

Some principles

There are several important principles which should shape how we plan for the future:

- The city centre is a hub, a focus for activity: we must better understand why people go to our city centres today - to shop, work, play or live - and adapt accordingly
- We must retain, or perhaps re-discover, a sense of community: the city centre is social space for people and our planning must reflect that
- City centres must be socially diverse, and we must tackle inequalities: they need to work for all people
- Space is at a premium and we must use it intelligently: we need imaginative approaches to creating flexible, multi-functional spaces for living, working and playing
- Cities work best if we create a healthy environment which makes space for nature
- We must think about the design of our city centres: make them welcoming, safe, and healthy places, each with a clear narrative and distinctive identity.

Creative and imaginative leadership matters as well. The city centre needs to be shaped and developed to meet the complex, sometimes contradictory, needs of the whole community: residents, businesses and visitors. We think it needs a 'curator' to join up the pieces of a complicated jigsaw.

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The population of Southampton city centre has nearly **doubled since 2002.**



The population of Bournemouth has risen by **40%.**

What next?

Our report, due to be published in the early summer of 2020, will explore these issues in more detail, summarise the results of our survey of local businesses and residents on how the centre must change, and highlight some examples of innovative new solutions.



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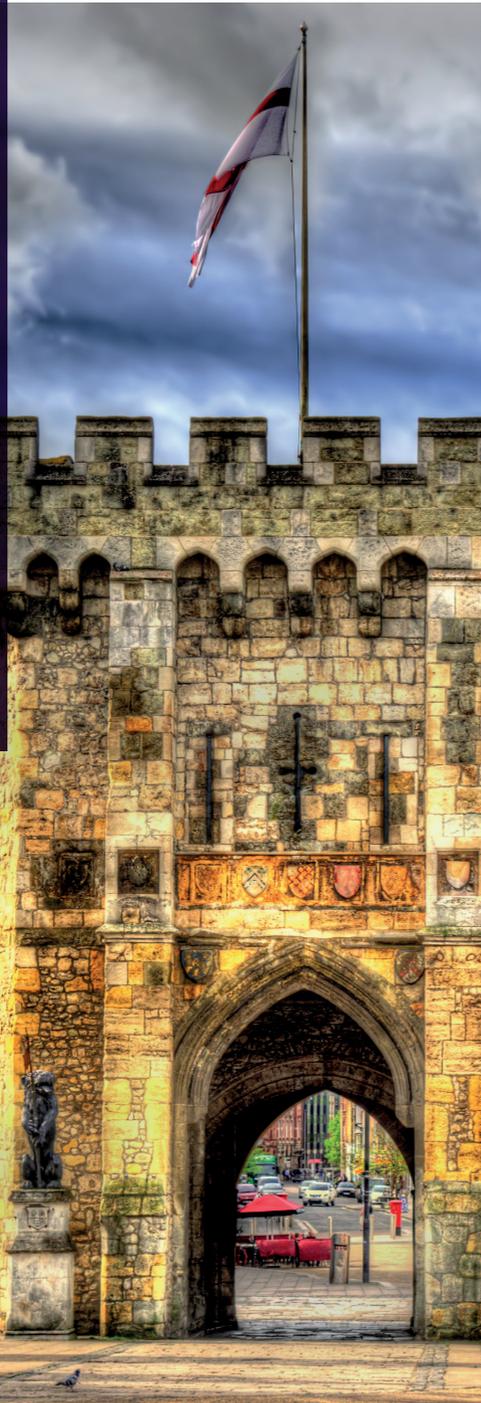
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How can the Central South's city centres **successfully survive change?**

Living in cities.

Archaeologists tell us that the world's first city developed in Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq, over 6,000 years ago. At the heart of emerging cities like this was space for people to meet, trade and worship.



The UN estimates there are now almost 4,500 cities with populations of over 150,000 in the world, with more than half the world's populations living in urban areas.

The UK Government recognises 64 cities, each home to more than 125,000 people, with the 2011 census showing over half (54%) of the UK's population living in those larger cities. And since the beginning of the millennium their populations have grown faster than that of other parts of the country.



In the next 20 years the number of people over 65 who live in our cities will increase by **40%**, and make up one in four of the population



The 2011 census showed that over half (**54%**) of the UK's population lived in cities of over 125,000 people

But despite, or perhaps because of, their success, our cities face many challenges: expensive and poor quality housing, greater social inequalities and rising crime are regular news topics. Our city centres, once the great gathering points for communities and home to markets, theatres, museums and public services, are now threatened by huge changes in how we shop and spend our leisure time.

Blake Morgan wants to understand how cities in the Central South are responding to these challenges and have asked the Southern Policy Centre to explore what the future holds for our city centres. This report offers some thoughts from our research so far.

Cities in the Central South

The Central South can boast three recognised cities: Portsmouth, Southampton and Winchester. And with over 400,000 residents, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole can justifiably be regarded as our fourth 'city'. The Office for National Statistics forecasts that the population of all four places will grow faster than that of the surrounding towns and villages in the next twenty years. Home to just over one million people today, by 2040 there will be another 90,000 people in our cities.

Much of that growth is happening in city centres. The population of Southampton city centre - the area within a 0.6 mile radius of the centre - has nearly doubled since 2002, and that of Bournemouth risen by 40%. Councils see a positive future for our city centres: Portsmouth and Southampton expect to see between a quarter and a third of all new homes built across the city developed in the centre, and all our cities are encouraging more office and retail development.

But none of the Central South's cities have been immune to the regional and national trends which have done so much harm to our high streets: whether it be the high average vacancy rate for retail premises, which stood at 10.3% in July 2019, or the rise in on-line shopping from 14.1% of consumer spending in 2016 to 18.6% today.

Perhaps because of those dramatic changes in retail today's news focuses on the 'decline of the High Street'. But our city centres are also threatened by changes in how we work or how we spend our leisure time: digital technology means fewer of us work 9-5 in an office than a decade ago, and home streaming is challenging cinemas and music venues.



"To survive and succeed city centres will need to rely on their ability to adapt, retain their sense of community, tackle inequality, use space intelligently, provide a healthy environment and offer a distinct identity."

Understanding what people expect from our city centres

Our city centres aren't just places to go shopping, they have a much more complex role: places where people meet and

socialise, centres of governance or worship, places to live and play as well as work. Our research to date shows that we can expect our city centres to continue to fulfil many functions in people's daily lives.

But the city centre of tomorrow must respond to changes in society. We think some of the most important trends affecting the Central South's cities are:

- **Our changing values: young people are not alone in having a greater respect for the environment, being less consumerist and valuing their network of friends**
- **Digital technologies affecting all aspects of our lives: how we shop, work, are entertained or interact with others - are re-shaping how we use our urban spaces**
- **City centre prices: wealthier visitors or residents pay a premium for city centre homes or at exclusive restaurants and shops, and gentrification is encouraged as we seek to 'regenerate' city centres**
- **Our aging population: in the next 20 years the number of people over 65 who live in our cities will increase by 40% and make up one in four of the population**
- **The number of young people in cities is growing, partly driven by the growth of universities, and their lifestyles and aspirations will shape the city centre**
- **Changing how we live to stop our environment degrading: from the severe problem of air pollution in our urban centres to the challenge of reducing carbon emissions.**

This summarises a complex and changing mix of issues. We cannot tackle them in isolation, we need a more sophisticated response to the complicated way our society is evolving.