots of mums and babies want to go for coffees or lunches in west Bridgford but don't feel welcomed to bring a pram into most venues on the avenue'*

*'Re-routing buses would make pavement cafes much more attractive. How unpleasant they are with diesel fumes belching out'*

*'The pavements around the centre have limited dropped kerbs making it difficult for wheelchair and mobility scooter users'*

### Congestion and barriers to physical access

Many references were made to traffic congestion in and around the Tudor Square area. Again, increased pollution caused by stationary traffic at 'unmanaged' zebra crossing raised concerns. Several respondents felt the junctions were dangerous with poor signage. Concern was expressed about accessibility for wheelchair, mobility scooter and pushchair users.

A number of direct quotes from the survey capture a range of concerns about traffic flow.

*'The flow of traffic is terrible around the mini roundabout'*

Residents expressed concerns about the availability and positioning of ramps to individual premises.

### Locating the heart of West Bridgford

A number of stakeholders referred to the fact that it was difficult for visitors to locate the 'heart' of West Bridgford. Although Central Avenue was seen as the main shopping street, some commented there was no monument or central piece of architecture to reinforce West Bridgford's distinctive identity. Many viewed the library as the community hub.

As one resident commented 'a sculpture or piece of public art can provide a meeting point and central focus for the community'.

Another commented on the potential to make more of the history of West Bridgford with references to St Giles's Church and other towns of similar size with cathedrals and museums.

A number of stakeholders highlighted the potential for improving and developing Bridgford Road within the overall scheme as it contains a number of historical places of interest. It needs improving visually and may encourage further development which would enhance the centre of the town as a whole.



### Digital

Nationally, digital developments are transforming consumers' expectations about the goods and services that high streets should provide. Most notable are initiatives which acknowledge the use of the mobile phone as an integral part of the consumer experience. Consumers expect full WiFi access. They expect to be able to shop online and collect goods from collection points in town centres. They expect to receive personalised offers and information about

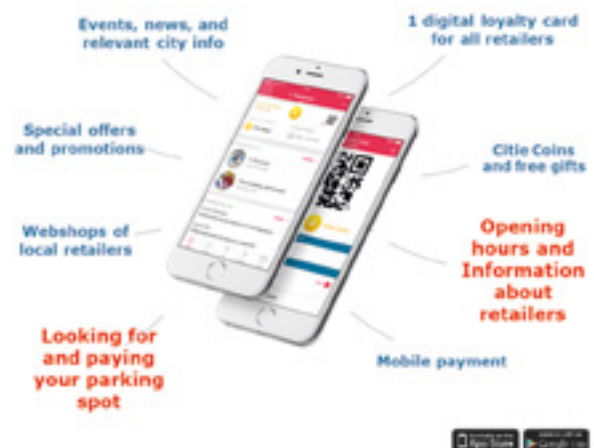
opening hours and activities, and services in real time directly to their mobile phones. They expect retail store owners to interact and respond to them on social media. They also expect the high street to be a fun, engaging, and entertaining place offering an incentive to visit rather than simply stay at home and shop online. Consumers also expect to be able to make contactless payments.

Although we have not conducted a study of the digital capability of West Bridgford, the fact that respondents made limited reference to any such initiatives suggests that 'digital' innovation is not currently a dominant feature of the landscape. It is, however, acknowledged as an important factor moving forward.

*'Social media is important in this current time, perhaps all local businesses should be offered training on how best to promote their business online via Instagram, Facebook, twitter etc. I think a scheme to offer a reward for people shopping locally would also be a good idea'*

The review of secondary data suggests there are many high streets nationally that are implementing digital initiatives to meet consumer expectations outlined above. These include Digital Place Reports linking demand (catchment area / demographics, footfall) and supply (occupancy) with online engagement at centre or street level (appendix 1: example for Gloucester Digital Place report); the CITIE APP (appendix 2) being implemented by Roeselare in Belgium and the [wdyt.org.uk](http://wdyt.org.uk), campaign which focuses on getting high street retailers and consumers engaged in social media.

### CITIE APP





## Theme 2 | Balance and blend

This refers to views on the current mix of retailers and leisure facilities within the catchment area.

- Restaurants generally seen as positive and the current number to be about right. Too many bars only are associated with increased social problems
- There is a need to attract more high end businesses to West Bridgford, particularly fashion and speciality goods
- Markets were seen to make a strong contribution to the mix with opportunities for further expansion
- People would like to see more independent, local businesses rather than chains
- There is an opportunity to integrate other community services into the traditional retail mix
- There are too many charity shops
- There is an opportunity for more innovative, creative and flexible retail units

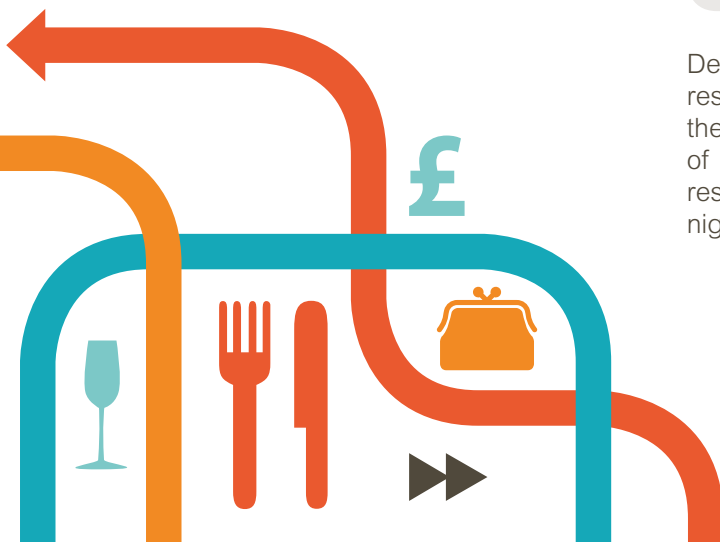
### Restaurants and bars

It is clear that West Bridgford currently has a much higher percentage of restaurants and cafés than traditional retail outlets. Many recognised that these outlets played a vital role in attracting visitors to the town helping to maintain a vibrant and energetic atmosphere. Some good examples cited include Escabeche, owned by the Nottingham based Perkins family. Although the family own a number of different outlets in Nottingham, they focus on promoting local produce and where possible retaining the heritage and historical architecture when developing outlets.

Some expressed concerns about the impact of bars on crime.

*'I think that the café culture has now become a victim of its own success with over supply. Also, the bars have totally changed the atmosphere in an evening and attracted people from all over, causing many problems for an already overstretched police force'*

Despite this potentially negative impact, 29% of respondents felt the food and drink outlets were the best thing about West Bridgford and 31% of respondents actually came to visit a cafe or restaurant whereas 16% of respondents came for a night out.



### Traditional retail 'mix'

In terms of the mix of traditional retailers, 40% of respondents wanted to see a greater variety of shops, 31% of respondents wanted to see more independents shops, selling clothing, shoes and household goods and 12% of respondents wanted to see fewer charity shops. The Kerching Retail study highlighted that there is a surprisingly high number of charity shops when compared to the high demand for property in West Bridgford. The quality of experience was also very mixed.

In the words of one resident:

*'Please for the love of god do not give us more coffee shops and restaurants' 'I just want shops to buy stuff. Not wine bars, cafes and charity shops selling bobbly faded clothes which smell'.*

The need for an increased variety of shops reinforces the findings from the Kerching Retail study.

*'West Bridgford is dominated by service outlets at the expense of traditional shopping outlets, typically convenience and comparison shopping. We would draw attention to the lack of comparison shopping in the town centre. Local people are less likely to visit West Bridgford for clothes, electrical products, mobile phones or homeware'. The report went on to call for an 'Upmarket independent jewellers, an independent fashion store, a premium ladies shoe retailer, an outdoor wear store and an independent designer children's clothing store'.*

**Kerching Retail**

Again, this mirrors the comments of respondents in our consultation

*'More classy shops by local people e.g. Boutiques, chocolatiers etc'*

*'West Bridgford needs to be focussed with retail outlets of an independent nature that have high end products and sophisticated shop fronts....e.g. like some of the Surrey villages'*

*'I feel that Bridgford is lacking in a variety of shops. Whilst I appreciate all the coffee shops and eateries there isn't much else there other than charity shops, banks and travel agents. We need more useful shops selling shoes and clothes, especially children's clothes'*

The issue of the number of charity shops generated some discussion. Many felt there were too many but recognised that the residents of West Bridgford valued the opportunity to support charities and contribute to sustainable agendas.

*'There are too many charity shops, which have beneficial rates, and this alters the balance of the retail scene'*



### Markets

Many felt that the markets made a positive contribution to the economy in West Bridgford.

*'I love the markets (farmers market and plant market) but I don't know when they are. They could be marketed much better. Also, they finish far too early. Just being in the morning means that I generally miss them as I can only get to the high street after 2pm due to other commitments on Saturday mornings'*

As well as longer opening hours, many felt that there was room for a range of different types of market, which would add to the image and reputation of West Bridgford.

Some expressed concern about the unprofessional appearance of many market stalls.

*'More effort should be made to present the stall as attractive and high quality to reflect the retail offer within the town centre'*

Nationally markets are proving to be a major contributor to high street regeneration. There are

many good examples where lively, interesting markets are being successfully used to showcase local goods and services. Borough Market, in London, is a good example, offering a:

*'feast for all the senses, not just the taste buds. The scents of cheese, herbs and spices, grilled meats; the sociable din of the souk; the visual theatre that stands in comparison with the best in the world; the tactile interaction with people and products'. No wonder Borough Market has become such a retail and leisure destination for Londoners and visitors alike, successfully blending day and night-time economies and home to well-known chains and smaller, entrepreneurial businesses'.*

### Retail Week

Different types of markets are springing up all over the UK targeted at different consumer groups, for example the National Youth Market [nmtf.co.uk/national-youth-market/](http://nmtf.co.uk/national-youth-market/). The *Kerching Retail* study highlighted the potential for a range of different markets: 'continental markets, teenage markets, vintage markets, night markets, antique or art exhibitions (in the street)'.





### Independents v chains

Again, in line with the findings of the Kerching Retail study, our stakeholders felt that West Bridgford lacked independent outlets. As a relatively affluent area, many felt there was an opportunity for some unique and innovative independent shops to offer premium goods and services. The Kerching Retail study drew attention to the national statistics, which illustrated the gap in independents in West Bridgford with 58% versus the national average of 67%. Many referred to the high business rates as the major barrier to attract independents. A point discussed more extensively under the next theme.

There was a view that the independents were suffering at the expense of the large chains.

*'West Bridgford is 'going downhill fast'. There are too many restaurants and not enough shoppable shops...But now it's just like any other high street - full of 'chains' and it's kind of upsetting to know smaller independent businesses are being pushed out, so anything to support the smaller businesses would be great and a way of maintaining West Bridgford's charm'.*

*'The recent refurbishment of Bridgford Hall has added another very positive asset and dynamic to West Bridgford. The Registration facility is amongst the best in the country, there will also be good benefit to the local economy by the opening of the Aparthotel'.*

### Other community services

Nationally, town centre managers are adopting the recommendations of the Grimsey review and ensuring that the traditional high street landscape is developed as part of a:

*'complete community hub solution incorporating; health, housing, education, arts, entertainment, business/office space, manufacturing and leisure, whilst developing day-time, evening-time and night -time cultures'.*

**Grimsey Review**

Other centres are developing plans to integrate housing and other important services with existing traditional retail space. 'Multi-functional centres' are being designed to draw people in for a much wider 'bundle of benefits' than just shopping.



A few residents referred to the need for additional community services within West Bridgford.

*'We need more community facilities/services'*

*'More clubs aimed at school children/families that actually start after 5.30pm as many parents work and can't attend the ones before this time e.g. swimming, dance, martial arts – if these were held in the town centre at one of the many halls/huts they'd encourage parents to spend money in town when these are happening and do more of their shopping here e.g. groceries'*

However, most still seemed to view 'shops' as a very traditional sense with no mention of how housing, leisure and shopping might blend.

### Innovation, creativity and flexibility

To compete with the increase in online shopping, many high streets nationally are offering incentives to attract innovative and creative stores, which are seen as fun, engaging and more likely to create an emotional attachment for visitors. Boxpark in Shoreditch, a food and retail park made out of refitted shipping containers contains many such innovative startups and has been described as the 'world's first pop up mall' [boxpark.co.uk](http://boxpark.co.uk). Nottingham's creative quarter is another example. The term retail 'mashup' has been coined to describe a number of innovative retailers who have recently been successful combining unrelated businesses to create memorable experiences for customers. Examples cited recently in the trade press include: American Eagle Outfitters, highly regarded for its trendy T-shirts and jeans, who now offer non-alcoholic beverages at a bar called DRINK at its Times Square flagship store, and Kohler, a bathroom store which enables customers to sample the faucets, showerheads and sinks by taking a shower or bath on site. Again, given the high disposable income of the West Bridgford demographic, this would appear to be an ideal location to trial many of these more innovative, specialist formats.

As one resident commented, West Bridgford offers:

*'Specific areas where new things could be tried out. Other events e.g. evening street food market with entertainment etc'.*

As well as encouraging innovative formats some residents suggested ideas for more flexible use of space.



*'Businesses perhaps could share retail space rather than have the expense of the whole shop?'*

*'Place local art and other local products in windows of empty shops, by renting out the shop window whilst the shop is empty'*

To conclude this section, one retail expert commented that the retail mix within West Bridgford came across as 'confused', with little indication of brand identity reinforcing what makes it different from other communities. There was a view that Bridgford Road and Gordon Road had tremendous potential to contribute to the retail offer if developed sympathetically to the overall ambition for the town centre. Concerns were expressed about the impact of blighted properties on Gordon Road and the missed opportunity.



### Theme 3 | Local and level

#### Supporting localism and equality

- Unfair business rates seen as a big issue for independents
- Rents are also regarded as too high for independents
- Sense that citizens as well as the local authority have a responsibility to support local businesses
- Strong interest in community initiatives with the library seen as the community hub

#### Unfair Business Rates

A key concern for stakeholders under this theme was the perception that blanket business rates have created an unfair trading environment. Many felt that they work in favour of multiple retailers and charity shops, with discounted rates, making it very difficult for smaller independents to run a viable business.

In relation to increasing the number of Independent retail and service outlets, all the local Independent businesses interviewed expressed significant concerns particularly the recent increase in business rates, some had premises elsewhere as a comparison. Many expressed genuine concern about future viability.

*'There are too many charity shops, which have beneficial rates, and this alters the balance of the retail scene'*

*'I am not sure how I will balance my books next year'*

*'Business Rates here are much too steep'*

*'I have an operation in the City that gets far more custom but I pay three times the rates here'*

Rents were also raised as a challenge to smaller individual businesses.

*'I really welcome this Commission and hope opportunities are looked at to involve landlords in the vision for the future with the hope that they may be encouraged to consider the exceptionally high rents that presently dissuade individuals and independents from setting up business in West Bridgford centre'*

*'Rents should be reasonable. They are currently too high and force out interesting and useful shops'*

*'And it's kind of upsetting to know smaller independent businesses are being pushed out, so anything to support the smaller businesses would be great and a way of maintaining West Bridgford's charm'*

*'If the emphasis here is on LOCAL business growth, then something needs to be done about rents. Local businesses are closing, citing high rents and unsustainable costs (e.g. D'Lights, Grices, Jayline etc), and they are being replaced by large national chains. It seems that local businesses struggle to afford a premium pitch in West Bridgford town centre, and this is leading to the homogenisation of our high street with more and more national chains and franchises taking up space'*

*'Many of the local businesses are put out of business by high rents, therefore, it is often only large chains, as in the case of the many restaurants and cafes that can afford the rents'*

There was a large groundswell of opinion that some form of proactive incentive scheme is needed to support and encourage local independent traders. In the survey, 57% of respondents wanted to see more help for independents.

*'Incubation or starter funds for local businesses'*





*'A few years ago, Karina Wells was given the use of a shop for a month and it was used by local businesses and was very successful, it was a month before Christmas, I think the rent was much reduced for the month'*

*'Could Rushcliffe Borough Council give independent shops a tax break / help with renting in order to get the high street looking more like Southwell. I like the restaurants and coffee shops but it would be nice to have some independent businesses too'*

Once again, equality and support for local independent traders has been a sentiment underpinning many of the national high street initiatives. Many managers proactively offer financial incentives for pop-up shops and specifically target innovative traders who fit the profile and brand image of the location, for example, the Roeselare Excites scheme.

Many respondents asked that attention be given to attracting fashion, clothing and high quality household items. The Commissioners acknowledge that the retail mix requires improving, they understand from discussion that there is potential to add well known national high quality clothing retailers but there is currently a shortage of suitable premises. Findings suggest that they are only likely to come to West Bridgford if there are enough suitable premises for several brands to locate in close proximity to each other.

### Residents have a role to play

Although largely a local authority responsibility, many residents felt that they themselves should do more to support local businesses.

*'A couple of years ago there was a campaign to spend just £5 in a local retailer. I often ensure that if buying gifts or birthday cards etc I buy them from the independent shops in West Bridgford to support them and I try and buy my groceries from the independent greengrocers, butchers and fish mongers. More people should be encouraged to do this and support their local shops. When somewhere closes then people are very quick to complain that it's closed but are these people shopping there and supporting the businesses, if not then why not?'*

### A strong sense of community

It is clear that many residents are keen to make a contribution to improving the welfare of the community, either through charitable donations or supporting other social initiatives.

One resident commented:

*'I would like to see a social eating space provided - such as the Superkitchen model in the city centre. Not everyone is wealthy in West Bridgford and I think a weekly social eating space would be welcomed by many people'*

As noted above, the library plays a critical and central role as a community hub for West Bridgford. Many cited this as one of the most positive features of West Bridgford.

## Theme 4 | Green space

This includes comments about the importance and use of green space.

- It is vitally important to maintain and develop the 'green' areas within West Bridgford
- Further greening/landscaping would further enhance the town centre

### Maintain and develop green areas

It was very clear from the feedback from all of the subgroups that people placed a high value on the present green environment of the town centre, particularly on Central Avenue with its proximity to the 'Jewel in the Crown' of the nearby Bridgford Park and also the vital green link of the croquet lawn. All were considered to be very important from an aesthetic and community service point of view. Many residents mentioned how important it was to preserve this green space and protect it in future development plans.

Residents felt that the croquet lawn represented a unique high street feature and was a critical asset to the town. Residents felt that further greening and planting in this area would help to hide some of the less desirable buildings that currently form a gateway to the Centre.

A range of quotes from residents captures views on green space.

*'The fact that the town centre is very green. We have a lawn in the centre, a public park, with many specimen trees, a sports field, a tree outside a new restaurant which has tree preservation order on it, an Aricara Aracana, (Monkey Puzzle tree). We could enter Britain in Bloom, going for a green flag award for the Park. The town centre has all year long floral displays in the Park and Central Avenue and Gordon Square'*

*'Please name a town centre with a park at its heart, that's why its unique and the large restaurant chains want to be here, who wants to look out at another restaurant when there is a beautiful green lawn, with trees and a hedge for wildlife'*

*'Please leave the park and croquet lawn alone just to be green space'*

*'The green space in the town centre means it is better presented than other local towns'*



### Further greening and landscaping

Many respondents felt that the town centre would benefit by additional tree planting and greening. Many visitors felt it was a 'nice leafy' suburb' however more greenery would greatly enhance the centre.

*'We need to plant more trees, suitable native trees to encourage wildlife. Stop mowing and plant for wildflowers and those that encourage pollinating insects. This saves money, and reduces pollution from mowing machines. And it is more beautiful than short mown grass. Win, win, win. Let's make West Bridgford the top area for wildlife, it will improve air quality. More flowers, more butterflies, more birds - what a way to improve the quality of life. And what a slogan - Come to West Bridgford - quality countryside in the town'*

*'More planting in and around the centre'*

*'Stop cutting down trees unnecessarily, wastes money and not good for air pollution, plant more trees along roadside'*

*'I would like to see more green walls like Escabeche on buildings in the area... it is very pleasing to the eye but also more importantly helps in filtering out toxic air pollutants. I think the centre does very well with floral displays but I would prefer to see some green roofs and far more wild flowers'*

*'More flowers and foliage on buildings'*

*'Plant trees to soften the feel of the street'*

*'A water feature would be really nice as it would be something that provided a meeting point and a point of interest if it was in the Tudor Square area'*



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### Theme 5 | Town centre co-ordination

This reflects views about policies for street cleaning, crime, traffic offenders, homelessness and security.

- Improve physical appearance of buildings
- Enhance shop fronts by enforcing professional standards and uniform image
- Co-ordinated communications about events
- Improved town centre management
- Stricter enforcement of policies on homelessness, dog fouling, illegal parking, improved safety and reinforced action on drivers who disobey restrictions on Central Avenue
- Improved street cleaning particularly at busy times

Stakeholders felt strongly that more needed to be done to centrally co-ordinate and enforce key aspects of town centre management. Residents were particularly concerned about aspects of law enforcement and improved marketing communications.



### Physical appearance

A high number of respondents commented on the unsightly buildings including the telephone exchange and in particular premises in the Tudor Square area.

*'Tudor Square, Thomas Cook and the Barclays buildings are a complete eyesore. I would propose any funds to be spent on the town centre to be concentrated on cosmetic architectural improvements and face-lifts. By this, I do not mean shop signage. Central Avenue and Tudor Square are blighted by nineteen sixties-style "precinct" architecture, similar to the Soviet-inspired architecture of many Eastern European towns at the end of the cold war period. We should take a leaf out of what many towns in Poland have done and regenerate West Bridgford by giving its shops a distinctive style and their facades greater character'*

*'Tudor Square is an eyesore. Ugly 1960's concrete devoid of trees'*

*'Tudor Square buildings need a major facelift'*

*'The area around Tudor Square is currently messy with car parking, street signage, furniture etc and has the opportunity to be much more visually attractive'*

### Professional shop fronts

26% of respondents wanted to see shop fronts improved

'Some shop fronts could do with a bit of a facelift. New shops such as Oliver Bonas and Jo Jo show up some of the older shops'

'Efforts should be made to present market stalls as attractive and high quality as possible to reflect the retail offer within the town centre' the stall holder must be dressed in clean and suitably presentable clothing, appropriate for the prevailing climate'

'Some of the shop fronts are quite ugly'

This reinforces one of the main conclusions of the Kerching Retail study.



### Town Centre co-ordination and co-ordinated marketing communications

'Marketing is poor – so many events come and go and we don't know they are happening. And that is considering I am on West Bridgford Wire and Lady Bay Local Facebook pages and a mum on maternity leave. I would join more if I knew about it. A straightforward calendar of events would be a start'

'Better thought out location of events, for example, the Christmas lights switch on...let rides be put on supported floors on park and the avenue be free flowing for pedestrians!'

'I think a directory via an app or website of services and retailers who operate, opening hours and details of special offers and events would be great. A map in the town centre to highlight stores that aren't on Central Avenue would be good too. Similar to those in large indoor shopping centres'

'A 'one stop portal' on-line for what's on in West Bridgford (the centre and surrounding c.1 mile radius including Lady Bay, Gamston, Compton Acres, Edwalton) – this could be events and also promotions/offers from retailers to encourage people to shop and visit and drive footfall. Often 'events' are shared through word of mouth and can be missed. The 'West Bridgford Wire' could be a good vehicle'

Improved marketing communications was also a strong recommendation within the Kerching Retail survey:

'It is evident from our recent studies of shoppers that there is much ignorance of a town centre's offer. Outdoor media advertising could highlight specific 'beacon stores' from the Fashion or Food sector, for instance, on a giant map and street lamp flags and banners'

**Kerching Retail**



**Improved Town Centre Management**

There appears to be a need to improve the management and co-ordination of 'on street' activity and issues including surveys, charitable collections and incidental activities.

This includes how to improve the co-ordination and support to improve the way homeless people, rough sleepers, street performers and people requiring help are guided and advised. There appears to be an increase in rough sleeper activity particularly around the Central Avenue area which may be a result of Nottingham City tightening its policies and practice. There is full recognition to the invaluable work undertaken by The Friary and other local bodies, as increases reflect a national trend relying on co-ordinated cross-sector collaborative solutions that engage the local community.

*'Charity shops are well managed with few problems but charity collectors are on occasion overwhelming Central Avenue as it is naturally a target as an affluent area. Needs a more managed solution as often swathes of collectors from multiple charities which can sometimes harass and irritate shoppers'*

*'Less 'charity' people trying to get people to sign up - some charities place "staff" on all four corners of Central Avenue'*

In short, the rough sleeping presence in West Bridgford is a local manifestation of a national trend but in seeking to solve this issue the local community needs to be engaged.

**Stricter policy enforcement**

There are a number of areas of concern requesting action be taken to address adverse, inappropriate and illegal behaviour. Cars travelling along Central Avenue is a high profile concern both for respondents and the Police who have to field numerous complaints.

*'We need key timed ANPR cameras which would result in a lot of revenue to justify the installation and make the area safer for pedestrians'*

*'Stop the drivers who use Central Avenue as a cut through'*

*'Cameras to prosecute the continual stream of car drivers who use Central Avenue at the times they are prohibited to do so'*

*'Stopping the use of Central Avenue by private vehicles'*

*'CCTV is needed on Central Avenue'*

Litter and dog mess was a concern with respondents providing a range of comments.

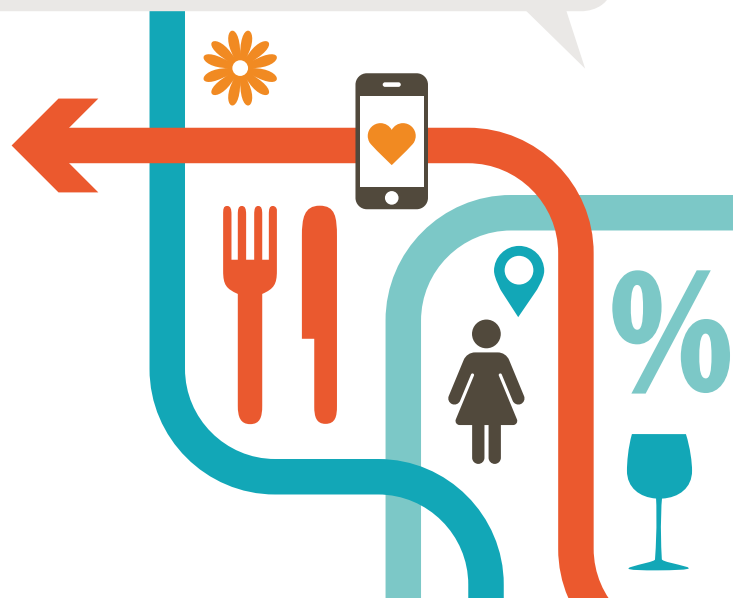
*'More waste bins in the area would lead to less litter'*

*'Getting the bars to clear the pavements in front of their property'*

*'Bins need to be emptied regularly when we have so many food take-away premises. Bins need providing in surrounding streets'*

*'Ensuring litter is not dropped and dog walkers clear up the mess created by their pets particularly in the parks'*

*'The park has become over run with dog owners who let their dogs off leads, foul the area and don't control them. Why can't we have a dog free zone in the park area'*





## Theme 6 | Strategic considerations

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Views on 'branding', investment, planning and the use of land and leadership options – the role of the strategic plan.

- The value and significance of a strategic plan to capture the distinctive identity and strengths of West Bridgford. This should reinforce the brand identity
- Clear planning and use of land policies that support desired retail developments, particularly on Gordon Road and Bridgford Road
- Plans to improve traffic management and removing barriers that inhibit pedestrian movement and improve the visual street scene to create a 'centre' around the Tudor Square area

### The Strategic Plan

Many stakeholders acknowledged the need for a strong strategic plan to underpin developments. Many thought that the plan should encapsulate a clear statement about how West Bridgford was different from other similar locations as well as build on the distinctive features of the location. The plan should also acknowledge the impact of the retail and leisure outlets on Melton Road, Radcliffe Road and the potential these have as part of the overall vision for West Bridgford.

For example, it is acknowledged that Melton Road, with its good quality delis, butchers, bakers, fishmonger, florist etc and free parking, does help bring people into the town centre.

These are captured in the following extracts:

*'For West Bridgford to be a destination rather than just a convenience it needs to offer something a little different. Why would anyone come to West Bridgford for Pizza Express or Caffé Nero, when they can get the same in literally any town anywhere in the UK? These chains are squeezing out useful retailers for local people, and devaluing our town centre'*

*'We need to have a strategy / vision for the future of the high street e.g. we want a focus on supporting local innovators'*

*'We need a masterplanning exercise for Tudor Square – need a centre, need something as a feature to attract people in / need to alter the architecture on Landmark Building – need some form of public art – need more retail independents – move traffic away from centre – need bigger premises to attract Wilco etc – opportunity on blighted properties on Gordon Road – too many charity shops - must keep green space – don't move bus stops as good access'*

*'We need a strategy which makes more of history – St Giles Church and adjoining cottages'*

*'Needs an overarching strategy that works everything together instead of piecemeal – Stamford a great example of a place to match with'*

Potential for Bridgford Road and Gordon Road development.

*'A plan is needed that takes into account the role of town centre in wider context ... Takes note of the influx of property which is planned and under development ... some scenario planning'*

A strong strategic plan underpins many of the developments taking place across the UK and Europe.

Creating a brand identity for West Bridgford was also a key recommendation within the Kerching Retail report recognising how important the brand is for a town in helping to 'galvanise the message to potential consumers'.

### Recommendations

There are clear ambitions and aspirations as identified by the many respondents and stakeholders who have provided valued and meaningful feedback to the Commission. The secondary information gathered by the Commission identifies best practice elsewhere. The results of the findings are set out within the report and its recommendations.

Plan and Ambitions. To ensure delivery of the recommendations, the Commissioners propose West Bridgford requires a Plan, it should reflect the findings of the Commission, the Kerching Retail report and other associated activity. To be managed by the West Bridgford Growth Board to ensure key actions are initiated and completed and realistic ambitions are achieved.

A brand identity, and vision, should be developed and articulated for West Bridgford. The suggestion is to name this 'The West Bridgford Way' (WBW) and develop it through structured consultation with all stakeholders involved in this consultation exercise. It is vital that the brand mobilises the expertise and enthusiasm of citizens and groups. Part of this consultation could involve an audit of best practice that citizens have seen elsewhere, so that the WBW is current and distinctive. This will build on the expertise of residents and inform the development of a clear strategic plan for future developments and communications. In developing the plan, reference

should be made to plans developed elsewhere and documented in various places. It should capture perceptions of what West Bridgford is all about now, and what values it wants to reinforce moving forward. It should identify how West Bridgford is different and unique from other locations. The brand would normally build on the history, culture and heritage of the place. It should highlight uniqueness and identity and be reinforced and connected to the Heritage Trail (historical assets) and cycle routes.

A result of this activity might include:

- Production of a physical map of the WBW very similar to the Roeselare map. It needs to be a 'streetscape', connected in some way to the cycle route as well as highlighting shops and leisure attractions, 'historical' landmarks, with strategically placed monuments, features and points of interest. The map needs to link with the creation of the Heritage Trail and plans for the proposed cycle route. It may be that the map could highlight different 'distinctive areas' or clusters of facilities, or areas with different 'types of shops'



- A further series of stakeholder consultation events which gives citizens the opportunity to get involved in aspects of the WBW following on from enthusiasm towards this consultation process and might involve 'design initiatives' to improve aesthetics e.g. redesign bank, competitions for ideas etc.
- The appointment of a professional window dresser to ensure that the WBW is reflected in shop fronts to be coordinated alongside existing grant management to improve shop frontages to enhance the appearance of the town centre

Take steps to improve the **digital capability** of West Bridgford. This should build on the expertise within the community and best practice elsewhere e.g. Gloucester pathfinder. This might include:

- Further developing the library into a knowledge hub – a good example has been developed in the Belgique town of Roeselare where the library serves as the focal point for the community but will have an emphasis on incubating and disseminating the latest digital innovations that are impacting on the retail and leisure experience. It will quickly bring West Bridgford up to speed
- Appointing a digital manager
- Joining the WDYT campaign
- Carry out an audit of current digital capability to include assessment of WiFi access
- Develop a town APP. This would serve as the 'one stop portal' for what's on in West Bridgford (the centre and surrounding c.1 mile radius including Lady Bay, Gamston, Compton Acres, Edwalton) and developed in conjunction with the West Bridgford Wire and other key interest groups. Could build on totally locally?

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Take steps to develop an appropriate Retail Mix to reinforce the brand, the WBW. There is full recognition given to the importance of securing a healthy mix of

national chains, locally based and entrepreneurial, independent businesses. This is likely to involve:

- Incentive schemes for start-ups (see schemes in Broxtowe and Loughborough). Incentive schemes for restaurants and bars to collaborate more directly with traditional retail; for example, digital screens in restaurants could allow consumers to buy relevant merchandise online. Incentive schemes to attract and support innovative markets formats e.g. the teenage market [theteenagemarket.co.uk](http://theteenagemarket.co.uk), incentive schemes to attract and develop local independents. Offer incentives to attract the most innovative types of town experience e.g. chameleon, restaurants encouraged to showcase online retail, mixed use 'mash up'. Although these schemes may focus on financial incentives, other forms of incentivisation could be considered
- Rushcliffe Borough Council engage with landlords to draw them into the vision and aspiration to secure more independent businesses and assist through appropriate rent levels
- Rushcliffe Borough Council review Business Rates in West Bridgford
- Consider innovations and support to encourage more independents and local businesses to locate in West Bridgford. This is a clear priority for many residents and visitors and could build on the rich talent for local craft if incentives were made available (see best practice)
- Prioritise the opportunity for high quality national chain and independent clothing/fashion retail tenants to be encouraged to locate in West Bridgford by ensuring suitable vacant retail units are made available in the size and design required. Bridgford Road and Gordon Road may offer a development opportunity
- To assist in the maximisation of local charity donations whilst achieving the aim to increase Independent shops. Review current activity and develop an alternative mechanism to enable residents to donate to charity and restrict the number of charity shops (e.g. charity barn)





Develop and **enhance the physical environment and access** Critical to the success of this priority will be the need to agree a plan to deliver the adopted options for Tudor Square.

- Consider potential for further tree planting and greening in the centre
- Improve traffic and pedestrian flow through Tudor Square. County Council Highways are engaged in options. Suggestion from the Commission's findings include installing one integrated set of pelican signals that permit a synchronised traffic stop therefore enabling pedestrians to cross the whole central area but release traffic to flow unhindered by individual zebra crossings. This would fit with the removal of as many railings and barriers as possible around Tudor Square to enable improved pedestrian flow into Gordon Road as they currently act as obstacles to this aim
- Consider greening to soften the appearance of some of the unsightly buildings particularly in the Tudor Square and Bridgford Road area
- Consider creating a feature (water based?) to act as a focal point in the revised Tudor Square area
- Introduce and trial a range of flexible parking schemes to encourage longer stays thereby enabling greater spend in the area
- Review parking with the aim of enhancing the number of spaces, options to consider include two tier partially below ground to ensure the street-scene is protected (see best practice)

- Pedestrianise Central Avenue for summer based events at weekends only by developing a programme of events thereby making it a more attractive place for people to spend time – farmers' market, trade fairs, pop-up local food etc. (this could be trialled in 2018).
- Secure electric / low-emission buses for the routes through the Central Avenue area thereby contributing to a noise and pollution-free area (New low-emission buses have recently been introduced for some routes)
- Improve cycling routes and ensure that they are presented as part of the WBW
- Consider where and how to provide more secure cycling storage facilities
- Review road widening schemes to improve access for special interest groups
- Enhance potential retail space by using land or buildings that are under-utilised on Bridgford Road and Gordon Road

#### General Management

- Provide improved management and co-ordination to the town centre. Issues that require further work include sensitive policies and action to address homelessness, rough sleepers and improved co-ordination of charity collections (charity donations to be deposited at rear of buildings)
- Consider options to address concerns over litter and dog mess particularly the suggestion that an area in the park is created as a dog free zone
- Utilise ANPR technology or alternative to stop inappropriate car usage on Central Avenue

## Summary

The Commission has provided a valuable insight into the aims, aspirations and ambitions of local people, visitors and key stakeholders. The Commissioners acknowledge that not everyone will agree with the findings or the recommendations as there are a number of strongly voiced, yet conflicting views. On balance, the Commissioners are confident that this report remains evidence-based as drawn from the extensive primary and secondary research and findings.

The Commissioners presented their report and recommendations to the West Bridgford Growth Board. The Growth Board now assumes responsibility for determining which recommendations will be acted on and delivered. The Commission was undertaken in parallel with a number of plans and projects which are helpfully complementary to the findings.

The Commissioners have requested that they are invited to return to the Growth Board in the summer to check on progress.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed, for the many ideas and suggestions proposed, and to the support given by many people throughout the Commissions existence.

We saw at first-hand what a great place West Bridgford is and caught the spirit and ambitions of local people who simply want to ensure it remains a pleasant, interesting and friendly place that continues to enhance its retail and leisure offer through a more integrated, customer-focused and future-proofed approach.

Finally, the spirit of the area was captured in one of your responses:

'A laughter session on a Saturday morning on the croquet lawn, where people just go and laugh, I'll lead it'

...we might see you there.





Mick Burrows



Professor Kim Cassidy



Tim Richmond

**Appendix 1** Digital Place Report LDC

**Appendix 2** Citie App Roeselare

**Appendix 3** Kerching Retail Recommendations

**Appendix 4** Kerching Retail Map - potential retail area

**Appendix 5** Bill Grimsey overview

**Appendix 6** Gloucester Digital Report

**Appendix 7** Rethinking Parking Report

These appendices are available online at [rushcliffe.gov.uk/wbcommissioners](http://rushcliffe.gov.uk/wbcommissioners)

The Commissioners would like to acknowledge the excellent work done by Roeselare, Belgium, in this area which has influenced many of the ideas and recommendations contained within this report.

If you have any comments to make on the report and its findings please send them to [consultation@rushcliffe.gov.uk](mailto:consultation@rushcliffe.gov.uk) or hand your comments into the Library, Customer Contact Centre or Rushcliffe Borough Council.

The Commissioners have been invited to meet with the Growth Board in June 2018 to confirm which recommendations and actions will be delivered and to hear any alternative proposals to address the priorities identified in the full report.

