

# MARKET RESEARCH RESPONSE DOCUMENT

Folkestone & Hythe District Council

2020



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# INTRODUCTION

In September 2019, Folkestone and Hythe District Council commissioned Watermelon Research Limited to conduct market research into the perception of Folkestone Town Centre. A series of face to face and online surveys were undertaken to capture this information. The output of this market research was intended to be used by the council to inform future interventions, initiatives and, where appropriate, new policies for Folkestone Town Centre.

The information collected through this market research is far reaching and this document sets out some of the planned and future interventions being deployed by **Folkestone & Hythe District Council** to tackle to issues identified.

There has been much publicity about how our high streets are changing with well-known national retail names leaving the high street. This is not

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### 1. Background

- National High Street Trends
- What might the future high street look like

### 2. What did the Market Research tell us and how is FHDC look to address this?

- The four main themes
- FHDC action plan



## Background context of changing high streets

There has been much publicity about how our high streets are changing with well-known national retail names leaving the high street. This is not expected to change in the foreseeable future and we can expect to see high streets continue to contract, with multiple retail chains leaving the high street as the level of on-line purchasing continues to rise. Below are some examples of these challenges.

*“Those that will close will likely be the smaller ones in secondary high streets in small town centres as opposed to bigger malls and cities.”*

*Outgoing John Lewis chair Charlie Mayfield*

*M&S transformation plan is to downsize its UK portfolio of 1036 stores and increase online clothing sales. Last year, M&S revealed it would shut down 110 stores, comprising 85 full-line shops and 25 food stores. However, Rowe conceded at the AGM in August that those plans were not final, leaving the door open for further closures.*

*Most of the 53 stores M&S has closed down since 2016 have been in secondary towns and cities.*

*Retail Gazette February 2020*

*Fig. 1*

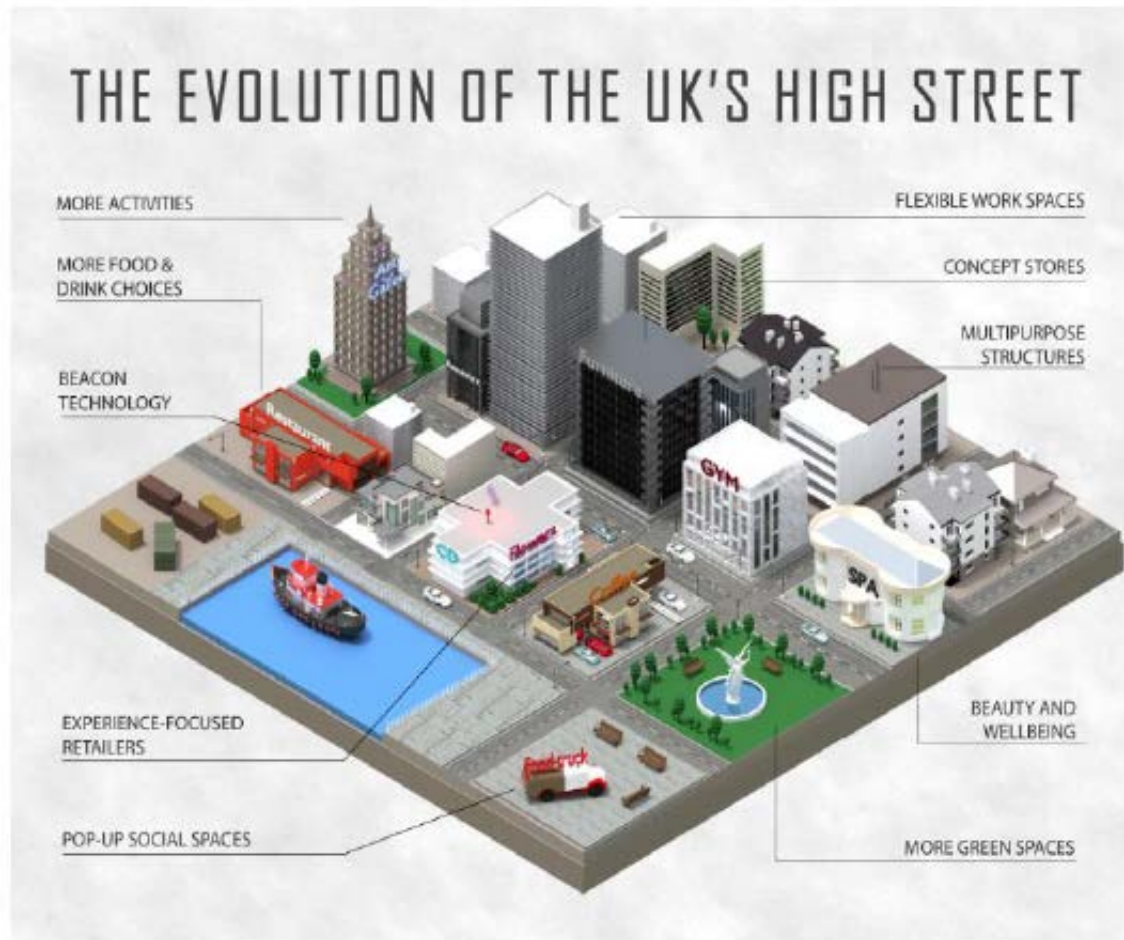
*“2019 was the worst year on record when it came to the overall health of Britain’s retail sector.*

*Not only did it present some of the toughest trading conditions in modern history – resulting in over 140,000 job losses – the catastrophe may continue into 2020. 8000 stores closed in 2019, with retail experts predicting this to continue at the same pace.”*

*Retail Gazette January 2020*

## So how do you address this?

Analysts have predicted how town centres and high streets must change and what the future high street might look like (see fig.2).



- More activities
- Flexible work spaces
- Concept stores
- Multipurpose structures
- Beauty and Wellbeing
- More green spaces
- Pop-up social spaces
- Experienced focused retailers
- Beacon technology
- More food and drink choices

SmallBusiness.co.uk

What will the future high St. might look like (5 Feb 2020)

Fig.2

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## What did the Market Research tell us and how are we looking to address the issues?

How residents and visitors perceive Folkestone Town Centre can be grouped into four main themes and we indicate the interventions that Folkestone & Hythe District Council are implementing to address the feedback from the market research.





## Improving the retail experience

You told us how important the retail experience is and identified the current retail experience as both a strength and a weakness.

- Shopping represents one of the key activities by residents.
- Independent shops and high street chains such as Primark provide a significant draw.
- The current shopping/retail offer is seen by many as a weakness of the town.
- Parking is highlighted as an area of concern.

### Our Plan

- We launched our High Street Fund in October 2019 with the objective of awarding grants to businesses seeking to improve both the shopping environment and enhance the town centre experience for residents and visitors alike. As at March 2020 £185,733 had been awarded for projects directly impacting Folkestone Town Centre and supporting existing and new businesses.
- In March 2020 we committed to buying the former Debenhams store and to ensure that this building remains at the heart of Folkestone town centre future offer
- We have recently commissioned with Kent County Council a transport study for Folkestone Town Centre. Therefore all relevant information collected from the market research, including on parking will inform future transport plans for the town centre.



## Entertainment and leisure

You told us that getting the right leisure offer in our town centre will increase the number and frequency of your visits to Folkestone, as well as the length of time you stay.

- Relatively few residents or visitors to Folkestone currently participate in evening activities or nightlife offered in the town.
- Over 42% of the online and 51% of the face to face survey respondents were dissatisfied with the current entertainment and leisure offer.
- However, there is a desire for improvements or more options, which demonstrates there is an unmet demand for more options.

### Our Plan

- A series of public realm improvements will be delivered in 2020, including:
  - Planting schemes
  - Repair and enhance street scene (e.g. railings)
  - Animation of the former Debenhams store windows
- More schemes to strengthen our sense of community will be supported.
- We will continue the good work undertaken to date through multi agency partnerships which includes:
  - Formulating and delivering on a Community Safety Partnership Plan
  - Introducing a Public Safety Protection Orderww (PSPO) to address anti-social behaviour
  - Appointment of FHDC homeless prevention officers
  - Introduction of the Folkestone Safe Haven initiative





## Promoting attractions and events

Your feedback highlighted the need to better promote the great attractions we have and events we hold in Folkestone Town Centre and to maximise the opportunities these present

- Only 8% of surveyed respondents had seen advertising or promotional material about Folkestone
- 57% of respondents were from elsewhere in Kent and only 4% of these had seen advertising or promotional material about Folkestone

### Our Plan

- In 2019, the council commissioned Pillory Barn to develop a place brand for the entire district in recognition that we need to do more to promote our fantastic area.
- Experience the Extraordinary is the council's new place brand campaign which launched in autumn 2019. This aims to promote the district as a place to live, work, visit and invest in. Please go to our [place brand website](#)
- This campaign aims to capture the district's strengths and aspirations into one unified campaign which includes:
  - Social media presence – Twitter and LinkedIn
  - Business success stories and newsletters
  - Supporting related campaigns e.g. Triennial, Monopoly, Music Town
  - Train panel advertising on high speed \*scheduled for Q3
  - Kent-wide advertising

## Summary

The market research has given us a wealth of information of the views and perceptions of residents, visitors and businesses. This output will be invaluable in informing future action to make Folkestone Town Centre fit for the future and a place we can all be proud of.

Three quarters of all survey respondents are satisfied with Folkestone and Hythe as a place to live, although this figure is lower amongst the younger generation of 16-24 year olds at 61%.

We recognise that we need to improve Folkestone for the future, including creating a more diverse offer to meet the aspirations and needs of all age and social groups. We need to ensure that Folkestone Town Centre is a place that can attract new investment, support and retain current businesses, embraces innovative technology and celebrates it as a vibrant seaside town that can offer an excellent work life balance.

We are fully committed as a local authority to driving action to improve the local economy and stimulate economic growth in Folkestone town centre and in the wider district.

