Baldock Town Centre
Recovery & Development Plan

(July 2022)

Baldock Town Centre
Recovery and Development Strategy

This report has been produced for North Herts Council with support from the European Regional Development Fund through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing Communities and in association with Baldock Events Forum and Hertfordshire County Council.

The report was prepared by Chris Wade & Jekaterina Ancane of the People & Places Partnership, based on survey work undertaken in Baldock during spring 2022.

"Prior to the scheme the first impressions of Baldock from a visitor were underwhelming. It appeared on the surface to be a small run down market town with wide streets and a scattered arrangement of shops and eateries. There was an abundance of parked cars and little signs of people in the streets."

Baldock Town Centre: The transformation of a market town, BDP, 2010

Executive Summary

Introduction

This work uses a tried and tested methodology developed by the People & Places Partnership. It is a basis for preparing a COVID-19 Recovery and Development Plan for Baldock town centre on behalf of North Hertfordshire Council.

It is part of a District-wide initiative taken by the Council to work with key stakeholders in Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth Garden City. In the short term, it seeks to map out a high level, strategic and effective COVID recovery plan for its town centres. In the medium to longer-term, it sets out a development strategy framework to assist the town centres in developing successfully over the next decade.

This report follows the methodology prepared nationally by the People & Places Partnership for the Local Government Association to guide the local leadership of town centre revitalisation. In-line with the requirements of North Herts Council, this methodology focuses on helping local councils and partners to develop a 'Forward Framework' that focus on both the 'what' and the 'how' of town centre recovery and development.

Review: Existing Strategies

Review of existing strategies

Work to prepare the Recovery and Development Plan commenced by engaging with members of the Town Strategy Group. A detailed desktop review and analysis of existing local strategies relating to Baldock town centre was then conducted. The findings of this strategy review are presented using the town centre revitalisation themes provided in the LGA toolkit.

Planning and property

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

The North Hertfordshire Local Plan set out a strategic vision and spatial strategy for the District over the period 2011 to 2031. As part of this the Local Plan sought to promote, protect and enhance the provision of shops, financial and professional services, cafés, restaurants, pubs or drinking establishments and takeaways in the main centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston.

The Local Plan recognised Baldock as the smallest of three towns within the group also including Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City. It recognised that Baldock's retail environment provides for day-to-day shopping, with the majority of outlets located on the High Street and Whitehorse Street. There is also a supermarket on the edge of the town centre and a traditional market held in the High Street on Wednesdays. A lack of vacant units and available properties restricted any plans for the expansion of towns retail functions.

North Hertfordshire Retail Study Update (2016)

The North Hertfordshire Retail Study Update, prepared by Lichfield and Partners in 2016, outlined business growth needs for retail and leisure sectors to maintain the competitiveness of the district's larger towns. The retail study informed the Local Plan targets for A1 growth and identified Baldock as a much smaller centre alongside Royston, with a lower comparison and multiple retail offer. While there was a projection to introduce 1,800 m^2 to Baldock by 2026, increasing to 3,300 m^2 by 2031 of A1 to A5 uses, the report acknowledged that there is a limited potential to accommodate major development. The main site to accommodate projected growth is the Tesco superstore if proposals for its extension are to be considered.

Baldock Town Centre Strategy (2006)

The Baldock Town Centre Strategy was adopted in 2006, setting out a plan up to 2016 and beyond. As the smallest across other four towns in North Hertfordshire, Baldock town's centre's primary function is to provide a social centre for residents and visitors to interact. Heavy volumes of through traffic going through the town centre was identified as a key issue that detracts from the living environment as well as its attractiveness as an historic place to visit and work in. Among other goals and aims set in the strategy, the council sought to promote opportunities for enhancement of the town centre's street scene.

The Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (2019)

The Neighbourhood Plan aims to get the best outcome for Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall from whatever development takes place in and around the town in the future. It contains policies that anticipate the new North Hertfordshire Local Plan coming into force and provides additional safeguards and requirements.

With reference to the Baldock and its town centre, the Neighbourhood Plans sets out how the proposed large-scale development to the north of Baldock could "create a town of two halves", due to the physical barrier presented by the railway, and the fact that the in question would be provided with its own facilities (albeit more limited than those available in the town centre). Instead, the Plan makes the case that local people would like to see Baldock's strong sense of community continue, which will mean creating physical connections between old and new parts of the town, as well as efforts to promote community activities that can bring existing and new residents together.

The following policies are important in relation to the ongoing revitalisation of the town centre:

- Improving access and parking
- Baldock conservation area
- Local heritage
- Transport and air quality
- Building strong communities
- Development north of the railway

North Herts Council Climate Change Strategy 2021-2026

The North Herts Climate Change Strategy outlined the Council's commitment to contributing to the reduction of carbon emission. Whilst not outlining town centre related policies, it influences activities managed by the Council, including planned new developments and green infrastructure.

Parking, travel and access

The North Herts Local Plan identified a need for improvement across transport links connecting east to west. While offering strong connections to London through road and rail links, a lack of direct routes across the District puts pressure on rural roads.

Letchworth / Baldock Transport Strategy

Since Baldock is immediately adjacent to Letchworth, it is considered jointly in proposing this transport strategy. It highlights strategic elements and measures to be undertaken such as behaviour change, improvements to walking and cycling routes and bus-based improvements.

Streetscape and public realm

North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment – Baldock (2007)

North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment for Baldock was developed through public consultation to examine the perceptions and suggestions from local residents as part of the evidence. The strategy indicated that Tesco is a major convenience retail hub of the town, with the rest of the comparison retail offer being rather weak. The strategy suggested improving the link between Tesco and the High Street that would allow the easier movement of the supermarket's shoppers to access the town centre's specialist retailers.

Another issue that was identified was the pedestrian environment, that would benefit from wider pavements, appropriate street lighting and signage and planting along pavements. The strategy also suggested enhancing the "pavement culture" that can take advantage of the wide High Street.

Baldock Town Centre Enhancement

The Town Centre Enhancement Scheme was one of the key actions to be taken forward following the adoption of the Baldock Town Centre Strategy. North Herts Council working in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) commissioned Building Design Partnership (BDP) in 2007 to prepare a design scheme in consultation with councillors, local businesses, residents and local organizations.

The project sought to create:

- a high quality, attractive and robust scheme in terms of design and materials
- a scheme that improves safety within the town
- a scheme that benefits all users in terms of function and accessibility
- a scheme that creates a lively setting for the town centre

The Scheme was successful in winning a National Award, the Horticultural Landscape and Amenity Award in 2009 under the Category Best Commercial Project. The Scheme was also awarded a certificate of Special Recognition at the 2010 National Civic Trust awards

Conservation Area Statement (2003)

The Conservation Area Statement suggested a list of features that then detracted from the areas special architectural and historic character and thus were opportunities for improvement. Such features were: surface treatments and materials, street furniture and signage, street markings, historic and missing railings, railings to entrance of Pepper Alley, unsympathetic shop fronts, loss of historic plot boundaries and development of rear plots.

Business support

The Local Plan vision for North Hertfordshire aims to build robust and prosperous economy with a greater mix of skilled jobs, focused in locations that best support the District's growing population, with a particular emphasis on support for small local businesses.

Hertfordshire LEP has recently launched its Strategy for Clean Growth in Hertfordshire. It will be important for new and existing business in Baldock to be aware of the opportunities it presents to support their growth and transformation as well as more widely to see if it can be a focus for investment in the town.

Unlike other North Herts towns, Baldock does not have an organisation dedicated to representing businesses views, promoting their interests within town centre revitalisation, or providing support. There was a Baldock Town Partnership CIC operating from 2007-2018, when it was dissolved. It will be important to understand the lessons from this period.

Place branding and marketing

Although there is no organisation with a specific focus on place branding and promotion, Baldock Events Forum is responsible for events and their promotion within the town. Their objectives are:

- To strengthen the local community, empowering and enabling local groups through the development and, where appropriate, provision of a vibrant programme of events in the town
- to engage our community through all appropriate means, by which we will accurately and effectively assess local need to ensure events are popular and well patronised
- to enlist the support of capable and passionate people from our community to help in the provision of local sporting, cultural, social and arts events
- to work with community members, and organisations to secure aid and assistance from the community in the planning, organisation and running of events
- to secure funds from within the town and externally, in support of our aim

The Baldock Events Forum web site and social media promote its own events as well as others in the town. There is a variety of events based in and around the town centre through the year and which bring it to life and attract footfall. There is also a weekly street market and the Baldock Country Market.

Digital technology and data

While there is no specific social media or digital strategy for Baldock, there are several web sites and social media platforms that are revealed through a quick online search. Whilst each of these sites serves slightly different audiences and organisational roles, it is important to coordinate and clarify the town's digital footprint.

- Baldock Events Forum web site, Instagram and Facebook accounts
- Baldockgram on Instagram

Whilst these sites serve slightly different audiences and organisational roles, it is important to coordinate, clarify and boost the town's digital footprint.

There are also three private, community Facebook pages with a combined total of 7,300 members and one group specifically dedicated to raising awareness of local businesses and organisations with 1,600 members.

North Herts Council has recently adopted a new mobile phone-based footfall monitoring system for Baldock as part of a wider scheme with other East and North Herts towns. This system could give very useful baseline data as well as routine updates to understand the changing use of the Baldock town centre post-pandemic, with the possibility for benchmarking with neighbouring towns.

Evidence: The Survey Findings

The Place

The business mix

The business data for Baldock indicates that current retail focus on provision of comparison retail such as items for personal care, home and luxury. While the proportion of convenience retail businesses is low, taking up only 2% of the total business mix, that includes Tesco Extra supermarket that caters for residents convenience shopping needs. The number of retail service providers is quite low, indicating that some of those needs have to be met elsewhere.

The proportion of hospitality mix is good, providing sufficient offer for local residents with 15% of cafes and restaurants, 5% bars and pubs and 7% of take aways.

Levels of Sui Generis are slightly higher when compared to other smaller towns and indicate presence of diverse service, majorly those for personal care.

Overall, the Baldock town centre business mix is suited to meet basic everyday shopping needs of local residents including staples, food and personal care items, as well as to cater social life with diverse hospitality offer. However, proportions of data indicates that the town's main focus is its local customers rather than external visitors.

Examining the retail mix specifically reveals that the proportion of comparison retail (91%) in Baldock is significantly greater than convenience. Slight increase in convenience retail provision can be important in boosting footfall in the town centre. Convenience retailers include multiple independent grocers, two chain supermarkets, and several other convenience shops. These businesses meet local needs and attract footfall that other nearby town centre businesses could benefit from.

The data for Baldock indicate that there is 1 key attractor in the town centre - Tesco supermarket. Across the rest of the businesses, 89% are independent shops, with another 10% under regional or multiple ownership. Such numbers indicate that the town focuses to meet local residential needs only and serves for basic goods with other demand having to be met elsewhere.

Vacant business units

The vacancy data for Baldock indicates that out of 91 total town centre units, three are unoccupied (3%) which is lower than the level for benchmarked large towns nationally (13%). This indicates that available premises are being used comparably well.

Footfall

Whilst footfall monitoring was not part of this survey work for Baldock, footfall data is available through a new monitoring system available through North Herts Council. A template is provided showing the normal data that People & Places would look to assess using such a system.

Car parking

The Initial data collected for 2 private car parks and 1 public car park serving Baldock town centre shows there are a total of 849 spaces. Most of the car park spaces are available on a short-stay basis (86%), of these 40 spaces are in public car parks and can be used for both short and long stay.

The People

Response to customer survey

A sample of 241 Baldock town centre users were surveyed online through social media using the help of local community partners. There was a healthy participation amongst all age groups, with 46-55s providing slightly the highest number of responses, just exceeding 36-45s and 56-65s. Overall, the higher response rate amongst older age groups highlights that online survey work is efficient in capturing all demographic, not only the younger age groups.

It is evident from the responses that the majority of customers surveyed (47%) typically visit Baldock for everyday convenience shopping and everyday services such as food shopping or newsagents. The second most popular purpose of a visit (37%) is for leisure and likely to include socialising, activities as well as visiting many pubs and cafes located in the town exercising, use of outdoor spaces, attending Town Hall and commute. Only 3% of respondents said that they the use town centre to access services and 1% go there for comparison shopping.

Analysis of the 241 responses received from town centre users reveals that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was varied, and only 25% of town centre customers have decreased their frequency of visits to Baldock due to the pandemic. For 57% of respondents, there was no change in the frequency of town centre visits and 18% of users said that they have been visiting the town centre more frequently.

When asked how often users visit the town centre now, with the pandemic restrictions being lifted, 43% of users responded that they are visiting more than once a week, 30% are in the town centre daily and 15% are visiting weekly. Only 2% of respondents visited the town fortnightly and 9% made their visits less frequently than that.

Answering the question on the duration of their visit, more than a half of users (56%) said that they are spending one to two hours in town, while another quarter (26%) of shoppers are in and out of the town centre within one hour. A further 16% dwell up to 4 hours, 1% are spending more than 4 hours and 2% are staying in the town centre for the whole day.

As part of the Baldock survey, town centre users were asked about their preferred primary and secondary methods of travelling into town.

The responses on travel to town show that on foot (68%) and car (33%) are the preferred primary methods of travel to town. Only 1% of customers choose cycling as their primary travel method and 1% is travelling by bus.

Travelling to town by car (57%) and on foot (29%) are also the most popular secondary choices, followed by cycling (9%) and train (1%). The fact that public transport has received very low responses in both primary and secondary categories, contrasted with the high response in walking, suggests that Baldock town centre is well connected to nearby residential areas and provides its visitors with convenient walking routes.

The positives & negatives

Positive perceptions

Baldock town centre users were asked to indicate what are the positive, neutral, or negative aspects of the current condition of the town centre environment for a list of town centre qualities.

Users were very positive about convenience (90%), built heritage (82%) and pedestrian access (79%). They were also positive about road links (71%), physical appearance (68%), public spaces (61%), events and activities (59%), outdoor hospitality seating (58%), cleanliness (54%) and safety (52%). The majority of town centre users felt indifferent about public transport (58%), off-street parking (46%) and online information and promotion (46%).

Subsequently, customers were asked to indicate the positives and negatives of the current provision of town centre services and businesses. The aspect that received by far the most positive response was Baldock's provision of hospitality services - cafes and restaurants (90%) and pubs and bars (82%). Customers were also positive about customer service (69%), grocery retail offer (64%) and independent shops (54%). Customers were majorly indifferent towards value for money retail (54%).

Negative perceptions

In terms of the negative aspects of Baldock's town centre's environment, traffic (39%) received the higher number of responses, followed by public transport (28%), leisure and cultural facilities (28%). Generally, responses appeared to be more positive than those expressed nationally, with negative rating covering some town centre aspects, yet with much smaller proportion. Across negative expressions on Baldock town centre's services, customers were the most negative about access to banks and ATM's (66%), comparison retail offer such as clothes and gifts (52%), provision of national chains (38%) and overall mix of businesses (30%).

Customer sentiments

A word cloud was created from the single words most popularly used by town centre users to sum-up Baldock. Such a word cloud, whilst only indicative, is useful in understanding how the town centre is perceived by current users who are familiar with it. It gives a visual representation of sentiments and can be helpful in determining how the town can be honestly promoted to potential new users in a way that creates achievable expectations.

Many of the most prominent words used for Baldock are positive, such as: good, friendly, nice, historic, charming and community. This indicates users' appreciation of the existing town qualities and its historic and character aspects. There are some negative sentiments such as: lacking, tired, dull, forgotten, declined and untidy. This highlights some aspects that users are dissatisfied with and points out areas for the improvement.

This word cloud presents a picture where users of Baldock town centre are generally satisfied with the appearance and image of the town. However, they are unhappy with present offer and maintenance. It will be informative to see how perceptions change as work is undertaken to revitalize Baldock.

When asked how their experience of Baldock town centre had changed in recent years, 26% of town users said it had improved and a further 21% stated that it had changed in a mixture of good and bad ways. 26% said that the experience has remained the same, while 24% of respondents said that their experience had worsened- this is a smaller proportion than that of the national response. This indicates that there are opportunities and space for improvement to support this already generally positive opinion about the town.

When users were asked if they would recommend a visit to Baldock town centre, 166 out of 201 of users said yes. This indicates that more than four fifths (83%) of users think of the town centre as a valuable experience for external visitors. Such a positive response is higher than that of the one expressed nationally, showing that the town centre is appreciated by local users.

Future priorities

Customers' priorities

The theme receiving by far the most comments was the one related to the town's retail, hospitality & general business mix (148).

Within this theme, sentiments regarding the lack of retail diversity and sufficient business diversity (48) generated almost one third of all comments received within this topic. Other comments related to the same category indicated high priorities related to the hospitality mix (25) with sentiments regarding lack of diversity in restaurant and bar provision and insufficient provision of banks and ATM's (24). Furthermore, there were requests for an increased number of independent shops (19), better selection of grocery outlets (with fresh fruit and veg in particular) (15), improved market facilities (11) and better fashion retail business mix (7).

Themes on appearance and signage (65) and parking and travel (65) gathered a similar number of comments. The appearance and signage (71) theme covers comments related to the topics such as cleanliness (17) with most of the suggestions pointing out insufficient litter management, followed by sentiments in regards to necessity of pavement repairs (12). Other comments highlighted lack of a maintenance (9), in building upkeep in particular, general appearance of the town (7), provision and upkeep of greenspace (6), graffiti removal (6), increase of outdoor hospitality seating (6) and accessibility such as graduated slopes (2).

For parking and travel, the majority of comments expressed a wish for better parking (23) and traffic management (21), including traffic reduction and speed restrictions. Further, comments were made on better provision of public transport (especially bus services) (8), improved cycling facilities such as cycling lanes (8) and improved conditions for pedestrian safety (5).

Local leadership and social issues theme (36) covers sentiments regarding improved support for local businesses (9), concerns about safety and lack of police presence (9), better approach to local planning and developments (8) and better management of homelessness around the Templer.

Within the public amenities theme (30), sentiments were related to improvements in public outdoor seating (16), better provision of family and leisure activities (7), increased number of public toilets (5) and better community facilities (2).

The visitor economy, promotion and events theme (9) received comments in relation to better provision of cultural events (4), better options for evening activities (4) and improved promotion of the town (1).

Finally, the property, rents & rates theme that received only two comments, suggest rate reduction for local businesses (2).

Digital Development

Customers' digital drive

Amongst digital development options for town centre customers, use of social media and insights about businesses, products, places to eat, things to do (62%) received the highest response as priority or high priority. This is followed by: the digital phone network coverage (54%), priorities related to regular updates from businesses about special offers, things to do (53%) and town centre Wi-Fi provision (48%). Provision of 'click and collect' services received the lowest amount of priority and high priority in total (33%).

Local Leadership: Creating a Forward Framework

Revitalising a town centre is a complex and long-term venture. Experience shows that it requires resources and leadership that should not be left to chance. For a partnership to evolve in its effectiveness, it is important to plan for constant progress through regular review and writing things down! It can be achieved by annually reviewing the checklist and updating a 'Forward Framework'. This comprises an over-arching strategy and two component plans covering the 'how' and the 'what' of town centre revitalisation.

Business Planning: An organisational business plan covering the foundations, form, folk and organisational finances will determine whether there is an effective and sustainable partnership able to deliver improvements. This organisational plan should define the inter-relationship and respective roles of partners such as the local authority, town council, business partners, Chamber of Commerce or a BID.

Action planning: A town centre action plan is necessary to determine and define objectives, projects, responsibilities, budgets, timescales, outcomes and impact measures as the building blocks of the coordinated delivery of improvements on the ground. The annual review of such an action plan should begin and end with a review of available evidence and the monitoring of impacts and changes.

This report concludes with potential themes and a forward framework for guiding the 'how' and the 'what' of town centre recovery and revitalisation in Baldock. The themes can be used to bring stakeholders together and use the forward framework's template as a basis for preparing a detailed delivery plan by partners with budgets, responsibilities, defined outcomes and measurable indicators of success.

Introduction: Revitalising Town Centres

Background

This work uses a tried and tested methodology developed by the People & Places Partnership as a basis for preparing a COVID-19 Recovery Strategy for Baldock town centre on behalf of North Hertfordshire Council.

North Hertfordshire Councils' requirements

This report follows the methodology designed by the People & Places Partnership for preparing Town Centre Recovery and Development Plans for the North Herts towns of Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth Garden City. The same methodology is used for each of the four towns to identify their unique character and issues faced, whilst enabling comparisons to be made and complementary plans prepared.

It is part of a District-wide initiative taken by the Council to work with key stakeholders in Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth Garden City (the North Herts Welcome Back Fund programme). In the short term, it seeks to map out a high level, strategic and effective COVID recovery plan for its town centres. In the medium to longer-term, it sets out a development strategy framework to assist the town centres in developing successfully over the next decade.

Policy SP4 Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops make references to reviewing each of its town centre strategies as part of the council's Local Plan. This commission will help inform the scope of work associated with review of the town centre strategies.

People & Places' approach

The People & Places Partnership offers a proven track-record of *bringing facts and faces to centres* through an evidenced-based, collaborative working method for enabling the revitalisation of town and city centres. People & Places have extensive experience of conducting research into town centre performance and perceptions; businesses confidence; stakeholder engagement; partnership development; town centre action planning and delivery; and performance monitoring.

In 2020, People & Places updated its earlier national *revitalising town centres toolkit*, prepared for the Local Government Association LGA). The toolkit provides local leaders with guidance on how to approach the revitalisation of town and city centres.

The methodology used by People & Places to develop the Baldock Centre COVID-19 Recovery Strategy will adopt and adapt the approach created nationally as good practice in the LGA toolkit. In-line with the requirements of North Hertfordshire Council, this methodology focuses on helping local authorities and their partners to develop a 'Forward Framework' that focus on both the 'what' and the 'how' of town centre revitalisation.

The methodology used here to prepare the Baldock town centre Recovery and Development Plan has six key elements. These reflect the requirements in the strategy brief blended with People & Places' tried and tested approach used in the LGA toolkit. The approach has been used to prepare plans for the other three North Hertfordshire towns.

The People and Places Partnership are creators of the Local Government Association's national revitalising town centres toolkit. This online toolkit provides practical guidance and resources to assist councils in taking a strategic and evidence-based approach to revitalising town centres. The updated version prepared by People & Places in summer 2020 includes newly available case studies and guidance to help local authorities and place partnerships to develop COVID-19 recovery planning as part of wider revitalisation.

The toolkit uses the town centre checklist developed by the People & Places Partnership for delivering the 'how' and the 'what' of town centre revitalisation. Councils can use the self-assessment 'town centre checklist' with partners to regularly review progress in developing local policy and practice.

Key elements to consider in applying the town centre checklist are:

- Foundations: the process should be underpinned by an up-to-date review of existing strategies, collective objectives and evidence from recent surveys.
- Function: action planning begins with a clear statement of identified issues; recognition of council and partners' roles; creation of suitable responses; acknowledgment of gaps in delivery; identification of impact measures.
- Form and Folk: next comes the development of appropriate organisational 'form' to coordinate activity, including defining the roles of key partners and wider stakeholder engagement through 'folk'.
- Finances: financial planning needs to include identifying opportunities for fund raising, inward investment and partnership sustainability.
- Forward planning: finally, everything gets written down as a 'forward framework' and regularly reviewed.

The updated toolkit uses guidance on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic based on an adaptation of the Institute of Place Management's (IPM) national post-COVID 19 Recovery Framework. The IPM's Post-COVID 19 Recovery Framework has much in common with the toolkit's approach. Essentially, both frameworks place a strong emphasis on evidence-based planning and delivery whilst focusing on shaping the 'how' (partnership development) and 'what' (action planning & delivery) of recovery/revitalisation. Both frameworks recognise the key roles of local coordination and communication in delivering successful town and city centre outcomes.

1. **Review of how prepared each town centre's economies are to recover from the Covid pandemic**

An understanding of the evidence-base about the preparedness of each town centre's economic and associated social functions will be achieved through the following sequence of research.

- A desktop review will be undertaken of existing district-wide and town specific strategies to understand existing data, identified issues, related policies and existing/proposed interventions.
- Interviews/discussions with key stakeholder groups locally, leading councillors/officers within the local authorities and agencies (such as the LEP) will focus on achieving buy-in to the process; gauging perceptions/evidence of town centre priorities and beginning to consider the potential future roles of different organisations/departments.

2. **Clearly articulated recommendations of what needs to be done to strengthen each town centres' recovery as a high-level action plan with immediate and short-term actions**

Undertaking Town Centre Baseline Survey: To help objectively understand the wider economic, social and environmental issues and opportunities facing each town centre, People & Places will adapt its national town centre baseline survey process that forms part of the LGA toolkit. This survey work will comprise:

- Town centre business use survey, analysed against national benchmarks of business mix
- Business confidence survey: An online 'business confidence survey' will be made available to every customer facing, town centre business using social media accounts and email contacts of local partners. own centre users' survey:
- Customers' survey: An online town centre users' survey will be distributed through Council and partners social media accounts to gauge the perceptions and priorities of different types of town centre customers.
- Digital development opportunities: As an adjunct to the business confidence and town centre users' survey, preliminary questions will be asked about each town's digital infrastructure services.

Town Centre Forward Framework: People & Places will use the findings from step (i) and an analysis of the baseline survey to prepare an evidence-led 'forward framework' template. This will have a clear set of objectives for the Town Centre to aspire to address identified issues over the next 5 years and beyond. This forward framework will include existing and proposed interventions and recognise gaps in the responses. This will then be matched with proposals for practical suggestions as to how each town's daytime/nighttime economies and community facilities could act in concert to maximise the draw of the town centre.

A draft Forward Framework template will form the basis for reasoned discussion as to which agencies, stakeholders and other interested parties are best placed to lead on which actions given the resources available to them.

LGA Revitalising Town Centres Checklist	
FOUNDATION	
Evidence and objectives	Has a baseline survey of issues been completed including COVID-19 impacts, objectives defined and short/long-term outcome monitoring ‘dashboard’ agreed?
FUNCTION	
Travel, parking and access	Is an integrated town centre travel, parking and access strategy in place with immediate social distancing measures and transition to increased sustainability?
Planning and property	Are town-centre-first policies, master-planning or asset management in place that take account of COVID-19 impacts and engage businesses and landlords?
Streetscape and public realm	Has a prioritised streetscape and public realm improvement plan been agreed that facilitates social distancing and increases long-term, cross-town foot-flow?
Business support	Is there tailored mentoring and support to enhance the quality, performance and distinctiveness of businesses based on recovery needs and future trends?
Place branding and marketing	Is there a clear understanding of the town brand with pooled resources and a creative, collective campaign offering reassurance to existing and new markets?
Digital tech and data	Is there an assessment of digital infrastructure and skills with an investment plan for the collective use of data in marketing and monitoring the town centre?
FORM	
Governance and influence	Is there an appropriate structure, membership and credibility to coordinate local stakeholder activity and influence cross-departmental or strategic partnerships?
FOLK	
Community engagement and coordination	Is there strong public, private and community engagement with active and coordinated involvement in planning and delivery that extends to community assets development and is backed by a clear communications plan?
Capacity mapping and team building	Are there an effective chair, suitably skilled board, employment of necessary staff, effective management of trained volunteers and established relationships for joint working with other stakeholder groups?
FUNDING	
Finances and investment	Is there an organisation with robust financial procedures and strategy agreed for diverse and sustainable fund raising and income to support a town centre? Is it 'run as a business' with inter-relationships understood and investment secured?
FORWARD PLANNING	
Strategy and plans	Is there a well-defined ‘forward framework’ comprising an overarching vision/strategy, a rolling organisational business plan and a parallel action plan coordinating and monitoring delivery on the ground?

3. **Recommendations on strategic priorities for the medium and longer-term development of each town.**

Based on an understanding of the wider economic, social and environmental aspects gained following the earlier research and reasoned discussion with key stakeholders, People & Places will respond to issues identified and gaps in current provision/capacity. This will outline medium- and longer-term ideas for each of the town centres, recommending how they can be drawn together to form a coherent framework and outline a strategy for a wider development plan.

A revised Forward Framework will be presented as a finalised Town Centre Recovery and Development Plan for each town centre. This will be a tabulated document that clearly shows the links between issues identified; short, medium and longer-term actions /recommendations; and outcomes monitoring metrics to measure success.

4. **Identification of funding streams currently or potentially available to support the recovery action plan and the longer- term development plan**

As well as identifying existing and potential sources of funding in the tabulated Recovery and Development Plan, People & Places will use its national-level knowledge and experience to help prepare a compendium of currently or potentially available funding to support delivery. This will clearly identify the various funding routes in relation to the identified actions/recommendations.

Similarly, People & Places will use its experience with towns elsewhere and at a national level to identify best practice in how similar towns to those in North Herts are utilising existing funding and/or securing new monies to support recovery of both daytime and nighttime economies. This will include suggestions regarding how each town centre can position itself to maximise leverage of inward investment, grant funding and other funds.

5. **Recommending effective partnership and/or governance arrangements for improving, promoting and maintaining the overall ‘wellbeing’ of each town centre**

The draft Forward Framework and finalised recovery plan will also focus on the ‘how’ of town centre recovery and revitalisation. This will be done by recognising the roles of individual organisations and suggesting suitable governance arrangements to address identified themes in a coordinated and clearly communicated way. Importantly, People & Places will build such engagement with partners into a recovery planning process from the outset.

The roles of partner organisations in planning, delivery and governance will be recognised in the published plans. This will be done in a way that fosters involvement in progressing the short to medium term recovery plan and the wider medium to longer term development plan.

6. **Pointers to relevant best practice nationally with regard to the recovery of towns akin to those in North Herts**

People & Places will draw-on its national experience, including as authors of case studies on COVID- recovery for the LGA’s town centre toolkit to support the proposed actions and recommendations. This includes reference to best practice elsewhere in recovery of market towns akin to those in North Herts.

Review: Existing Strategies

Summary of findings by issue

This section of the study reviews existing knowledge, consultations and policies relating to Baldock's town centre. This review supplements the survey work undertaken by assessing and analysing existing local reports and strategies.

The purpose of this review is to help understand stakeholder perspectives and inform analysis. In doing so, the review helps bring together knowledge and understanding derived from organisations and groups with a particular focus on the future development of Baldock's town centre. Such a review helps in understanding the complementary approaches and inter-linked strategies. These existing strategies and plans are summarised here as background using the town centre checklist structure developed by People & Places in the *revitalising town centres toolkit* prepared nationally for the LGA.

Planning and property

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

Key Challenges, Issues and Opportunities for North Hertfordshire

The North Hertfordshire Local Plan, published in 2011 with subsequent modifications in 2018 and 2021, sets out a strategic vision and spatial strategy for the district over the period 2011 to 2031. Among key issues highlighted, the Local Plan stresses that there is a need to ensure that the District's town centres improve in their flexibility to address changing shopping patterns and retain a vibrant and viable retail environment that supports local communities.

Spatial Strategy and Spatial Vision

The spatial strategy sets out the District Council's overall approach for sustainable development and growth and how this will be distributed across the district. The vision is a statement of what North Hertfordshire will be like in 2031. The focus of the vision is predominantly on housing, the contribution to sustainable communities, protection and enhancement of natural and historic resource and appropriately allocated new developments to achieve vitality of key towns.

Specifically in relation to the District's four town centres, the vision seeks to ensure that "*the vitality and viability of the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock are safeguarded in a way that takes account of their distinctive role. This will have been achieved through carefully planned development which meets the needs of these centres, retaining their market share in terms of their retail offer, whilst recognising the importance of preserving and enhancing their historic character*".

The strategic objectives provide the link between the vision for the district and the strategic policies set out in the Local Plan. Objectives cover three topics that are summarised below in relation to town centres:

- *Environmental*: Existing settlement patterns should be maintained and there is a need to enhance the historic character and cultural assets of North Hertfordshire's towns by promoting good design and creating a distinctive sense of place. The effects of climate change should be mitigated through the encouragement of sustainable construction techniques, protection of existing and enhancement of new environmental assets.

- *Economic*: The local economy should be supported to ensure that it is vibrant, diverse and competitive, providing a sufficient range of jobs to support new and existing business. It is crucial to ensure an adequate supply of premises and provide opportunities for a greater mix of skilled jobs through skills training. The retail roles of town centres should be strengthened to ensure their competitiveness and viability relative to the modern-day trends. Additional activity can be achieved through tourism and improved infrastructure, services and facilities.
- *Social*: Adequate housing of different types should be provided to ensure needs of increasing and aging residents while building safe and vibrant mixed communities.

Economy and Town Centres

Retail and services

The Local Plan seeks to promote, protect and enhance the provision of shops, financial and professional services, café or restaurants, pubs or drinking establishments or takeaways in the main centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston. The Council aspires to reduce the need for unnecessary travel to alternative centres and ensure that the proportion of expenditure going outside the District does not increase.

A Town Centre and Retail Study established the need for an additional 38,100 gross m^2 of retail, commercial and leisure floorspace in the District over the period to 2031. This included 22,500 m^2 of comparison goods, 8,600 gross m^2 convenience and 7,000 m^2 of other uses including food and beverage outlets. The projected numbers included the potential of taking-up currently vacant units.

The Council aims to ensure that the town centres maintain their primary retail function whilst increasing their diversity with a range of complementary uses, promoting competitive and flexible town centre environments. It is proposed that this be achieved by monitoring the strategic allocation of active primary frontages in retail and service, avoiding appearance of non-retail uses that can create 'dead frontages'. Units allocated for primary frontages will predominantly be permitted only for retail use. Those units marked as having secondary frontages will be permitted for other A class uses, based upon their contribution to vitality and viability.

Other uses

The Local Plan recognises that "*business uses within town centres can add to the vitality and viability of centres. Office workers within a town centre will create more custom for shops and services*". The Local Plan consequently outlines that the Council will proactively encourage sustainable economic growth, support new and existing businesses and seek to build on the District's strengths, location and offer. This includes supporting office, research and development, light industrial and B-class uses in appropriate locations, including offices in main town centres. Office development will also be encouraged above ground floor retail.

Town centre policy

Policy SP4 sets-out the following specific policies for protecting the vitality and viability of the District's town and local centres, including preparing town centre strategies.

a. Promote, protect and enhance the retail and service functions, following a retail hierarchy that identifies the town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston; followed by 13 existing local centres.

b. Support proposals for main town centre uses in where they are appropriate to the: size, scale, function, catchment area, historic and architectural character of the centre.

c. Identify Primary Shopping Frontages within town centres where A1 retail uses will be expected to concentrate.

d. Make provision for 38,100 m^2 of additional A-class floorspace.

e. Maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support this approach and / or adapt to change.

Baldock

The local plan recognises Baldock as the smallest of three towns within the group including Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City. Baldock's retail environment provides for day-to-day shopping, with the majority of outlets located on the High Street and Whitehorse Street. There is also a supermarket on the edge of the town centre and a traditional market held in the High Street on Wednesdays. Lack of vacant units and available properties restricts any plans for the expansion of towns retail functions.

Housing – there are eight sites allocated within and around Baldock, with an estimated 1,960 new dwellings to be built over the plan period until 2031 and 3,360 as a total projected number. Although none of the developments are located within the town centre itself, the close proximity and increase of population could bring a significant boost to footfall.

Currently, there is an ongoing process of preparation of a planning application for the site to deliver a scheme located to the north and east of Baldock that integrates with the existing town centre. This involves developing 3,300 homes and supporting infrastructure, including schools and a country park that are planned as part of the delivery. The project will also advance the network of cycling and walking routes, providing links to the town centre and the railway station. There is also a planned investment in bus stops and routes, providing a boost for sustainable transport throughout Baldock.

Economy – the plan proposes to expand the current small employment area on Royston Road, transforming it into a business park that will benefit from good connections to nearby centres such as Letchworth and Hitchin, as well as proximity to Baldock town centre.

North Hertfordshire Retail Study Update (2016)

The North Hertfordshire Retail Study Update, prepared by Lichfield and Partners in 2016, outlined business growth needs for retail and leisure sectors to maintain the competitiveness with the District's larger towns. The retail study informed the Local Plan of targets for A1 growth and identified Baldock as a much smaller centre alongside Royston, with comparatively lower multiple retail offer.

While there is a projection to introduce 1,800 m^2 to Baldock by 2026, increasing to 3,300 m^2 by 2031 of A1 to A5 uses, the report acknowledges that there is a limited potential to accommodate major development. The main site to accommodate projected growth is the Tesco superstore if proposals for its extension are to be considered. As part of any such growth -and also independent of it- it would be good to increase the legibility of the connecting pedestrian link between the Tesco site and town centre.

The Baldock Town Centre Strategy (2006)

The Baldock Town Centre Strategy together with an Action Plan was adopted in January 2006. The Strategy for Baldock envisaged a number of improvements to the town centre following the opening of the Baldock Bypass. The Strategy attempted to recognise the varying interests of the town together with the issues and needs of the local community and young people.

The purpose of the Strategy was to provide a framework to promote integrated development and enhancement of the Baldock Town Centre that will sought to: benefit the future economic viability and vitality of the town centre, with special; emphasis on its future following the completion of the Baldock Bypass and the decrease in traffic passing through the town centre; emphasise its historic character as a market town, and meet the needs of its business and local community.

The Strategy comprised an overall vision with aims and policy guidance and looked forward to 2016. The Strategy was divided into a number of themes, which provided a series of policies to help deliver the aims of the Strategy and contribute to the Council's strategic objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan.

The Strategy was supported by an Action Plan, which set short to medium-term targets that for delivering the policy and aims of the Strategy.

Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (2019)

The Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan aims to get the best outcome for Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall from whatever development takes place in and around the town in the future. It contains policies that anticipate the new North Hertfordshire Local Plan coming into force and provides additional safeguards and requirements. However, some policies in this document will only be relevant to the extent that the proposals in the new Local Plan are eventually adopted.

The area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan (known as the 'Neighbourhood Area' includes the whole of Baldock and the parishes of Bygrave and Clothall. This is because the proposed developments cross the boundaries between these places, and it also allows the potential impact of the developments on the villages to be considered.

With reference to the Baldock and its town centre, the Neighbourhood Plans sets out how the proposed large-scale development to the north of Baldock could "create a town of two halves", due to the physical barrier presented by the railway, and the fact that the in question would be provided with its own facilities (albeit more limited than those available in the town centre). Instead, the Plan makes the case that local people would like to see Baldock's strong sense of community continue, which will mean creating physical connections between old and new parts of the town, as well as efforts to promote community activities that can bring existing and new residents together.

The Neighbourhood Plan contains an overall vision for the area: "By the end of the plan period, Baldock and the parishes of Bygrave and Clothall will continue to offer a high quality of life and a strong community feel. The range of community services and job opportunities available will have improved, and new transport infrastructure and services will cater for growth that occurs. There will be more green spaces and recreation opportunities to enjoy, and the conservation and enhancement of historic buildings and sites will make the area's rich history apparent to all. Where significant growth does happen, it will complement the existing town and set high standards of design and environmental performance. In support of this vision, a small number of key objectives have been identified for the Neighbourhood Plan to pursue:

1. Sustain and strengthen Baldock's character as a historic and vibrant market town, and the rural character and separate identities of Bygrave, Clothall and Luffenhall.

2. Ensure that new development is well designed, maintains and reflects important features of Baldock and its surroundings, and is resilient to climate change.

3. Secure the right infrastructure and facilities needed to serve the expanded town, and to avoid unacceptable impacts from new development.

4. Ensure that Baldock grows in a way that builds strong connections between all parts of the town (and maintains good connections with neighbouring villages and countryside); and which provides homes, services and job opportunities that cater for both existing and new residents.

The following policies and details are important in relation to the ongoing revitalisation of the town centre

Policy G1 Improving access and parking

- improved pedestrian and cycle access to Baldock station, including the provision of lifts to both platforms and additional secure cycle storage as Baldock grows
- improved pedestrian and cycle access from Baldock High Street to the Tesco superstore.

Policy G5 Baldock conservation area

- maintain and reflect the historic pattern of streets, alleys and medieval burgage plots
- maintain the pattern of continuous built frontages to streets, with mainly wide fronted buildings and minimal set-backs from the pavement, punctuated by frequent gaps giving access to rear yards
- use building forms and materials that are characteristic of the conservation area
- use shopfront designs and signage that reflect the style of the building and the character of the wider conservation area

Policy G6 Local heritage

- seek to conserve or enhance those qualities and features that make it of value
- be supported by an assessment of the potential impact on these qualities/ features, commensurate with the scale of the works and their likely significance for the asset's value

Policy E1 Transport and air quality

- walking and cycling routes that allow safe and convenient access between the sites and Baldock town centre, railway station, employment areas and primary and secondary schools
- the introduction of bus services (or additions to existing routes/stops) once an appropriate scale of development has been reached, to provide access to the town centre and railway station
- measures to help divert traffic away from the Station Road/Whitehorse Street crossroads, such as through appropriate junction designs, access arrangements (including restrictions on heavy goods vehicles), signalling and signage; and
- monitoring of NO2 and fine particle concentrations at this crossroads, in Hitchin Street and at any other locations in Baldock where there could be a risk of significantly increased traffic flows

Policy E4 Building strong communities

- providing new community facilities that are required as early as possible in the development process
- making arrangements for new residents and businesses to be involved in the continuing management and evolution of their community.

Policy E5 Development north of the railway

- make provision for improved pedestrian and cycle access between Bygrave and Baldock, through a new footpath and cycleway using the route of Bygrave Road/Ashwell Road

Policy E6 Royston Road

make provision for an improved footpath and cycleway along Royston Road

North Herts Council Climate Change Strategy 2021-2026

The North Herts Climate Change Strategy outlines the Council's commitment to contributing to the reduction of carbon emission. Whilst not outlining town centre related policies in particular, it influences activities managed by the Council, including planned new developments and green infrastructure.

Parking, travel and access

The North Herts Local Plan identified a need for improvement across transport links connecting east to west. Whilst offering strong connections to London through road and rail links, a lack of direct routes across the District puts pressures on rural roads.

Baldock Town Centre Strategy (2006)

The Baldock Town Centre Strategy identified heavy volumes of traffic going through the town centre was identified as a key issue that detracted from the environment as well as its attractiveness as an historic place to visit and work in. The completion of A505 bypass in spring 2006 contributed to resolution of this issue, relieving much of the traffic congestion caused by principal roads.

Among other goals and aims set in the Strategy, the District Council sought to promote opportunities for enhancement of town centre's street scene. North Herts Council's aim was to work together with Hertfordshire County Council and other public, private and voluntary sector organisations to improve the street scene of several streets. These included: High Street, Whitehorse Street, Hitchin Street, Church Street, gateways at Tesco roundabout, A505/Great North Road and Avenue Park/Knights Templar on Hitchin Street as appropriate. This included creating a safer pedestrian environment, improving provision for cycle routes and cycle parking, creating public and semi-public spaces and places for small scale activities, improving and providing appropriate signage and street furniture that is sympathetic to the historic character

These enhancements were delivered as a part of Baldock Town Centre transformation scheme completed in 2009. This included redesigning the main junction, placing pedestrian crossings as close to the junction as possible, widening footpaths and removing railings.

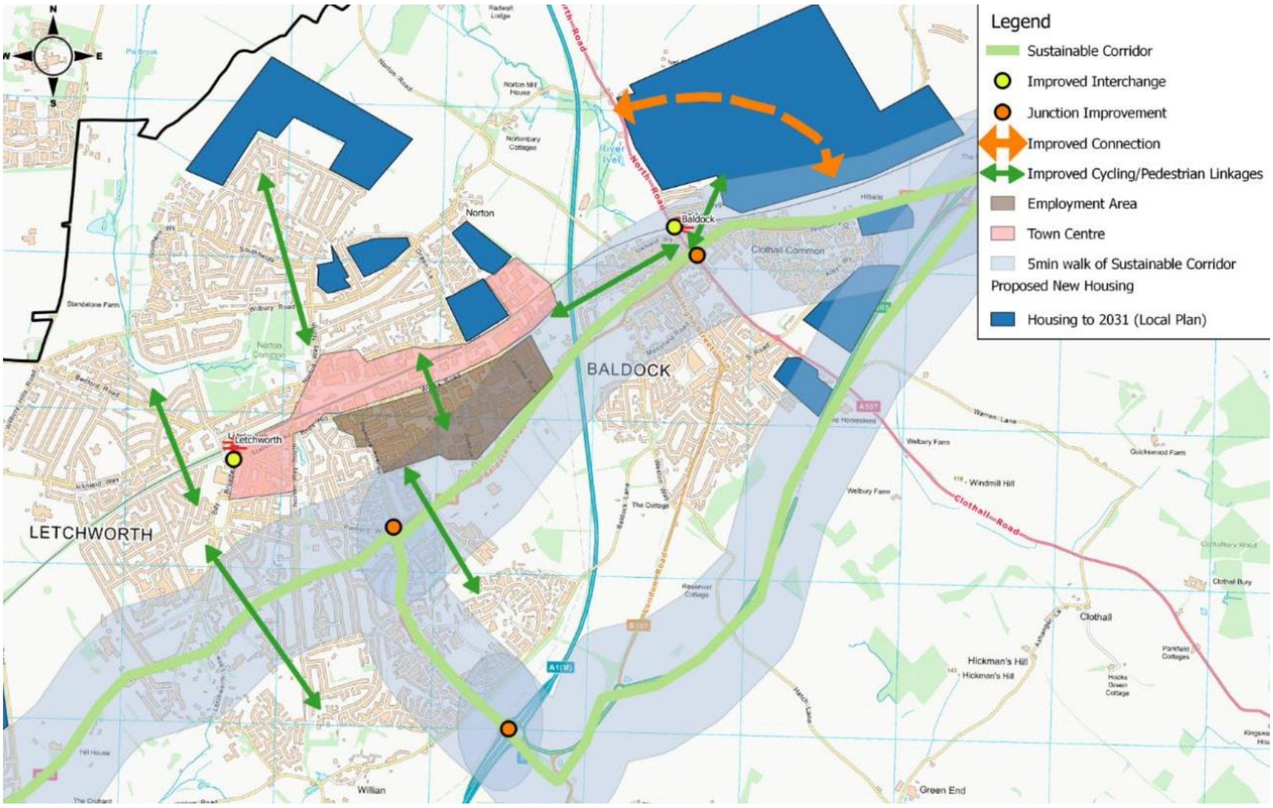
Letchworth / Baldock Transport Strategy

Since Baldock is immediately adjacent to Letchworth, it is considered together with Letchworth for this analysis and introduction of transport strategies.

To address these, strategy highlights elements and measures to be undertaken:

- Behaviour change – encourage shift to Sustainable Travel.
- Key development sites – ensure that major Baldock housing development site is connected to Baldock Station and town centre, promoting choice of bus, walking or cycling as preferred travel options.
- Improving walking and cycling – improved crossings, improved strategic signage of cycle network and provision of some 'quietways'.
- Bus-based improvements – better coverage of in and out of town centre bus services, better connection to Hitchin and Stevenage and improved town centre services.
- Sustainable spine – improved bus frequency, better walking and cycling facilities
- Traffic management – support 20mph speed limit across the town apart from some strategic routes, Retain 'gating' function of radial junctions to manage through traffic

The map below indicates improvements to the junction of the High Street that were suggested by the town centre redevelopment completed in 2009 and subsequently addressed. Additional improvements indicated are the use of the station as a main interchange for visitors, along with improved cycling and pedestrian routes connecting the town centre to the new proposed housing development, as part of a sustainable, active travel corridor ensuring sustainable active travel across Baldock.



Streetscape and public realm

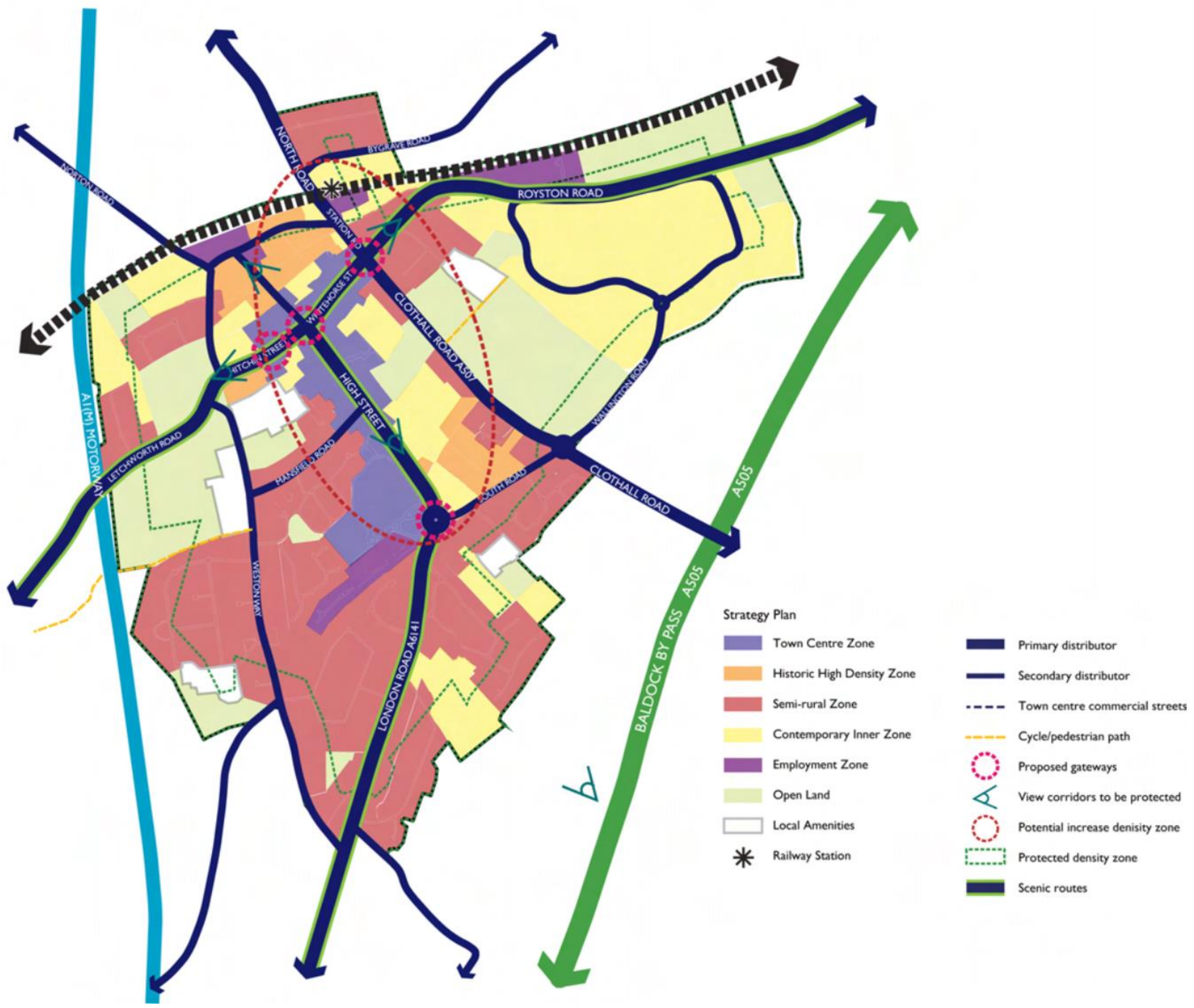
North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment – Baldock (2007)

The North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment for Baldock was developed through public consultation to examine the perceptions and suggestions from local residents. They helped to establish opinions that can be used as evidence in the urban design assessment.

As the diagram below illustrates, for the assessment, Baldock was divided into urban design zones grouping developments by period and use. Baldock town centre is designated as a separate town centre design zone, as a historic core and an activity centre based around the High Street, Hitchin Street and Whitehorse Street.

The strategy indicated that Tesco is a major convenience retail hub of the town, with the next comparative retail offer being rather weak. Thus, strategy suggested improving the link between Tesco and the High Street, connecting the supermarket's shoppers with the town centre's specialist retailers. This link has been partially developed as part of the Baldock town centre transformation scheme that enhanced the streetscape of the High Street. As part of the design process, there were further plans to create a new physical and visual link with the town centre and open-up the memorial gardens as an improved amenity for the town centre. Discussion was also held with Tesco about making provision on their site for approximately 30 local business parking spaces.

New Market Square was delivered as part of the transformation, building upon the town's history and appearance. The open space can be used for both market days as well as events that would give potential to attract further visitors to the town centre.



Baldock Town Centre Enhancement

The Town Centre Enhancement Scheme looked to transform the historic market town of Baldock and was one of the key actions to be taken forward following the adoption of the Baldock Town Centre Strategy. The Baldock bypass was opened in 2006 prior to which Baldock was a busy, congested thoroughfare. This resulted in an imbalance between vehicle and pedestrian space and needed to be addressed.

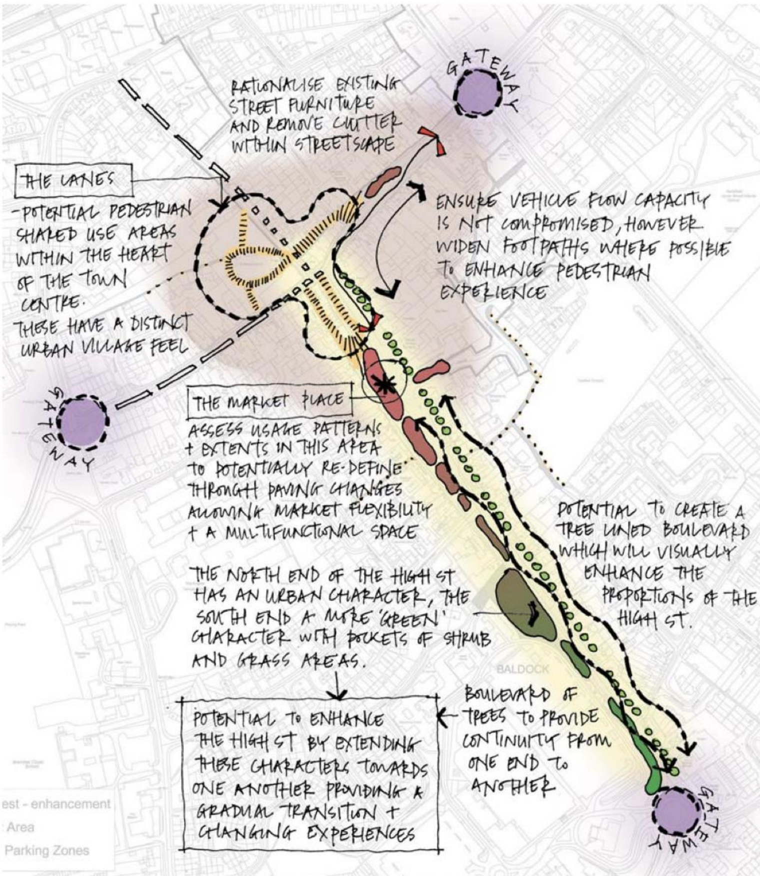
The project sought to create:

- a high quality, attractive and robust scheme in terms of design and materials
- a scheme that improves safety within the town
- a scheme that benefits all users in terms of function and accessibility
- a scheme that creates a lively setting for the town centre

The Scheme was successful in winning a National Award, the Horticultural Landscape and Amenity Award in 2009 under the Category Best Commercial Project. The Scheme was also awarded a certificate of Special Recognition at the 2010 National Civic Trust awards.

The key town centre initiatives were agreed to be:

- organise parking to enable new open public spaces, provide short-term parking on the high street, improve parking appearance
- increase footpath widths where necessary to allow outdoor trading – cafes etc. and provide safe pedestrian environment
- create a market place, give the market a real presence and encourage market to grow
- modify the main junction to slow traffic, improve pedestrian experience and provide additional pedestrian crossings
- create direct physical and visual link to Tesco and the town centre.



As an outcome, four areas of the town centre were reorganised and renewed with the street furniture and tree planting.

- *Market Square*. A new Market Square was proposed to enhance Market activities and host events.
- *Whitehorse Street*. Former car park was transformed into a key space in the town centre with minimised flow of vehicles on the shared space. Widening of pavements and improved crossings act as an encouragement for people to choose walking and strolling around the town centre.
- *Church Street*. The southern end of the Church streets previously used by vehicles as a short cut was pedestrianised and served with street furniture and trees, encouraging reoccupation of vacant units with cafes and restaurants with outdoor seating.
- *High Street*. Green space was introduced to improve pedestrian experience and setting of buildings, with wide pavements encouraging the outdoors café culture.
- While the key areas were addressed, some of the points highlighted in the concept still require further development, for example the link between Tesco and the town centre can be expanded further.

Conservation Area Statement (2003)

Conservation Area Statement suggests a list of features that currently detract from the areas special architectural and historic character and thus are opportunities for improvement. Such features are: surface treatments and materials, street furniture and signage, street markings, historic and missing railings, railings to entrance of Pepper Alley, unsympathetic shop fronts, loss of historic plot boundaries and development of rear plots. These findings were carried over to the Urban Design Assessment and addressed during the town centre transformation completed in 2009 including improved pavement surfaces, street furniture and use of the high-quality materials.

Business Support

The Local Plan vision for North Hertfordshire aims to build robust and prosperous economy with a greater mix of skilled jobs, focused in locations that best support the District's growing population, with a particular emphasis on support for small local businesses.

Hertfordshire LEP has recently launched its Strategy for Clean Growth in Hertfordshire. It will be important for new and existing business in Baldock to be aware of the opportunities it presents to support their growth and transformation as well as more widely to see if it can be a focus for investment in the town.

Unlike other North Herts towns, Baldock does not have an organisation dedicated to representing businesses views, promoting their interests within town centre revitalisation, or providing support. There was a Baldock Town Partnership CIC operating from 2007-2018, when it was dissolved. It will be important to understand the lessons from this period.

Place branding and marketing

Although there is no organisation with a specific focus on place branding and promotion, Baldock Events Forum is responsible for events and their promotion within the town. Their objectives are:

- To strengthen the local community, empowering and enabling local groups through the development and, where appropriate, provision of a vibrant programme of events in the town
- To engage our community through all appropriate means, by which we will accurately and effectively assess local need to ensure events are popular and well patronised
- To enlist the support of capable and passionate people from our community to help in the provision of local sporting, cultural, social and arts events
- To work with community members, and organisations to secure aid and assistance from the community in the planning, organisation and running of events
- To secure funds from within the town and externally, in support of our aims

The Baldock Events Forum web site and social media promote its own events as well as others in the town. There is a variety of events based in and around the town centre through the year and which bring it to life and attract footfall. These include:

- The Baldock Beast half marathon

- The Baldock Festival and Street Fair
- The Big Lunch
- The Baldock Beer Festival
- Baldock Eco Festival
- The Cycle Challenge
- Festive Window Competition
- Christmas Fayre

There is also a weekly street market and the Baldock Country Market.

Digital technology and data

Social media and digital footprint

There is no specific social media or digital strategy for Baldock though there are the following social media platforms and web sites revealed through a quick online search.

- Baldock Events Forum web site https://www.baldockeventsforum.org.uk/company-details Instagram , @baldock_events_forum and Facebook https://www.facebook.com/baldockevents/
- Baldockgram on Instagram (@baldockgram)

Whilst these sites serves slightly different audiences and organisational roles, it is important to coordinate, clarify and boost the town's digital footprint.

There are also three private, community Facebook pages with a combined total of 7,300 members and one group specifically dedicated to raising awareness of local businesses and organisations with 1,600 members.

Town centre Wi-Fi and footfall monitoring

North Herts Council has recently adopted a new mobile phone-based footfall monitoring system for Baldock as part of a wider scheme with other East and North Herts towns. This system could give very useful baseline data as well as routine updates to understand the changing use of the Baldock town centre post-pandemic, with the possibility for benchmarking with neighbouring towns. Historic data of town centre footfall is available over recent years and it will be good, if possible, to analyse this for trends before, during and emerging from the pandemic including daytime, evening and night time patterns.

Evidence: The Survey Process

The System

The People & Places Town Centre Baseline Survey process has been developed to address the real issues of how to understand measure, evaluate and ultimately improve town centres. The approach offers a simple way of capturing data on 10 key performance indicators (KPIs) selected by those involved in town centre management. By having the tools to measure baseline performance in this way, strategic decision-making is improved and future progress can be monitored. By understanding the baseline performance, forward strategies and action planning can be more focused and effective.

The system is divided into two sections: large towns; consisting of those localities with more than 250 units; small towns; consisting of those localities with less than 250 units

Towns, depending on their size, contribute to either the large or small town analysis. Baldock with 96 units is classed as a small town and will be compared against data for small towns nationally. The analysis provides data on each KPI for the town individually and in a national context for comparison. The national figure, unless otherwise stated are the cumulative averages for all the towns which participated in benchmarking during since 2014.

Key Performance Indicators

Each key performance indicator (KPI) is collected in a standardised manner as highlighted in the table below.

Key Performance Indicator	Methodology
Core Economic Indicators	
The Place: Commercial Units	
KPI 1: Use Class	On-street survey
KPI 2: Comparison/Convenience	On-street survey
KPI 3: Trader Type	On-street survey
KPI 4: Vacancy Rates	On-street survey
The Place: Cross-town Trends	
KPI 5: Footfall & Foot-flow	Footfall monitoring
KPI 6: Car Parking	Data from Parkopedia
The People: Stakeholder Surveys	
KPI 7: Town Centre Customers Survey	Online using community social media
KPI 8: Digital Development	Included in business/customer surveys

Key Findings: The Place

KPI 1: Commercial Units; Use Class

It is important to understand the scale and variety of the "commercial offer" throughout the town. A variety of shops and a wide range of services in a town are important to its ability to remain competitive and continue to attract customers. Sustaining a balance between the different aspects of retail and services ensures that the local population and visitors can spend time and money there, keeping the generated wealth within the local economy. Importantly, it provides local employment and helps to retain local spend rather than lose it to nearby towns. The table below provides descriptions of each of the Use Classes.

Analysis & Interpretation of Business Composition

This section of the report has been developed to assist in providing detailed analysis and interpretation of business composition. The presence of key classes of retail and other businesses will be indicative of a town centre's current or potential future role. The graphical business composition dashboard gives a visual representation of the make-up of key sectors.

Findings

For the purposes of this study, a much more detailed analysis has been undertaken of second and third-level use class to enable a better understanding of the town's business composition. This is shown in the table below that provides a detailed analysis of the commercial offering in the town centre by sub-use class. The figures are presented as a percentage of the 89 occupied units recorded. The business composition 'dashboard' overleaf also provides a visual 'snapshot' of the make-up of businesses in Baldock town centre.

Simplified use classes from Summer 2021

The ways the business use of a building is classified was simplified in September 2020. New regulations created a streamlined new use class system, although the terminology was not changed until July 2021.

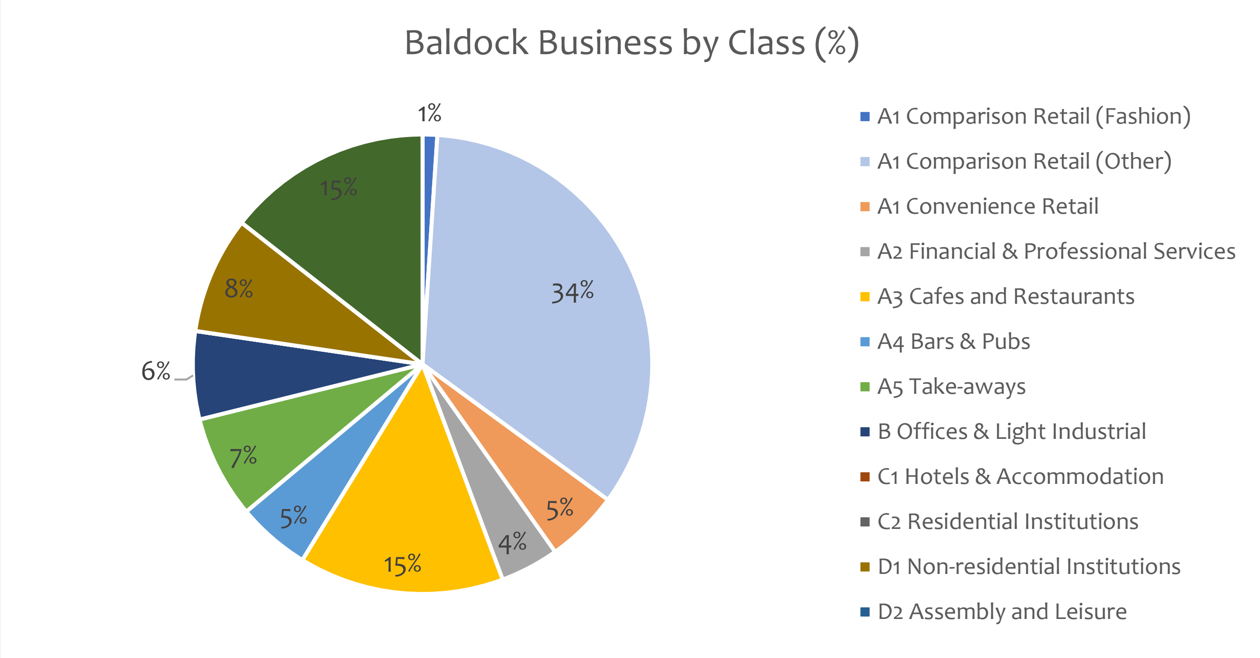
The new use classes are: a broad Class E (commercial, business and service), Class F1 (learning and non-residential institutions) and Class F2 (local community). Shops fall into Class E or Class F2 depending on their use, size and location. This change is important in shaping the potential mix of town centre businesses because it is no longer necessary to obtain planning permission for some changes between various non-residential uses required under the previous use classes.

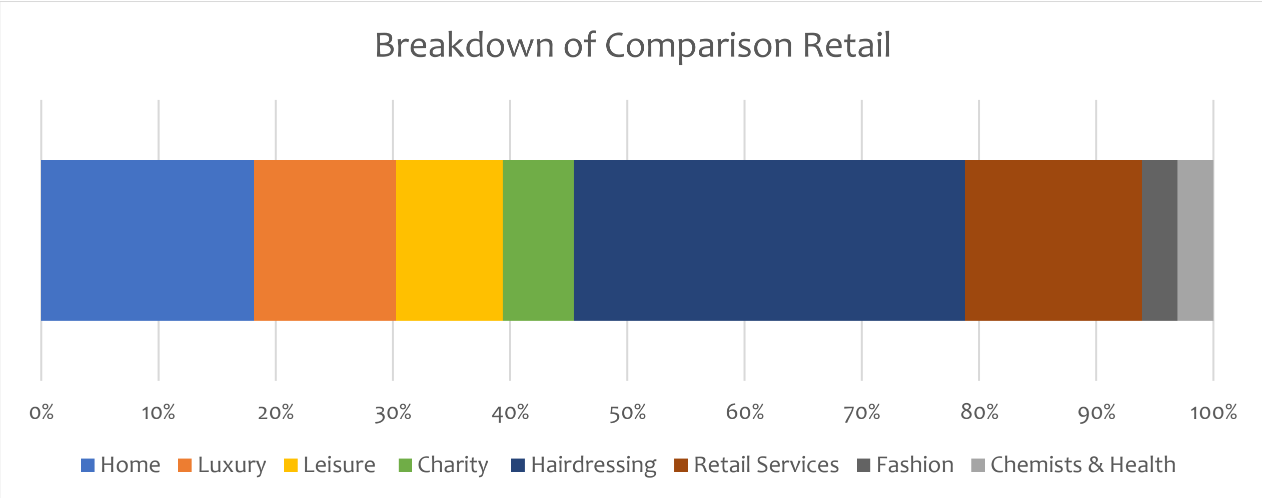
Full details of the changes, including the full list of the new use classes and their previous equivalents are provided in People & Places downloadable guide to changing the town centre business mix.

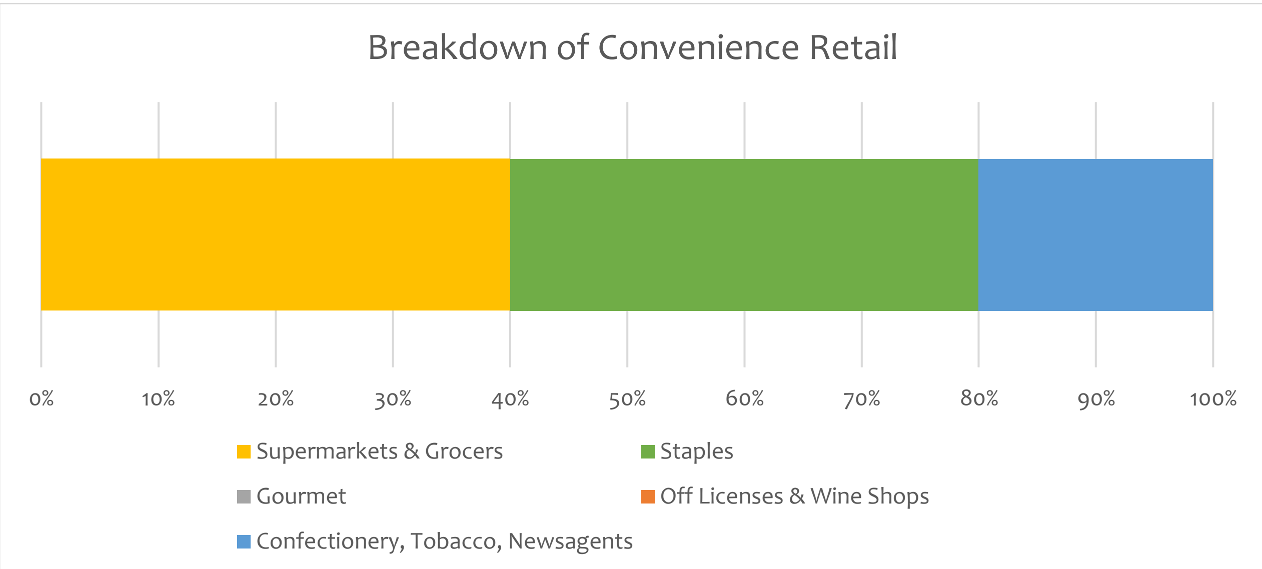
Class	Type of Use	Description
A1	Shops	Shops, retail warehouses, hairdressers, travel and ticket agencies, post offices (but not sorting offices), pet shops, sandwich bars, showrooms, domestic hire shops, dry cleaners, funeral directors and internet cafes
A2	Financial and Professional Services	Financial services such as banks and building societies, professional services (other than health and medical services) including estate and employment agencies and betting offices
A3	Restaurants and Cafes	Food and drink for consumption on the premises- restaurants, snack bars and cafes
A4	Drinking Establishments	Public houses, wine bars or other drinking establishments (but not nightclubs)
A5	Hot Food Takeaways	Sale of hot food for consumption off the premises
B1	Businesses	Offices (other than those that fall within A2) research and development of products and processes, light industry appropriate in a residential area
B2	General Industrial	General Industrial
B8	Storage and Distribution	Warehouses, includes open air storage
C1	Hotels	Hotels, boarding and guest houses where no significant element of care is provided (excludes hostels)
C2	Residential Institutions	Residential care homes, hospitals, nursing homes, boarding schools, residential colleges and training centres.
C2A	Secure Residential Institution	Use for a provision of secure residential accommodation, including use as a prison, young offender's institution, detention centre, secure training centre, custody centre, secure hospital, secure local authority accommodation or use as a military barracks.
D1	Non-Residential Institutions	Clinics, health centres, crèches, day centres, schools, art galleries (other than for sale or hire), museums, libraries, halls, places of worship, law court, non-residential education and training centres.
D2	Assembly and Leisure	Cinemas, music and concert halls, bingo and dance halls (not nightclubs), swimming baths, skating rinks, gymnasiums or areas for indoor /outdoor sports/ recreation (except motor sports/ firearms).
SG	Sui Generis ("unique" establishments)	Theatres, hostels providing no significant element of care, scrap yards, petrol filling stations and shops selling and/ or displaying motor vehicles, retail warehouse clubs, nightclubs, launderettes, taxi business, amusement centres, casinos, haulage yards, transport depots, veterinary clinics, dog parlours, tanning and beauty salons and tattoo studios.

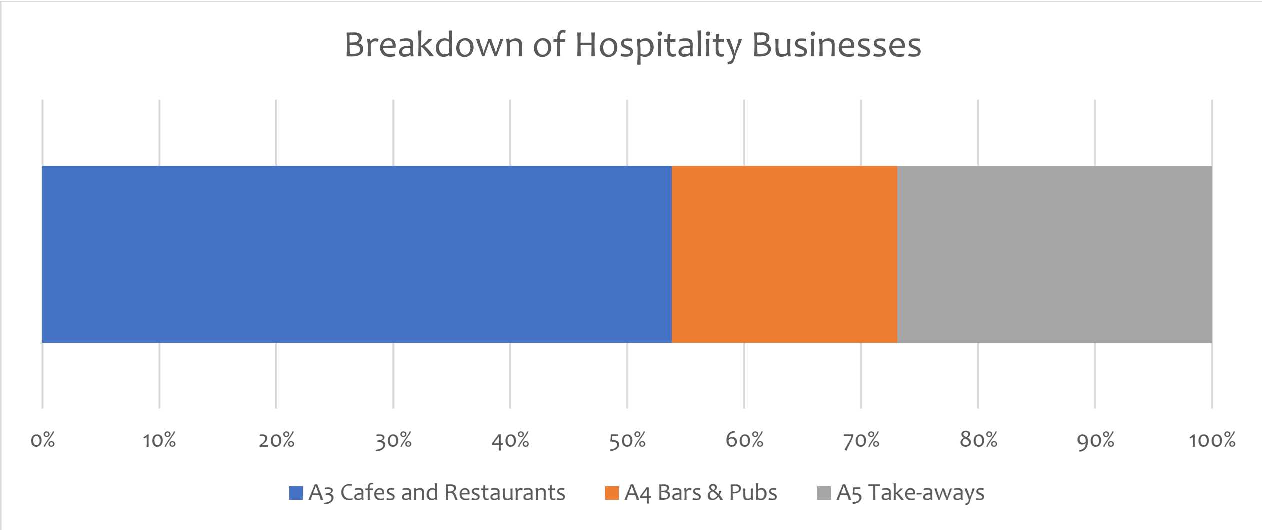
Level 1 & 2 classification	National Small Towns %	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
A1 Retail	**51%**	**35**	**39%**
A1 Comparison Retail	**42%**	**32**	**35%**
Comparison (Fashion)	**6%**	1	1%
Fashion & Clothing (children)	0%	0	0%
Fashion & Clothing (men)	0%	0	0%
Fashion & Clothing (mixed)	3%	0	0%
Fashion & Clothing (women)	3%	1	1%
Footwear	0%	0	0%
Fashion & General Clothing Accessories	0%	0	0%
Other Comparison Retail	**36%**	32	34%
Department Stores	0%	0	0%
Home	7%	6	7%
Luxury	10%	4	5%
Chemists & Health	3%	1	1%
Leisure	3%	3	3%
Value	0%	0	0%
Charity	5%	2	2%
Hairdressing	6%	11	12%
Retail Services	1%	5	6%
A1 Convenience Retail	**9%**	**3**	**5%**
Supermarkets & Groceries	2%	2	2%
Staples	4%	2	2%
Gourmet	2%	0	0%
Off Licenses	2%	0	0%
Confectionery & Newsagents	0%	1	1%
A2 Financial & Professional Services	**3%**	**4**	**5%**
Banks & Building Societies	**9%**	0	0%
Estate Agents & Auctioneers	2%	2	2%
Professional Services	3%	1	1%
Repair Services	4%	1	1%
A3 Cafes and Restaurants	**1%**	**14**	**16%**
A4 Bars & Pubs	**9%**	**5**	**6%**
A5 Take-aways	**4%**	**7**	**8%**

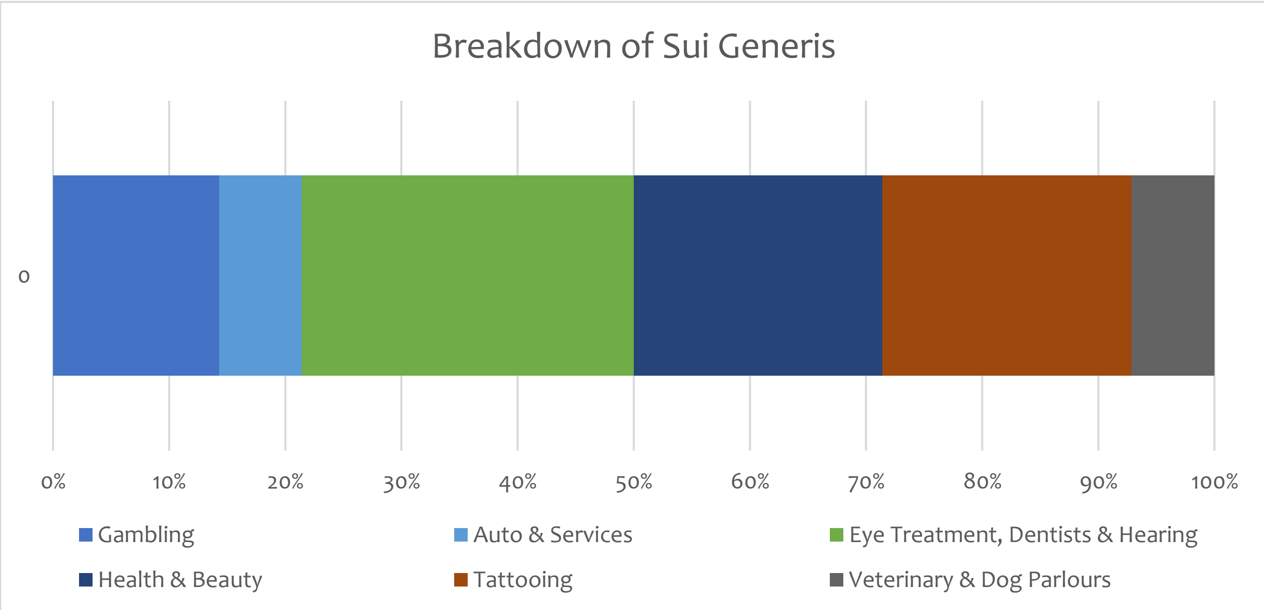
B1 Offices	**4%**	**6**	**7%**
B2 Light Industrial	**2%**	**0**	**0%**
C1 Hotels & Accommodation	**1%**		**0%**
D1 Non-residential Institutions	**0%**	**8**	**9%**
Medical	**1%**	1	1%
Civic Buildings	**1%**	1	1%
Education & Learning	**0%**	3	3%
Places of Worship	**8%**	3	3%
D2 Assembly and Leisure	**2%**	**0**	**0%**
Sui Generis	**3%**	**14**	**15%**
Leisure	**1%**	**2**	**2%**
Gambling	2%	2	2%
Entertainment (theatre & concert halls)	**1%**	0	0%
Clubs	**9%**	0	0%
Hostels	**1%**	0	0%
Auto & Services	**0%**	**1**	**1%**
Personal	**0%**	**11**	**11%**
Eye Treatment; Dentists & Hearing	0%	4	4%
Health & Beauty	0%	3	3%
Tattooing	**3%**	3	1%
Veterinary & Pet Grooming	**6%**	1	1%
Laundry	1%	0	0%
TOTALS	2%	**96**	**100%**


Baldock Business by Class (%)
1%
34%
5%
4%
15%
5%
7%
6%
8%
15%
A1 Comparison Retail (Fashion)
A1 Comparison Retail (Other)
A1 Convenience Retail
A2 Financial & Professional Services
A3 Cafes and Restaurants
A4 Bars & Pubs
A5 Take-aways
B Offices & Light Industrial
C1 Hotels & Accommodation
C2 Residential Institutions
D1 Non-residential Institutions
D2 Assembly and Leisure


Breakdown of Comparison Retail
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Home
Luxury
Leisure
Charity
Hairdressing
Retail Services
Fashion
Chemists & Health


Breakdown of Convenience Retail
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Supermarkets & Grocers
Staples
Gourmet
Off Licenses & Wine Shops
Confectionery, Tobacco, Newsagents





Fashion retail

Fashion retail is considered an important attraction for regular shoppers to a town. In small, rural towns this may be characterised by a modest number of independent, ladies fashion retailers with a distinctive or somewhat exclusive offering that can attract shoppers from a wider area. Other elements of fashion retail (men's, children's, shoes) will tend to be under-represented in smaller towns. The presence of premium fashion chains in small towns will be indicative of a wider catchment area including day-visitors and tourists. Popular, multiple fashion retailers in medium-format stores may be present in the slightly larger towns and indicate their role as a local shopping destination.

The data indicates that there is only one female fashion retailer in Baldock, accounting for 1% out of the total business mix. This is significantly less than small town business mix benchmarked nationally and indicates that the demand everyday fashion needs for the whole family is not addressed in Baldock town centre and shopping opportunities have to be found elsewhere.

Other comparison retail

Towns will typically have a high proportion of other comparison retail that form an important part of the choice offered to customers and their perception of a place. Comparison shopping is defined by the Government's Planning Portal as retail items not bought on a frequent basis, for example, fashion and electrical goods.

Department store: The continued presence of a vibrant department store in medium-sized town centres offers a key attraction to customers and probably indicates that the town is a local shopping destination with a wider catchment.

Home: A high proportion of retailers focused on providing goods for the 'home' (electrical goods furniture, carpets, kitchens & bathrooms, DIY, hardware, florists & gardening) is indicative of a town centre that is serving many of the routine needs of the local population. Such retail remains very vulnerable to competition from elsewhere including out-of-town retail, other larger centres and on-line.

Luxury: A town centre with a high proportion of so-called 'luxury' retailers (gifts, china, leather goods, jewellers, books, arts & crafts, antiques) is indicative of a catchment that extends beyond the local population and is more dependent on visitors or special interest trade.

Leisure: This a mixed category (sports, toys, cycle shops, hobbies, pet shops & supplies, travel agents) that serves local and specialist needs. A high proportion of such businesses may indicate a wider catchment area or that the town is situated in an area known for outdoor leisure activities.

Chemists and health: A small proportion of chemist and health businesses (opticians; chemists /toiletries, beauty products, health foods & products) is a normal part of the retail mix meeting the routine needs of local residents.

Value: The presence of discount store will normally be limited to a maximum of one or two independent businesses in small towns and multiples will only be present in slightly larger towns serving a larger, cost-conscious population.

Charity: The presence of charity shops is typical and often much maligned element of town centre retail that nevertheless adds diversity. The case for the positive contribution of charity shops to the local economy, community and environment is well-represented by the Charity Retail Association. Where there is an over-representation of charity shops the impact needs to be considered in terms of whether they are occupying otherwise vacant units of alternative, viable businesses.

Hairdressers: It is a characteristic of modern town centres that a relatively high proportion of businesses will be retail services such as hairdressers. Whilst local opinion may be disparaging of growth in such provision, these are stable businesses that face more limited competition from other localities, provide a use for premises and help attract modest footfall.

Retail services: Businesses providing services such as dry cleaners, clothing repairs and funeral services will typically be a small yet consistent part of the retail mix in town centres meeting local need.

As the dashboard illustrates, Baldock's comparison retail (apart from fashion) takes 33% of total business mix. While being sufficient, it still less than the national average (42%). The number is comprised of 11 hairdressers and barbers (12% of the total business mix), 6 outlet selling items for home such as electric goods, furniture, florists and interior items (6%), 4 business selling more luxury items (4%), 3 shops dedicated to leisure and hobbies (3%), 2 charity shops (2%) and 5 outlets providing various retail services (5%). There is only one Pharmacy on the outskirts of the town centre, however Baldock is also served by Tesco store pharmacy.

Convenience retail

Convenience retail is defined by the Government's planning portal as everyday essential items, such as food. It is usually a small percentage of overall retail provision though encourages regular shopping trips.

Supermarkets & groceries: The presence of town centre supermarkets provides an opportunity to boost footfall more widely if accompanied by medium-stay parking and good pedestrian access links to the town centre. This is preferable to development of out-of-town stores or 'leakage' caused when it is necessary for local shoppers to travel to other towns. Smaller format grocery stores enable top-up shopping as part of a town centre trip.

Staples: Food shops such as butchers, bakers, greengrocers are very important parts of the retail mix and help encourage regular, local footfall. They typically indicate readily accessible, smaller town centres. It is important to maintain such provision in a way that maintains and strengthens the appeal of town centres to existing and potential new customers by enabling 'pop-and-shop' parking, 'linked-trips' to supermarkets and innovative marketing as they are under increasing pressure.

Gourmet: The presence of food businesses such as delicatessens, tea and coffee suppliers, cheese shops and fishmongers denote a less cost-conscious customer-base. These businesses may in-part be dependent on custom from day visitors and tourists at least for part of the year. They are important in providing a distinctive shopping experience and create customer loyalty.

Off licenses: Most towns will have some sort of drinks outlet as part of its retail mix. The distinction and mix of discount stores, regular off-license and specialist beer or wine outlets will be indicative of the customer-base for a town centre.

Confectionery & newsagents: Confectionary shops and newsagents are consistently a small part of the retail mix in a vibrant town centre.

There are 3 convenience retailers in Baldock town centre, with 2 of those (2% of the total business mix) falling in supermarkets and grocers category. Out of these, one is Tesco Extra supermarket, that serves the majority of the towns convenience and comparison needs and acts as an attractor for visits from nearby towns. The proportion of convenience retail in Baldock is smaller than that benchmarked across the small towns nationally.

Financial & professional services

A mix of various financial and professional services is an essential part of a vibrant town centre serving local customers.

Banks & building societies: Banks and building societies are very important to the economic health of a town centre in providing a service to businesses and especially older customers. Their cash machines are an important and readily available source of cash. Small towns are, however, ever-increasingly vulnerable to ongoing programmes of bank closures.

Estate agents & auctioneers: Estate agents typically comprise a small, though significant, per centage of town centre businesses. Although they have a very specific customer-base, they are part of the overall economic activity and upkeep of the town.

Professional services: Solicitors, accountants, insurance companies, financial advisers and photographers are an important part of local service provision.

Repair services: Services such as cobblers, locksmiths, engraving and film developers are defined as separate to retail, though they provide routine and necessary functions as part of the business within town centres.

Baldock town centre has a low proportion of financial and professional services (4% of the total business mix), with the number comprised of 2 estate agents (2%), 1 professional and service (1%) and repair service (1%). There is no bank in Baldock, following the closure of Barclays branch in 2017.

Food and drink

Taken collectively, food and drink establishments are important parts of the town centre business mix that can help to encourage footfall, increase dwell times, contribute greatly to the visitor economy and underpin the evening economy as a growth area in town centre economic activity.

Cafes and Restaurants: Whilst some regular users will often be critical of the opening of "yet another café" they are a critical part of the distinctive social and leisure mix of town centres, encouraging footfall and dwell-times. Along with restaurants, a mix of appealing cafes will be very important in encouraging day-visitors and tourists to the town centre. A mix of suitable restaurants will be key in underpinning a flourishing evening economy for different local markets and visitors.

Bars & pubs: A mix of suitable bars and pubs will be key to enabling a flourishing evening economy that attracts different local markets and visitors. The predominant character of the town's pubs and bars will reflect the customer-base.

Take-aways: A small, though significant, part of the business mix in most towns will be take-aways. Although closed during the day, they are an important part of the evening economy and typically appeal to a younger customer-base.

Baldock is well-served with hospitality business mix. There are 14 cafes and restaurants (15%), 5 bars and pubs (5%) and 7 take aways (7%). This is slightly higher than the national average which indicates that Baldock meets the social function well and that this is a key part of its role.

Offices, light industrial and storage

Such uses do not tend to be focused on town centres and are more likely to be clustered in out-lying business parks or industrial estates. These various business types do not tend to be customer-facing in the same sense as retail and other services though they add to the wider economy. Where they are well-represented in or around the town centre, they contribute to regular footfall.

Baldock's proportion of town centre offices (6%) is significantly higher than the typical proportion of small national towns (2%). Most of the office premises are clustered in workspace dedicated buildings within the town centre thus contributing to the number of the town centre customers.

Hotels & accommodation

The presence of a significant number of bed spaces provided through hotels, guest houses, holiday parks and other serviced accommodation, positively reinforces a town centre's role in the visitor economy.

There are no hotels in Baldock town centre indicating that the town is not anticipating tourists or business travellers.

Residential institutions (care)

Institutions such as care homes and hospitals provide local social services and can contribute to footfall by staff, patients and visitors. In some town, the presence of relatively large boarding schools determines the character of the town centre and creates footfall from students, staff and occasionally visiting parents.

Residential institutions (secure)

Secure institutions such as young offender's institution; detention centres, secure hospitals, and military barracks are rare components of town centres though can provide additional footfall by staff.

Non-residential institutions

This comprehensive grouping accounts for the different civic and public services that can be found in town centres and are an important part of providing social functions in a way that that also attracts footfall more widely. Except for places of worship, all of these functions often face pressures to re-locate to more accommodating edge-of or out-of-town locations and so remove footfall.

Medical: This includes doctors' surgeries, health clinics and day centres that are an important part of the social function of towns that underpins their role as 'community hubs'.

Civic buildings: Town centres with a high proportion of civic buildings such as government buildings, council services, community centres, law courts and libraries have an important community role and will attract footfall from a wider area.

Education & learning: Crèches, schools, colleges, training centres, museums and art galleries all add to the wider life and appeal of a community. Schools located close to the town centre can cause congestion whilst significantly contributing to footfall at the beginning and end of the day. Museums and art galleries can help attract visitors if their appeal is beyond local interest.

Places of worship: Churches and other places of worship are a key part of the heritage and character of a town. They contribute footfall when services are on and can serve as community facilities for wider population and attract visitors.

There are 8 non-residential institutions in Baldock (9%), out of which 3 are places of worship (3%), 3 education and learning establishments (3%) that includes nursery, museums and general education courses, 1 civic and 1 medical building

Assembly and leisure

Although usually only a small percentage of the overall number of town centre businesses and institutions, assembly and leisure facilities are very important in contributing to footfall and vibrancy. Such facilities include: cinemas, snooker halls, sports grounds & stadiums, party venues & function rooms. It is important to retain such functions as part of the town centre mix in a way that will benefit weekend, evening and visitor economies especially.

There are no assembly and leisure establishments in Baldock, indicating that such demand across town centre users has to be met elsewhere.

Sui Generis

Certain uses do not fall within any use class and are categorised under the general heading 'sui generis' which literally means "of its own kind". This is a large category that overall accounts for a growing proportion of town centre uses as part of the diversification of town centres. Here we sub-divide the classification to aid understanding.

Leisure: This sub-division includes gambling institutions such as betting shops and amusement arcades that have had a growing presence in town centres over recent years and are not welcomed by all residents. They nevertheless are part of the wider economy and contribute modest footfall.

The Leisure sub-division of Sui Generis very specifically includes theatres & concert halls that could equally have been considered as part of the 'assembly and leisure' function of town centres. Though not present in all small towns, such facilities can be a very important part of the evening and visitor economies.

The Leisure sub-division also includes night clubs; private clubs and social clubs that are an important part of the social life of town centres and evening economy alongside pubs and bars. Most small towns will have at least one social club of this type, though night clubs will be restricted to medium and larger-sized towns.

Hostels are categorised as part of this sub-division.

Automotive

Automotive services including car dealers & accessories, petrol filling stations; vehicle hire, car wash & valet services, garage services, tyre dealers and taxis & private hire serve important local needs. Such uses are not necessarily located within town centres and may equally be located in surrounding areas. The proportion of such businesses in the town centre is not necessarily indicative of their wider presence.

Personal

The Sui Generis category includes a varied range of personal services that are a growing part of the business mix within town centres and meet local needs.

Dentists, hearing & eye treatment: Most town centres will have one or more dentists located in the town centre, though there may be others in peripheral areas. Hearing specialists are increasingly part of the mix. Such provision can be considered alongside other health-related services such as clinics and opticians that are classified differently by the planning system.

Health & beauty: This is a category with growing representation in town centres and includes hair & beauty salons, beauty salons, alternative & complementary medicines, herbalists; tanning shops and nail salons. Although categorised differently, it should be considered alongside other retail services such as hairdressing.

Tattooing: Most small town centres will have at least one tattoo parlour and they are another example of the mix of services provided to meet local demand in a convenient way.

Laundry: This includes launderettes and laundry businesses as opposed to dry cleaning services that are categorised elsewhere. Launderettes will usually be present in small town centres, focused on meeting local needs.

Veterinary & pet grooming: These distinct services for pet-owners may be part of the town centre mix as well as being provided in outlying areas, or in the case of grooming, even through mobile services.

Sui Generis uses make up 11% of town centre businesses. The diversity is comprised of high number of personal care businesses such as 4 health and beauty outlets (4%), 3 eye and dental treatments (3%) and 3 tattoo parlours (3%). Further, there is 1 auto services (1%) and 2 gambling outlets (2%).

Overview

The business data for Baldock indicates that current the retail focus is on comparison and provision retail such as items for personal care, home and luxury goods. While the proportion of convenience retail businesses is low, making up only 2% of the total business mix, that includes the Tesco Extra supermarket that caters for residents' convenience shopping needs. The number of retail service providers is quite low.

The proportion of hospitality mix is good, providing sufficient offer for local residents with 15% of cafes and restaurants, 5% bars and pubs and 7% of take aways.

Levels of Sui Generis are slightly higher when compared to other smaller towns and indicate presence of diverse service, majorly those for personal care.

Overall, the composition of Baldock's businesses indicate that the town's main focus is its local customers rather than external visitors. Baldock town centre business mix is suited to meet basic everyday shopping needs of local residents including staples, food and personal care items, as well as to cater social life with a diverse hospitality offering.

It is worth noting that there are also additional shopping opportunities offered by the retail complex consisting of Sainsbury's, Lidl and Wickes, located a 5 minutes' drive away from the town centre.

KPI 2: Commercial Units; Comparison versus Convenience

This KPI provides an overview of the composition of retail businesses alone by considering the split between convenience and comparison shops.

Convenience goods – low-cost, everyday items that consumers are unlikely to travel far to purchase. Defined as: food and non-alcoholic drinks; tobacco; alcohol; newspapers and magazines; non-durable household goods.

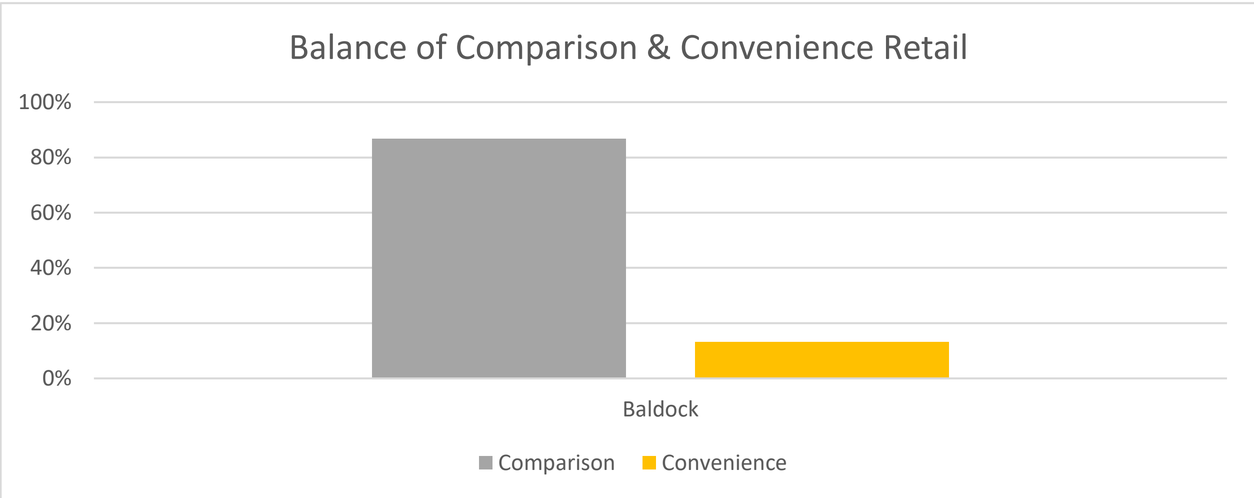
Comparison goods – all other retail goods. Defined as: books; clothing and footwear; furniture, floor coverings and household textiles; audio-visual equipment and other durable goods; hardware and DIY supplies; chemists goods; jewellery, watches and clocks; bicycles; recreational and miscellaneous goods; hairdressing.

The presence of a variety of shops in a town centre is important to its ability to remain competitive and continue to attract customers. A balance of both comparison and convenience retail units is therefore ideal in terms of encouraging visitors and potential customers. The following table provides a percentage of the A1 Shops which sell mainly comparison or convenience goods.

Examining the retail mix specifically, reveals that the proportion of comparison retail (91%) in Baldock is significantly greater than convenience. It is also higher than the proportion benchmarked across small towns nationally. A slight increase in convenience retail provision can be important in boosting footfall in the town centre. Convenience retailers include multiple independent grocers, two chain supermarkets, and several other convenience shops. These businesses meet local needs and attract footfall that other nearby town centre businesses could benefit from.

	National Small Towns %	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
Comparison	82%	33	87%
Convenience	18%	5	13%

Department Stores	Mixed Goods Retailers	Clothing
Debenhams	Argos	Primark
House of Fraser	Boots	Dorothy Perkins
John Lewis	TK Maxx	H & M
Marks and Spencer	WH Smith	New Look
Regional Dept. Stores	Wilkinson	River Island
Supermarkets	Other Retailers	Topman/ Topshop
Sainsbury's	Superdrug	Burton
Tesco	Clarks	Next
Waitrose	Clintons	Zara
Morrisons	HMV	
Asda	Waterstones	



KPI 3: Commercial Units; Trader Types

The vitality of a town centre depends highly on the quality and variety of retailers represented. Certain national retail businesses are considered key attractors and are particularly important in terms of attracting visitors and shoppers to a town. The character and profile of a town often also depends on the variety and mix of independent shops that can give a town a "unique selling point". A sustainable balance of key attractors and multiple

names alongside local independent shops is therefore likely to have the greatest positive impact on the vitality and viability of a town. The following shops is an updated version of a list of key attractors originally defined by Experian Goad.

Multiple traders have a countrywide presence and are well-known household names. Regional shops are identified as those with stores / units in several towns throughout one geographical region only and independent shops are identified as those that are specific to a town. The following table provides a percentage of the A1 Shops which are key attractors, multiples, regional and independent to the locality.

	National Small Towns %	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
Key attractor	6%	1	3%
Multiple	20%	3	8%
Regional	9%	1	3%
Independent	66%	33	87%

The data for Baldock indicate that there is 1 key attractor in the town centre - Tesco supermarket. Across the rest of the businesses, 89% are independent shops, with another 10% under regional or multiple ownership. The proportion of independent shops is higher than the average across small towns nationally.

KPI 4: Commercial Units; Vacancy Rates

Vacant units are an important indicator of the vitality and viability of a town centre. The presence of vacant units over a period of time can identify potential weaknesses in a town centre. This can be due to locational criteria, high rent levels or strong competition from other centres. The following table provides the percentage figure of vacant units from the total number of commercial units.

	National Small Towns %	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
Vacancy %	9%	3	3%

The vacancy data for Baldock indicates that out of 91 total town centre units, 3 are unoccupied (3%) which is lower than the level for benchmarked large towns nationally (13%). This indicates that available premises are being used comparably well.

KPI 5: Footfall & Foot-flow

The arrival and movement of people, whether as residents, workers, visitors or a shopper is vital to the success of the majority of businesses within the town centre. The more people that are attracted to the town, the better it trades and the more prosperous the businesses in it become. Whilst footfall monitoring was not part of the work proposed for Hertford, footfall data is available through a new monitoring system available through East Herts Council. It would be particularly informative to use the foot-flow tracking to investigate the current flow of users between Tesco and the town centre, helping to address improvements to this link if needed. The template overleaf, outlines the normal data that People & Places would look to assess using such a system.

Quarterly Footfall Performance Indicators Template		
Summary of Key Indicators for 1st Quarter 2019 & 2022	**Dates** (for same range of days)	**Dates** (for same range of days)
24 hours		
Total visits for period		
Busiest time of day		
Average dwell time		
Dwell over 90 minutes (%)		
Average visits per day		
Busiest zone		
Quietest zone		
Balance of repeat & new visitors		
Frequency of visits	Last week, Last month, Infrequent, New	Last week, Last month, Infrequent, New
Busiest 24hrs & number of visits (1st year & comparison)		
Busiest 24hrs & number of visits (2nd year & comparison)		
Day time (08.00-18.00)		
Total visits for period		
Busiest time of day		
Average dwell time		
Dwell over 90 minutes (%)		
Average visits per day		
Busiest zone		
Quietest zone		
Balance of repeat & new visitors		
Busiest day & number of visits (1st year & comparison)		
Busiest day & number of visits (2nd year & comparison)		
Evening (18.00-23.00)		
Total visits for period		
Busiest time of day		
Average dwell time		
Dwell over 90 minutes (%)		
Average visits per evening		
Busiest zone		
Quietest zone		
Balance of repeat & new visitors		
Busiest evening & number of visits (1st year & comparison)		
Busiest evening & number of visits (2nd year & comparison)		

KPI 6: Car Parking

It is important to understand the way users access a town centre and the opportunity for improvements. This has a big impact on the arrival points into a town and the foot-flow around it. Inadequate or poor-quality provision can also provide perceived and real barriers to people's use of a town centre that will affect the frequency and duration of visits. The need to reduce carbon emissions and the changes in mobility during the pandemic, serve to add to the importance of adding to the need to understand how users travel to town centres.

The provision of adequate and convenient car parking facilities is a key element of town centre vitality. An acceptable number of available spaces with a regular, quick turn-over for shoppers are the ideal. Adequate longer-stay, less convenient spaces for local owners/ workers and visitors must be considered too. As an informal rule of thumb advocated by the British Parking Association, at least 15% of parking spaces should be available at busy times to ensure customers have no difficulty parking.

Data for off-street parking provision was gathered during the access audit visit and from North Herts Council, supplemented by data on private car park parks available on Parkopedia. Data on car park occupancy level data was not collected as part of this survey. In the table below the data is broken down into the following categories:

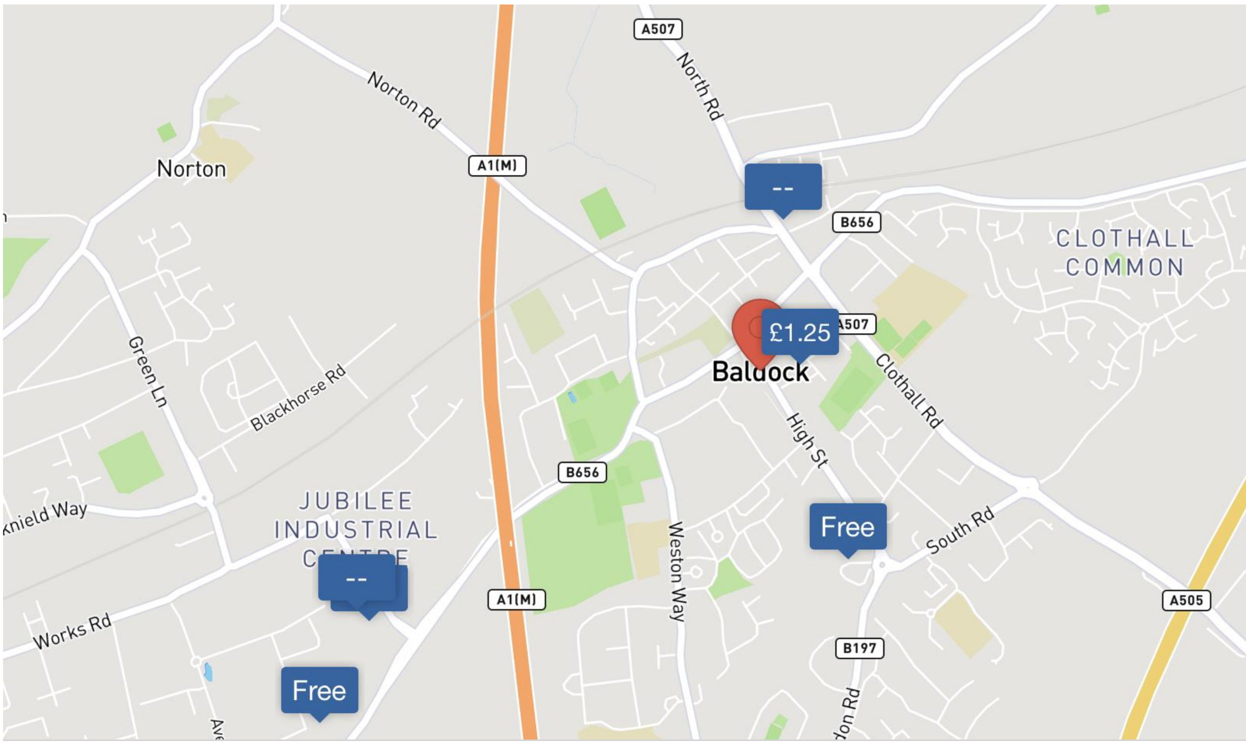
- Percentage and number of spaces in designated car parks
- Percentage and number of short-stay and long-stay

The Initial data collected for 2 private car parks and 1 public car park serving Baldock town centre shows there are a total of 849 spaces. Most of the car park spaces are available on a short-stay basis (86%), of these 40 spaces are in public car parks and can be used for both short and long stay. There are additional on-street parking spaces located on Hitchin Street and Sun Street.

A further 1,042 spaces are available in a peripheral sites at Retail park located on the way to Letchworth. These car parks cater largely for their own users.

The chart below compares these figures for parking in Baldock and the table overleaf gives details for individual car parks. The map overleaf shows the location of car parks and indicates cost for half hour pop-and-shop park at 9am on a mid-week morning.

	Baldock (number)	**Baldock %**
Car parks		
Total spaces:	849	100%
Short stay spaces (<4 hours)	730	86%
Long stay spaces (>4 hours)	119	14%



Car park location	Short-stay	Long-stay	Total	Cost for 1 hr	Cost for 4 hrs	Walk to town centre	Notes
Town centre parking							
Baldock Station		79	79	£ 3.90	£ 3.90	6 mins	Short & long-stay
The Thwitchel		40	40	£ 1.25	£ 1.65	3 mins	Short & long-stay
Tesco	730		730	Free	n/a	8 mins	Customers (2 hr max)
Totals	**730**	**119**	**849**				
Peripheral parking (>15 mins)							
Sainsbury's	518	0	518	Free	n/a	22 mins	Customers (2 hr max)
Lidl	143	0	143	Free	n/a	22 mins	Customers (1,5 hr max)
Plinston Retail Park	324	0	324	Free	n/a	20 mins	Customers (2 hr max)
Totals	**1,042**	**0**	**1,042**				

Key Findings: The People

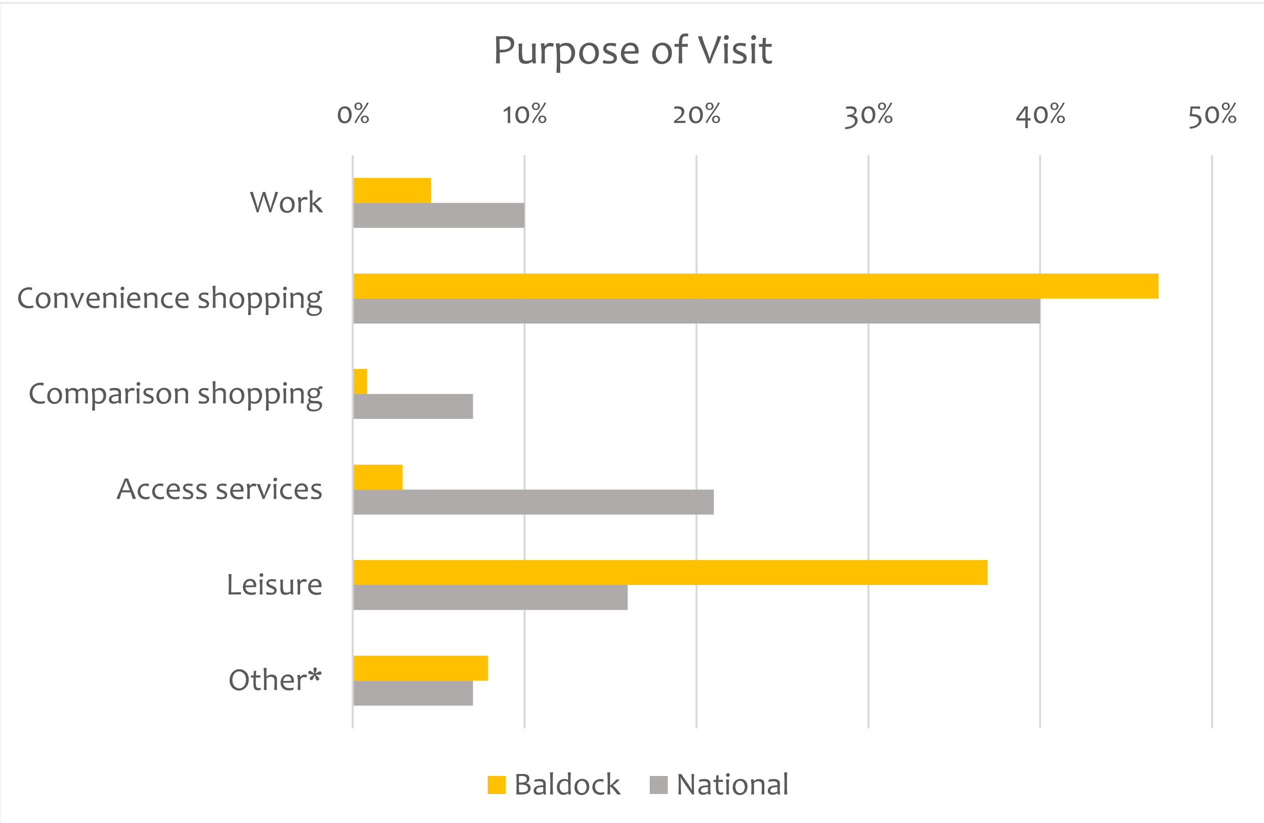
KPI 7: Town Centre User's Survey

The aim of the town centre users' survey is to establish how a town is seen by those people who use it. It provides a wealth of data from a range of different types of local and visiting town centre users.

Characteristics of customers surveyed

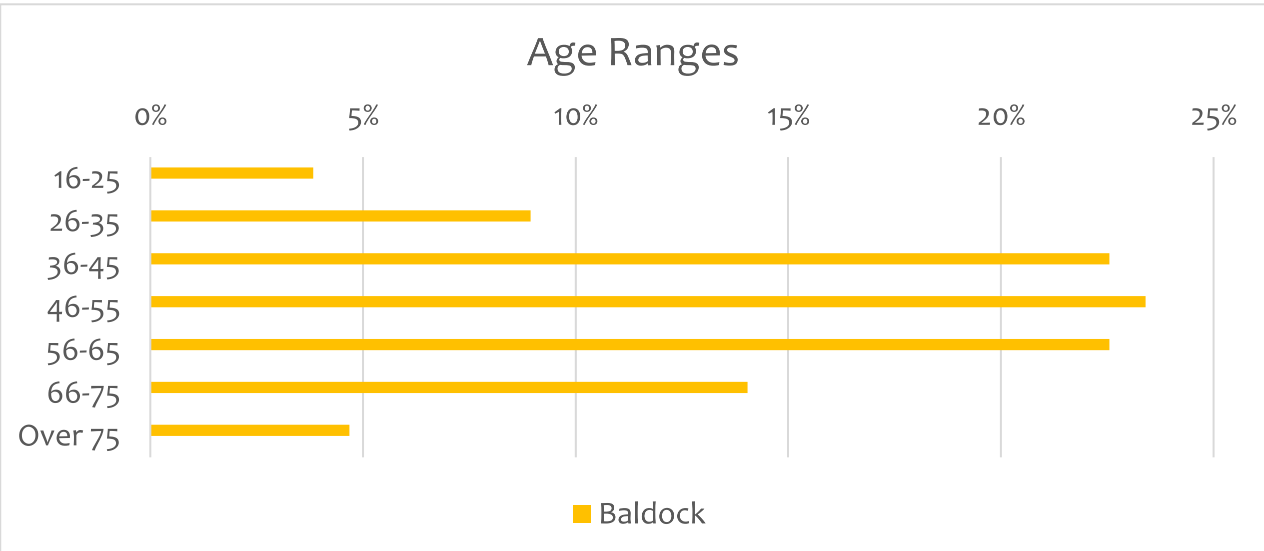
A sample of 241 Baldock town centre users were surveyed online through social media using the help of local community partners. There was a healthy participation amongst all age groups, with 46-55s providing the highest number of responses, yet only slightly over number of responses amongst 36-45s and 56-65s. Overall, the higher response rate amongst older age groups highlights that online survey work is efficient in capturing all demographic, not only the younger age groups.

It is evident from the responses that the majority of customers surveyed (47%) typically visit Baldock for everyday convenience shopping and everyday services such as food shopping or newsagents, these responses likely to include visits to Tesco. The second most popular purpose of a visit (37%) is for leisure and likely to include socialising, activities as well as visiting many pubs and cafes located in the town centre. Comments listed as 'other' mostly included a blend of all the included activities, exercising, use of outdoor spaces, attending Town Hall and commute. Only 3% of respondents said that use town centre to access services and 1% come here for comparison shopping, that may indicate low provision of services for such uses.



Customer background and nature of visit to town centre	**Baldock (number)**	**Baldock %**
Gender		
Male	72	30%
Female	159	67%
Other	0	0%
Prefer not to say	6	3%
Age		
16-25	9	4%
26-35	21	9%
36-45	53	23%
46-55	55	23%
56-65	53	23%
66-75	33	14%
Over 75	11	5%

What is the main purpose of a typical visit to the town centre?	**National Small Towns %**	**Baldock (number)**	**Baldock %**
Work	10%	11	5%
Convenience shopping	40%	113	47%
Comparison shopping	7%	2	1%
Access services	21%	7	3%
Leisure	16%	89	37%
Other[1]	7%	19	8%



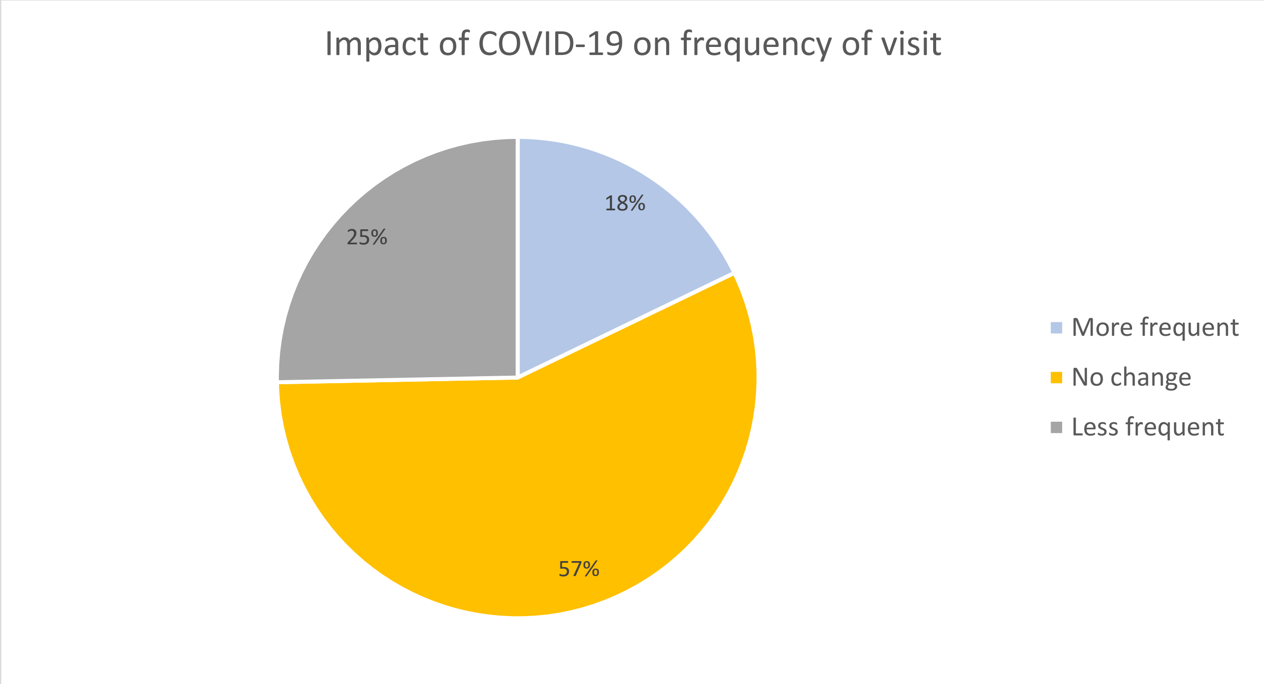
Analysis of the 241 responses received from town centre users reveals that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was varied, and only 25% of town centre customers have decreased their frequency of visits to Baldock due to the pandemic. For 57% of respondents, there was no change in the frequency of town centre visits and 18% of users said that they have been visiting the town centre more frequently.

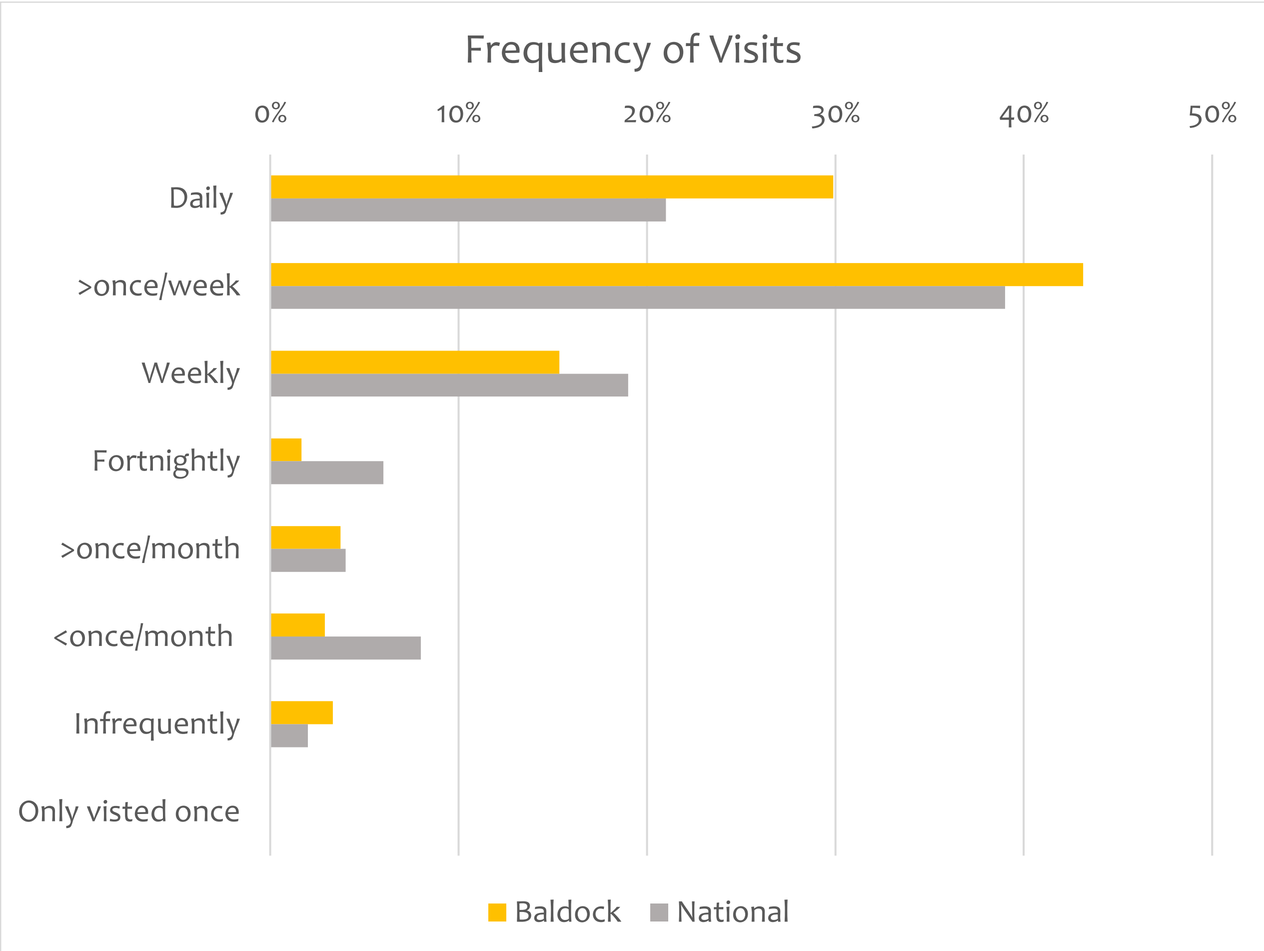
When asked how often users visit the town centre now, with the pandemic restrictions being lifted, 43% of users responded that are visiting more than once a week, 30% are in the town centre daily and 15% are visiting weekly. Only 2% of respondents visit the town fortnightly and 9% make their visits less frequently than that. The survey has captured no responses from the first visits category.

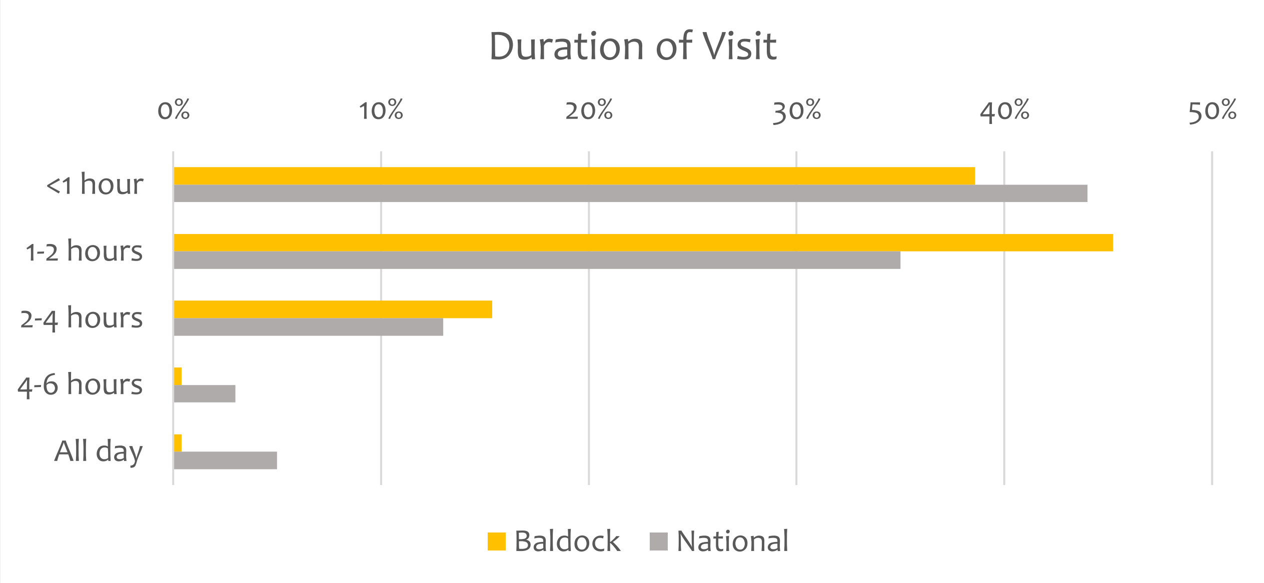
Answering the question on the duration of their visit, more than a half of users (56%) said that they are spending one to two hours in town, while another quarter (26%) of shoppers are in and out of the town centre within one hour. A further 16% dwell up to 4 hours, with only 1% spending more time there.

How do you think the frequency of your visits to the town centre will have changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic?	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
More frequent	43	18%
No change	137	57%
Less frequent	61	25%

Frequency and duration of visits to town centre	National Small Towns %	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
How often do you currently visit town centre?			
Daily	21%	72	30%
>once/week	39%	104	43%
Weekly	19%	37	15%
Fortnightly	6%	4	2%
>once/month	4%	9	4%
<once/month	8%	7	3%
First visit	2%	-	-
Infrequently	-	8	3%
How long do you normally stay during a visit to the town centre?			
<1 hour	44%	93	39%
1-2 hours	35%	109	45%
2-4 hours	13%	37	15%
4-6 hours	3%	1	<1%
All day	5%	1	<1%
Other	-	-	-


Impact of COVID-19 on frequency of visit
18%
57%
25%
More frequent
No change
Less frequent


Frequency of Visits
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
Daily
>once/week
Weekly
Fortnightly
>once/month
<once/month
Infrequently
Only visted once
Baldock
National



Customers' origins

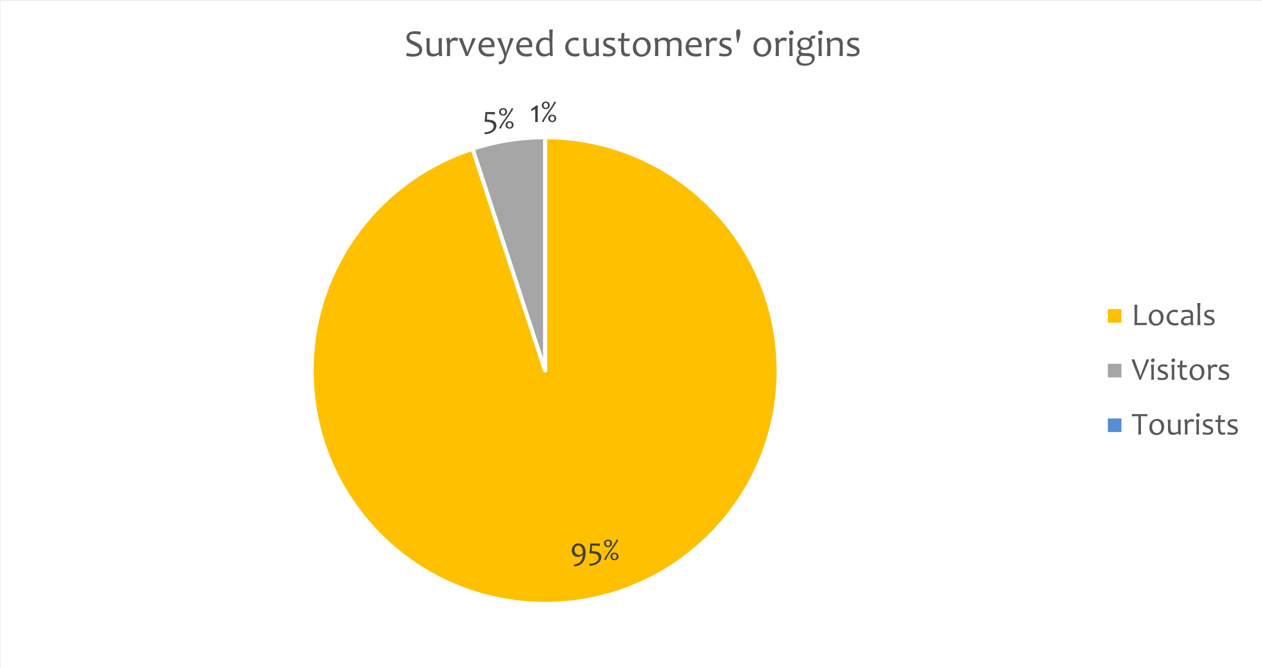
The customers' origin element of the town centre users' survey tracks the general area that town centre visitors originate from. The data can be used to target local marketing or promotional literature. It can also be used as evidence of the success of such campaigns by gauging the penetration into the population.

The postcodes gathered in the survey are split into 3 categories to be able to compare with other towns. The categories are:

- Locals: those who live within a Post Code covering the town
- Visitors: those who live within a Post Code less than a 30 minute drive away
- Tourists: those who live within a Post Code further than a 30 minute drive away

The figures for shoppers' origin for Baldock from this survey indicate that currently 95% of town centre users live locally and that 5% visit from within 30-minute drive distance. A significant proportion of these visitors live in nearby towns like Stevenage, Hitchin and Letchworth. Such a low proportion of visitors can be explained by the nature of online surveys that are likely to reach predominantly local residents. No responses across tourists identify that, even if attracting some visitors from further away, the town does not provide services that would attract external visitors. This implies that the wider promotion of the town centre can be improved. Despite the dominance of local users, some visitor presence suggests that it is necessary for both groups needs' to be accommodated by addressing the local issues and improving the shopping, hospitality, and leisure on offer of the town centre.

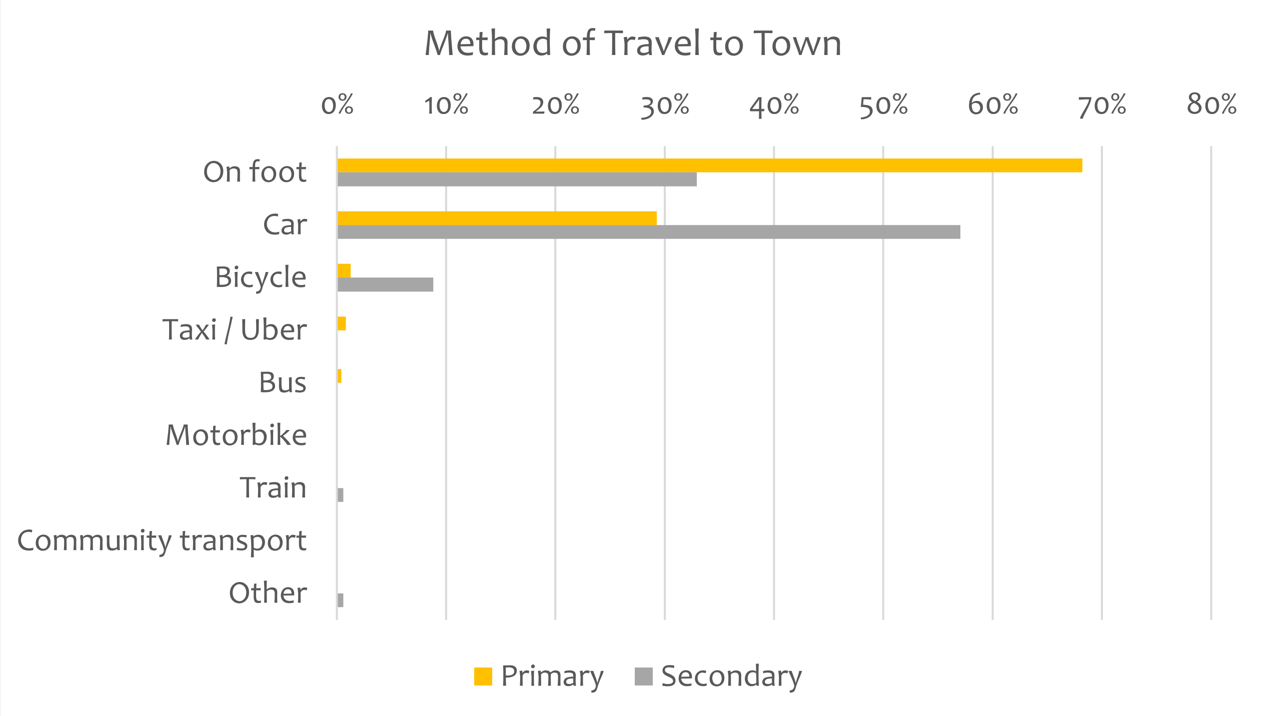
	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
Locals	189	95%
Visitors	10	5%
Tourists	0	0%



Travel to town

As part of the Baldock survey, town centre users were asked about their preferred primary and secondary methods of travelling into town.

	Primary (number)	Primary %	Secondary (number)	Secondary %
How do you currently travel into the town centre? (Please choose one main option and one secondary option that you might also sometimes use)				
On foot	163	68%	56	33%
Bicycle	3	1%	15	9%
Motorbike	-	-	-	-
Car	70	29%	97	57%
Bus	1	1%	-	-
Train	-	-	1	1%
Taxi / Uber	2	1%	-	-
Community transport	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	1	0.6%

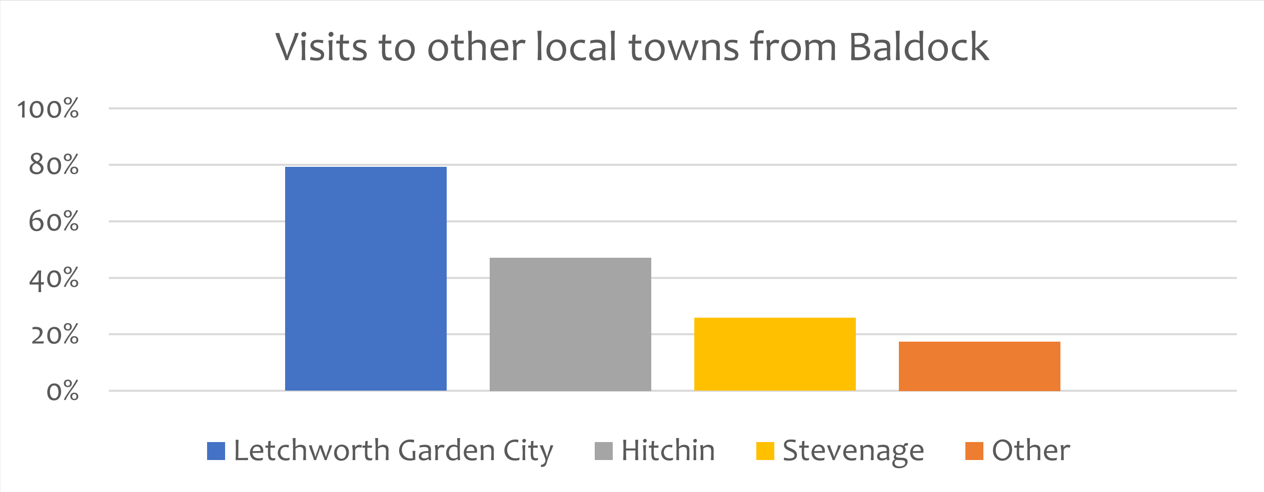


The responses on travel to town show that on foot (68%) and car (33%) are the preferred primary methods of travel to town. Only 1% of customers choose cycling as their primary travel method and 1% is travelling by bus. Travelling to town by car (57%) and on foot (29%) are also the most popular secondary choices, followed by a relatively high proportion who are cycling (9%) and train (1%). The fact that public transport has received very low response in both primary and secondary categories, and is contrasted with the high response in walking, suggests that Baldock town centre is well connected to nearby residential areas and provides its visitors with convenient walking routes. It also reflects the fact that users who participated in the survey are living locally. Responses across cycling and walking preferences indicate a good potential in active travel.

Surrounding towns

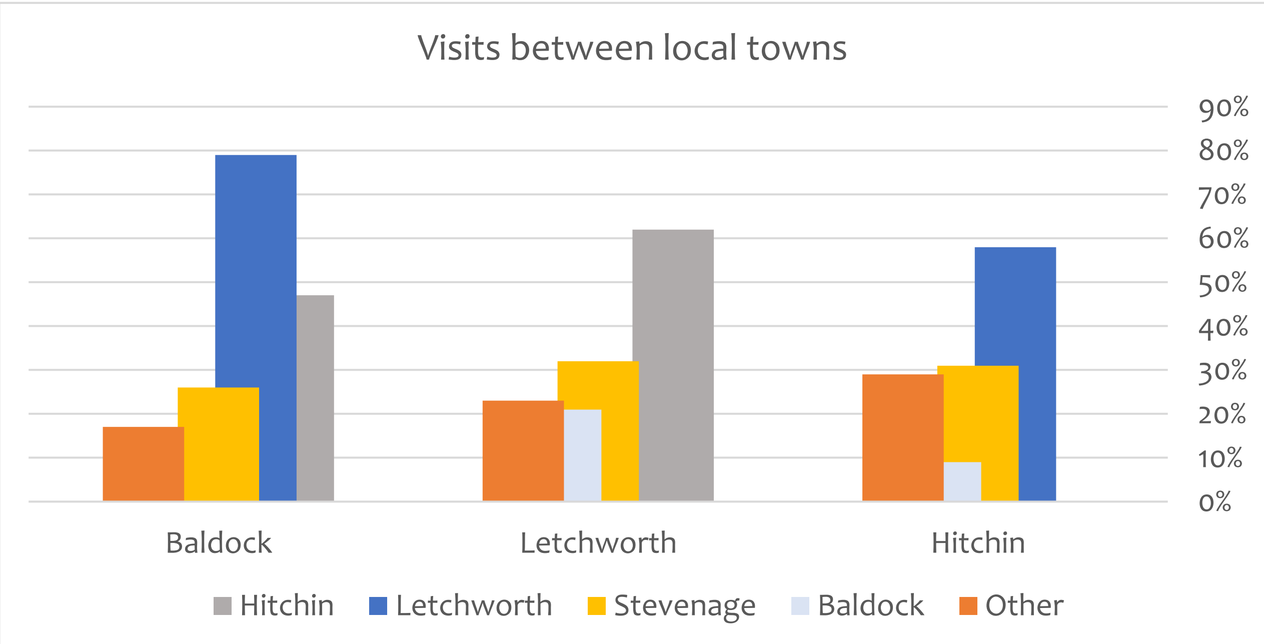
As part of the survey, users were asked which other local towns they visit regularly, making at least one trip per month. Letchworth Garden City appeared to be visited by 79% of respondents, Hitchin is visited by 47% and Stevenage by 26%. Within the category of Other (17%), Biggleswade and Welwyn Garden City appeared as the most popular options, with a significant number of respondents saying that are not visiting any of the local towns at all.

	Visitors (number)	Visitors %
Letchworth Garden City	187	79%
Hitchin	111	47%
Stevenage	61	26%
Other	41	17%



The same question was presented to users of Letchworth and Hitchin. Summary of this data shows how different customers move from town to town. Hitchin appeared to be the most popular destination across Letchworth users, however Baldock customers preferred Letchworth to Hitchin. Stevenage received similar number of responses across all three towns.

	Baldock	Letchworth	Hitchin
Letchworth Garden City	79%	-	58%
Hitchin	47%	62%	-
Baldock	-	21%	9%
Stevenage	26%	32%	31%
Other	17%	23%	29%



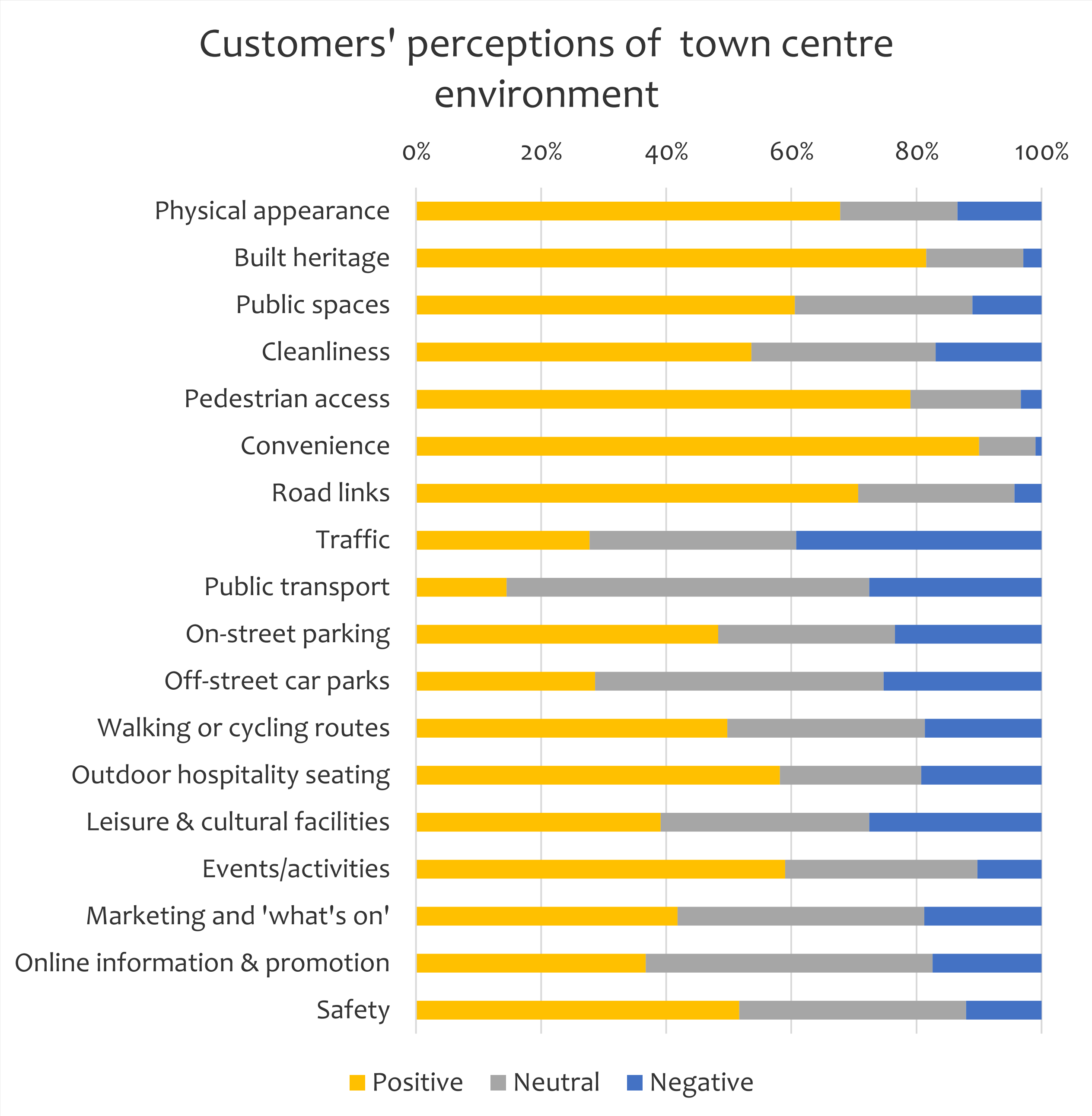
Customers' perceptions of the town centre

Positive or negative aspects of the town centre environment	National Small Towns %			Baldock %		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Physical appearance	51%	15%	34%	68%	19%	13%
Built heritage	-	-	-	82%	16%	3%
Public spaces	-	-	-	61%	28%	11%
Cleanliness	57%	24%	19%	54%	29%	17%
Pedestrian access	-	-	-	79%	18%	3%
Convenience	75%	19%	6%	90%	9%	1%
Road links	65%	16%	19%	71%	25%	4%
Traffic	40%	13%	47%	28%	33%	39%
Public transport	30%	38%	32%	14%	58%	28%
On-street parking	41%	16%	43%	48%	28%	23%
Off-street car parks				29%	46%	25%
Walking or cycling routes	71%	22%	7%	50%	32%	19%
Outdoor hospitality seating	-	-	-	58%	23%	19%
Leisure & cultural facilities	22%	48%	30%	39%	33%	28%
Events/activities	30%	42%	28%	59%	31%	10%
Marketing and 'what's on'	-	-	-	42%	39%	19%
Online info & promotion	-	-	-	37%	46%	17%
Safety	50%	41%	9%	52%	36%	12%

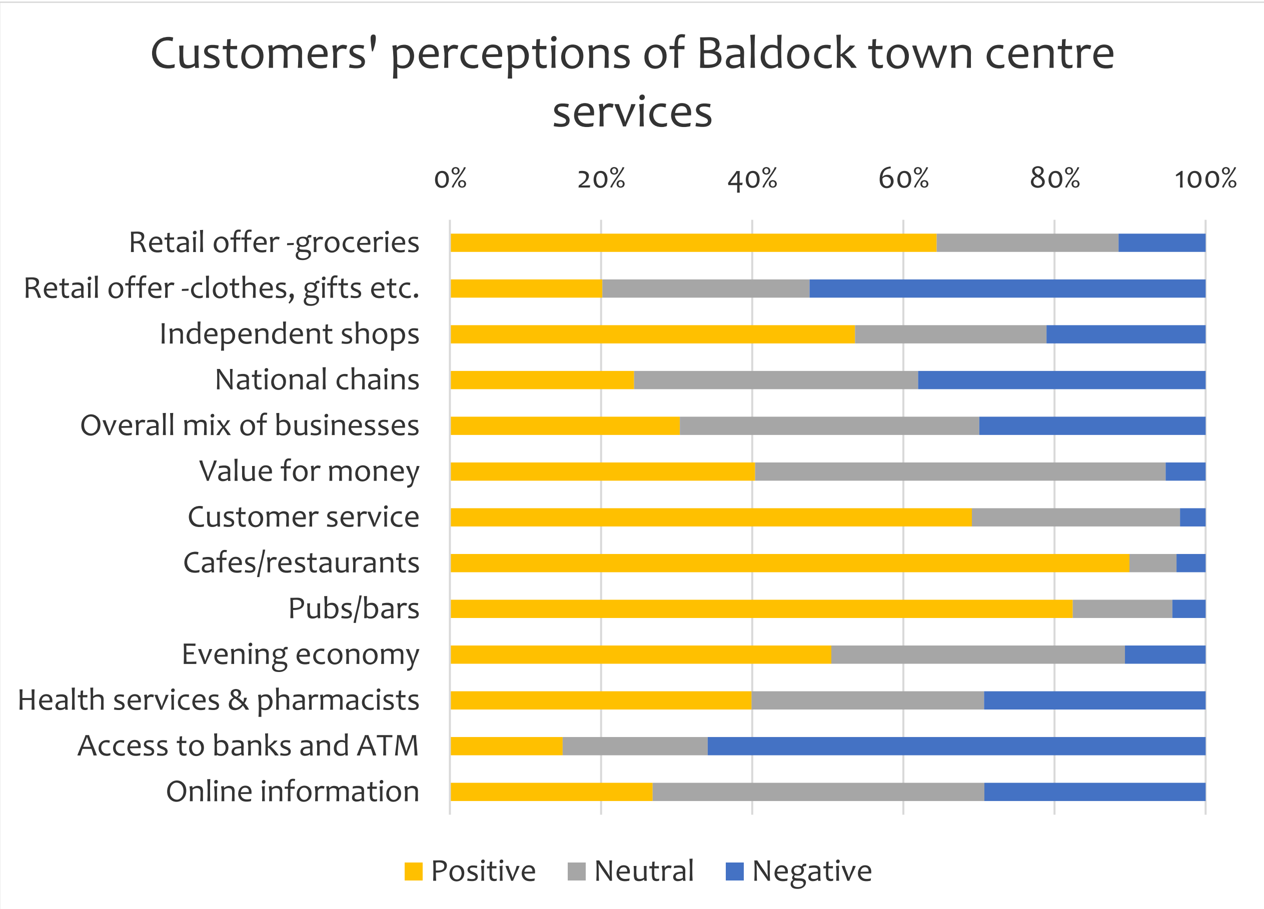
Customers were asked to indicate what are the positive, neutral, or negative aspects of the current condition of the town centre environment for a list of town centre qualities. Users were very positive about convenience (90%), built heritage (82%) and pedestrian access (79%). They were also positive perceptions about road links (71%), physical appearance (68%), public spaces (61%), events and activities (59%), outdoor hospitality seating (58%), cleanliness (54%) and safety (52%). These response indicate that Baldock is an easy and attractive place to move around.

The majority of town centre users felt indifferent about public transport (58%), off-street parking (46%) and online information and promotion (46%).

In terms of negative aspects of Baldock's town centre's environment, traffic (39%) received the higher number of responses, followed by public transport (28%) and leisure and cultural facilities (28%). Generally, responses appeared to be more positive than those expressed nationally, with negative rating covering some town centre aspects, yet with much smaller proportion.

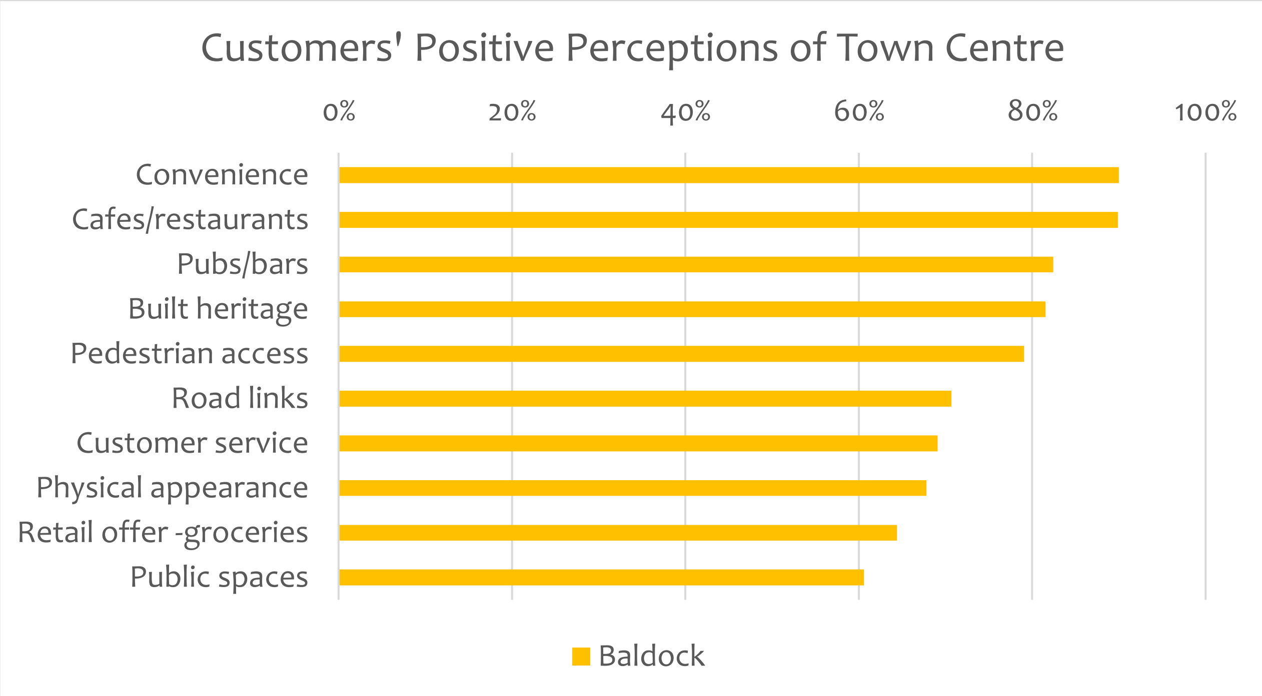


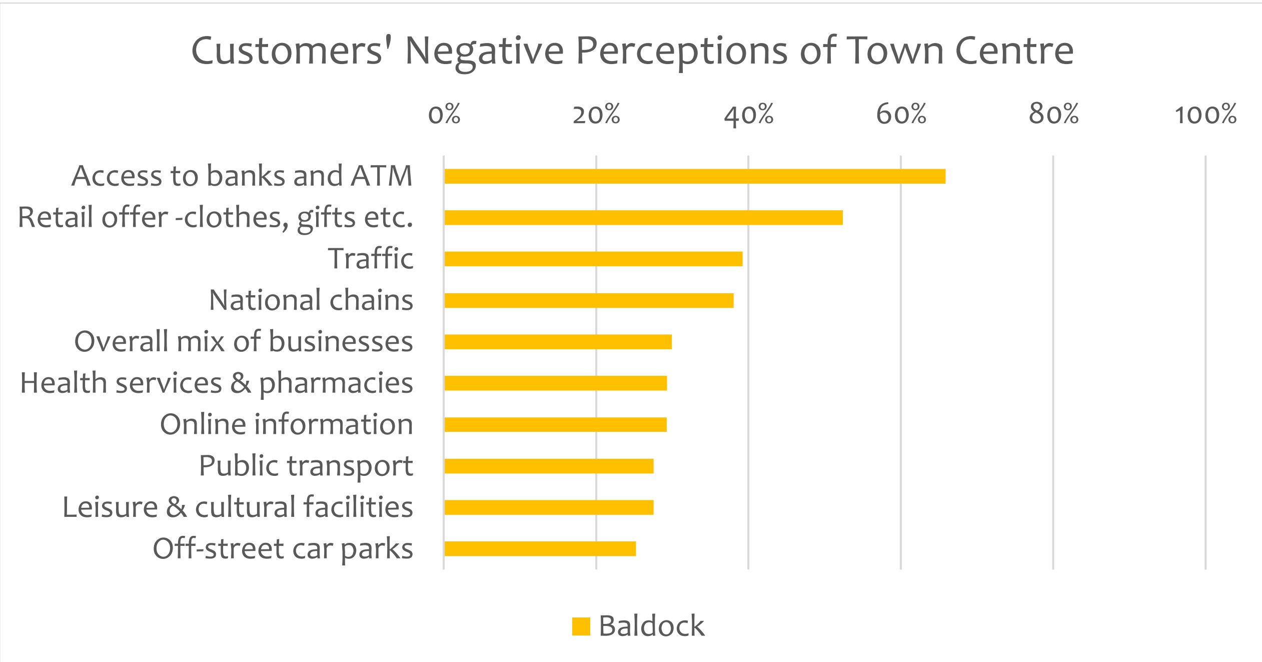
Positive or negative aspects of the town centre services	National Small Towns %			Baldock %		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Retail offer -groceries	63%	13%	24%	64%	24%	12%
Retail offer -clothes, gifts etc.	49%	14%	37%	20%	27%	52%
Independent shops	76%	10%	14%	54%	25%	21%
National chains	45%	22%	33%	24%	38%	38%
Overall mix of businesses	-	-	-	30%	40%	30%
Value for money	58%	21%	21%	40%	54%	5%
Customer service	53%	38%	9%	69%	28%	3%
Cafes/restaurants	57%	28%	15%	90%	6%	4%
Pubs/bars	40%	42%	18%	82%	13%	4%
Evening economy	-	-	-	50%	39%	11%
Health services & pharmacies	-	-	-	40%	31%	29%
Access to banks and ATM	-	-	-	15%	19%	66%
Online information	-	-	-	27%	44%	29%



Subsequently, customers were asked to indicate what are the positives and negatives of the current provision of town centre services and businesses. Baldock's provision of hospitality services received by far the most positive response - cafes and restaurants (90%) and pubs and bars (82%). Customers were also positive about customer service (69%), grocery retail offer (64%) and independent shops (54%). Customers were majorly indifferent towards value for money retail (54%).

Customers were the most negative about access to banks and ATM's (66%), comparison retail offer such as clothes and gifts (52%), provision of national chains (38%) and overall mix of businesses (30%).

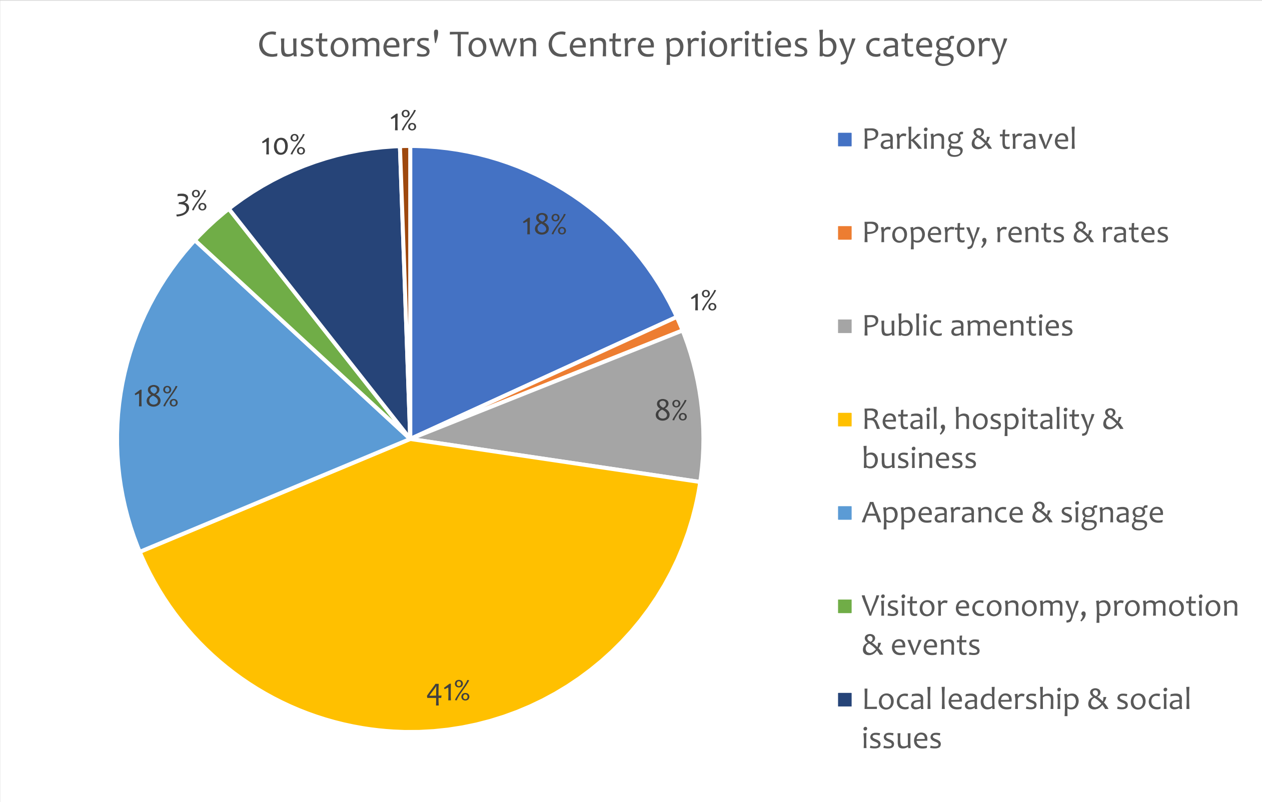




The charts above combine users' responses on the town centre's environment and service provision. They indicate that customers are the most positive about convenience, hospitality services and customer service, built heritage, pedestrian access and road links. The most negative aspects are the provision of ATM's and access to banks, fashion retail and national chain offer, overall mix of businesses, traffic and provision of health services and pharmacies. There is some dissatisfaction with the availability of online information, public transport, leisure and cultural facilities and off street parking.

Customer suggestions to improve the town centre

When customers of Baldock were asked what two things would improve the town centre, there was a high volume of comments generated. These were classified into broad themes and a more detailed breakdown of issues.



The theme receiving by far the most comments was the one related to the town's retail, hospitality & general business mix (148).

Within this theme, sentiments regarding the general lack of retail and business diversity (48) generated almost one third of all comments received within this topic. Other comments related to the same category indicated high priorities related to the hospitality mix (25) with sentiments regarding lack of diversity in restaurant, and bar provision. There were also a significant number of comments relating to the insufficient provision of banks and ATM's (24). Furthermore, there were requests for an increased number of independent shops (19), better selection of grocery outlets, fresh fruit and veg in particular (15), improved market facilities (11) and better fashion retail business mix (7).

Themes on appearance and signage (65) and parking and travel (65) gathered similar number of comments. The appearance and signage (71) theme covers comments related to the topics such as cleanliness (17) with most of the suggestions pointing out insufficient litter management, followed by sentiments about the necessity to repair pavements (12). Other comments highlighted a lack of a maintenance in building upkeep (9) in particular, the general appearance of the town (7), provision and upkeep of greenspace (6), graffiti removal (6), increase of outdoor hospitality seating (6) and accessibility such as graduated slopes (2). When read alongside earlier positive perceptions about the town centre environment, this would suggest high local expectations for maintaining the town's everyday appearance.

For parking and travel, the majority of comments expressed wished for a better parking provision, such as extended times, easier payment systems, extended free stay (23) and traffic (21) management, including traffic reduction and speed restrictions. Further, comments were made on better provision of public transport (8), improved cycling facilities such as cycling lanes (8) and improved conditions for pedestrian safety (5).

The local leadership and social issues theme (36) covers sentiments regarding improved support for local businesses (9), concerns about safety and a lack of police presence (9), better approaches to local planning and developments (8) and better management of homelessness around the Templar (7).

Within public amenities theme (30), sentiments were related improvements to public outdoor seating (16), better provision of family and leisure activities (7), an increased number of public toilets (5) and better community facilities (2).

Visitor economy, promotion and events theme (9) received comments in relation to better provision of cultural events (4), better options for evening activities (4) and improved promotion of the town (1).

Finally, property, rents & rates theme that received only two comments, suggest rate reduction for local businesses (2).

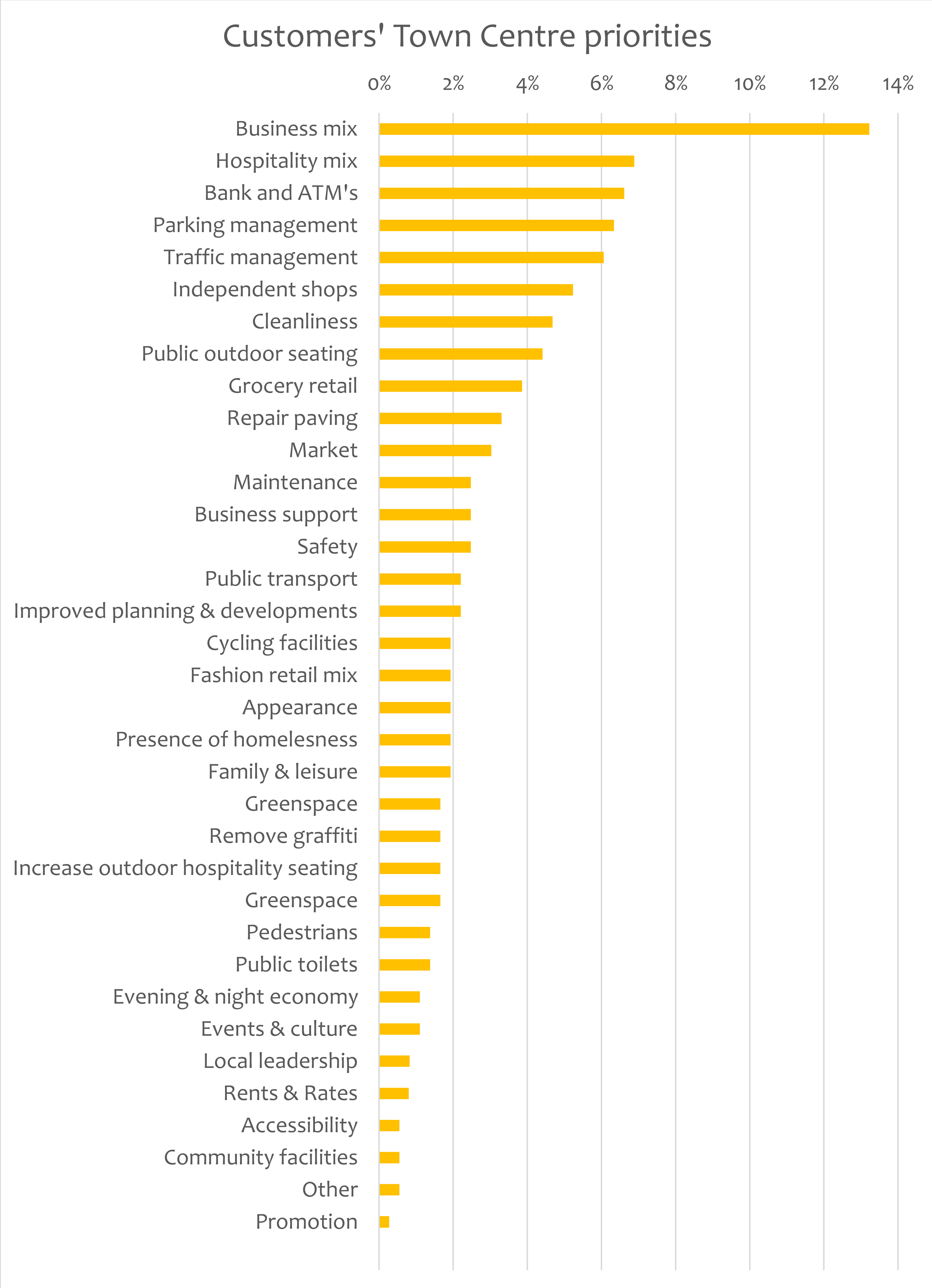
Below is a selection of five comments for issues that received 10 or more amongst over 350 responses received. The figures in brackets are a reminder of the total number of comments received for each issue.

Business diversity (48)

- Greater variety of retail shops and less empty, run-down hotels and buildings
- More varied shops currently too many hair salons and Indian restaurants
- More retail places to shop
- Fitness clothing/equipment shop and gym
- Encourage daytime shopping

Hospitality mix (25)

- More restaurants with various cuisines
- Wider variety of restaurants and food types
- More takeaway options, e.g. Thai food


Customers' Town Centre priorities
0%
2%
4%
6%
8%
10%
12%
14%
Business mix
Hospitality mix
Bank and ATM's
Parking management
Traffic management
Independent shops
Cleanliness
Public outdoor seating
Grocery retail
Repair paving
Market
Maintenance
Business support
Safety
Public transport
Improved planning & developments
Cycling facilities
Fashion retail mix
Appearance
Presence of homelessness
Family & leisure
Greenspace
Remove graffiti
Increase outdoor hospitality seating
Greenspace
Pedestrians
Public toilets
Evening & night economy
Events & culture
Local leadership
Rents & Rates
Accessibility
Community facilities
Other
Promotion

Categories of Issue	Baldock Responses (no.)	Baldock Responses (%)
Retail, hospitality & business	**148**	**42%**
Business diversity	48	13.6%
Hospitality mix	25	7.1%
Bank and ATM's	24	6.8%
Independent shops	18	5.1%
Grocery retail	15	4.3%
Market	11	3.1%
Fashion retail mix	7	2.0%
Appearance & signage	**65**	**18.5%**
Cleanliness	17	4.8%
Repair paving	12	3.4%
Maintenance	9	2.6%
Appearance	7	2.0%
Greenspace	6	1.7%
Remove graffiti	6	1.7%
Increase outdoor hospitality seating	6	1.7%
Accessibility	2	0.6%
Parking and travel	**65**	**18.5%**
Parking management	23	6.5%
Traffic management	21	5.9%
Public transport	8	2.3%
Cycling facilities	8	2.2%
Pedestrians	5	1.4%
Local leadership and social issues	**31**	**10.1%**
Business support	9	2.6%
Safety	9	2.6%
Improved planning & developments	8	2.3%
Presence of homelessness	7	2.0%
Local leadership	3	0.8%
Public amenities	**30**	**8.4%**
Public outdoor seating	16	4.5%
Improved planning & developments	7	2.0%
Public toilets	5	1.4%
Community facilities	2	0.6%
Visitor economy, promotion & events	**9**	**2.5%**
Events & culture	4	1.1%
Evening & night economy	4	1.1%
Promotion	1	0.3%
Property, Rents & Rates	**2**	**0.8%**
Rents & rates	2	0.8%
Other	**2**	**0.6%**
Total	**357**	

- An outstanding coffee shops
- Smart lunch venue

Bank and ATM's (24)

- Bank or cash machine
- We need Banks
- Cash points/bank
- BANK - why ever did they go?
- Better banking facilities

Parking management (23)

- More parking for longer times, every parking change has made things worse and constant wardens
- Make parking easier
- Help businesses with less parking restrictions
- Better parking (other than Tesco)
- Longer parking i.e. 3 hours to allow time to shop and visit cafes.

Traffic management (21)

- 20 mph speed limit
- Less loud/modified cars
- Reduce traffic, especially large vehicles from using the town as a cut through
- Space increased by use of bypass (paved and grassed) hardly ever used
- Less traffic

Independent shops (18)

- More independent shops
- Better variety of independent shopping
- Encourage more independent shops
- More independent non-food shops
- More shops, not necessarily chains or high street but more affordable boutiques independent shops

Cleanliness (17)

- Keep the paths and ways through clear of chairs outside cafes
- Needs a clean-up and litter pick
- Street cleanliness

- Tidy Templar's
- Empty bins quicker/remove broken glass

Public outdoor seating (16)

- More outdoor seating - was lovely with tables and chairs on the green during covid
- Refurb the street furniture, which has not received any maintenance since installation on 2009
- Street furniture needs repainting/staining
- More permanent seating in the middle of town
- More benches and replace existing ones

Grocery retail (15)

- Greengrocer
- Grocery shop independent
- Fruit and veg shop
- Encourage more retail trades, greengrocers, delicatessens, etc
- Organic Green Grocer

Repair paving (12)

- Make sure the roads and pavements are clean and looked after properly, no strips of tarmac on pavements.
- Upkeep of pavement type after replaced with tarmac
- Reinstating the pavement surfaces
- Pavements - they looked nice but have been dug up
- Cleaning & replacing broken paving

Market (11)

- Saturday Market
- Revitalise weekly market
- Better market
- A farmers/ foodie market or similar
- A better and bigger market (maybe once a month, let the stall holders pitch for free to encourage them to come)

What word would you use to sum-up the town centre?

The word cloud below gives an indication of the most popular words used by town centre users to sum-up Baldock.

Such a word cloud, whilst only indicative, is useful in understanding how the town centre is perceived by current users who are familiar with it. It gives a visual representation of sentiments and can be helpful in determining how the town can be honestly promoted to potential new users in a way that creates achievable expectations.

Many of the most prominent words used for Baldock are positive, such as good, friendly, nice, historic, charming and community. This indicates users' appreciation of the existing town qualities, appearance and its historic and character aspects. There are some negative sentiments such as lacking, tired, dull, forgotten, declined and untidy.

This word cloud presents a picture where users of Baldock town centre are generally satisfied with the appearance and image of the town, however, are unhappy with present offer and maintenance. It will be informative to see how perceptions change as work is undertaken to revitalize Baldock.

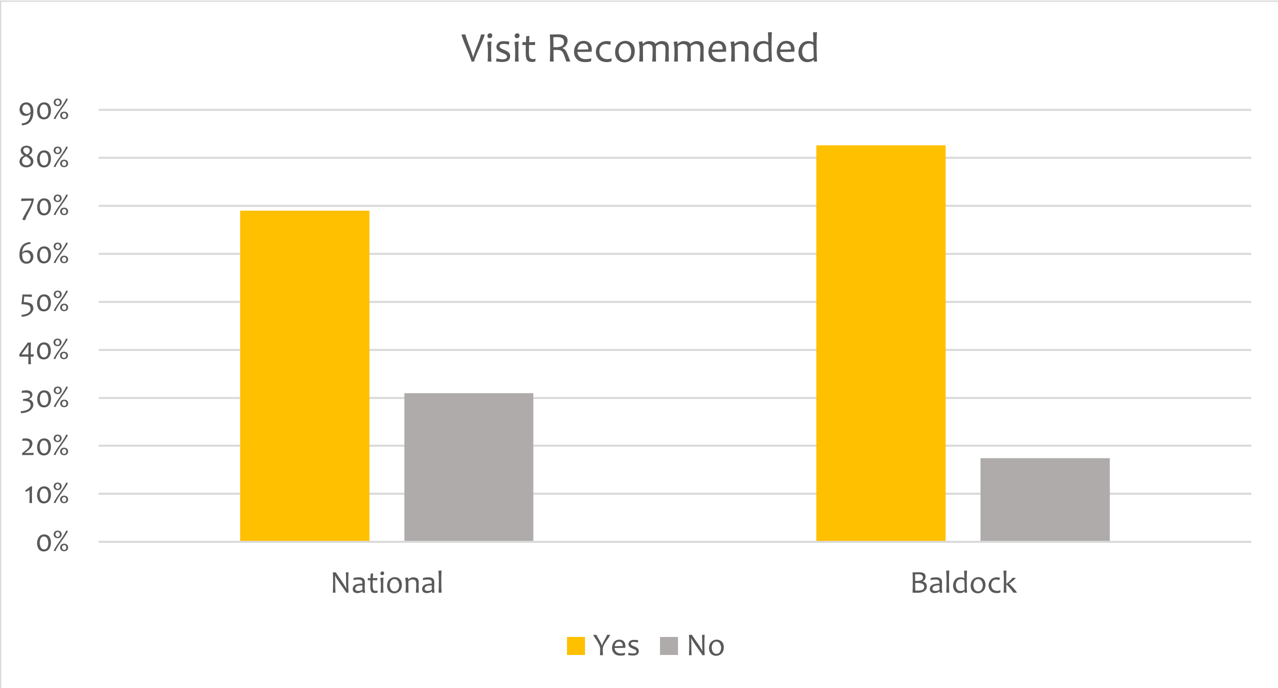
How has your experience of the town centre changed?

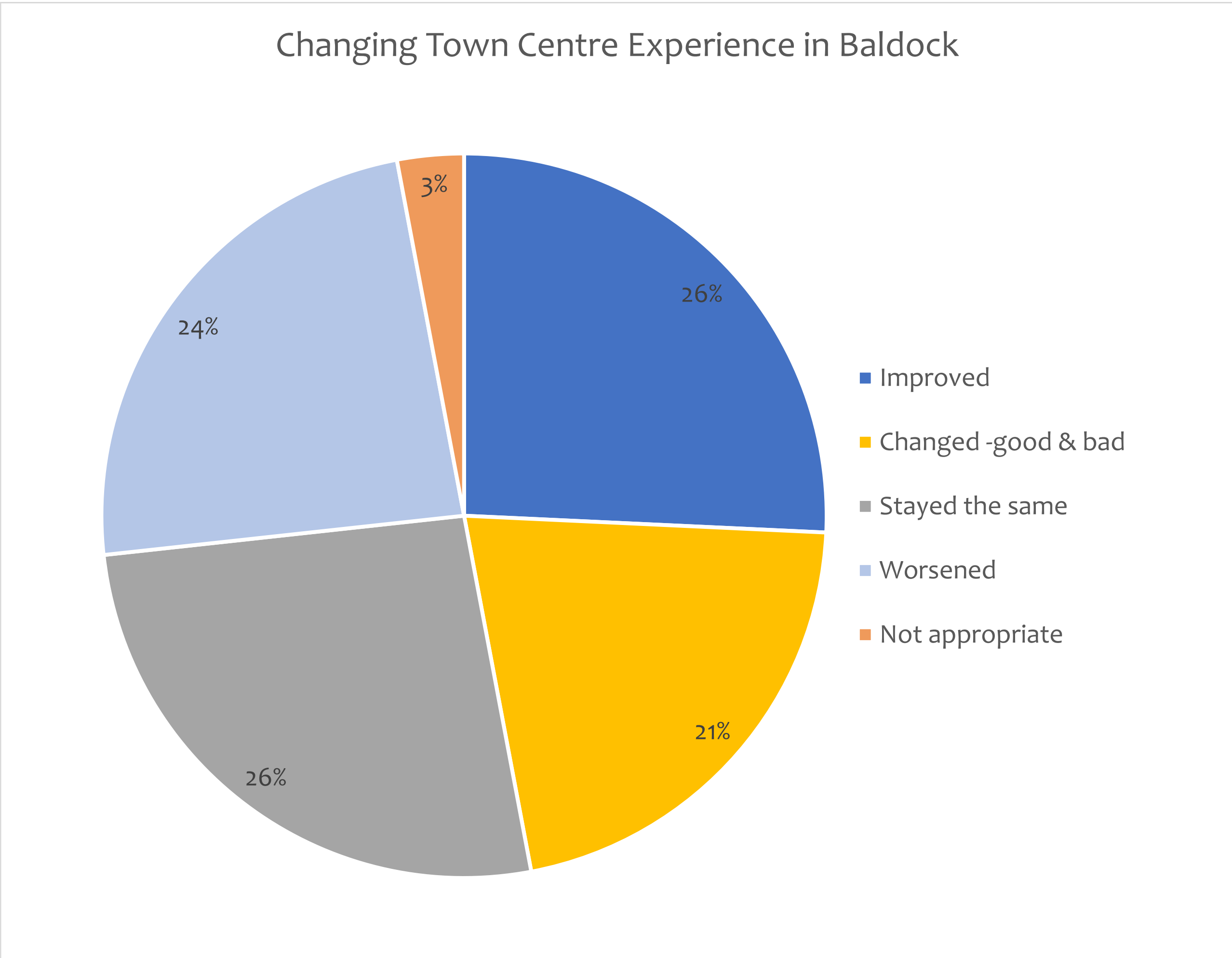
When asked how their experience of Baldock town centre had changed in recent years, 26% of town users said it had improved and a further 21% stated that it had changed in a mixture of good and bad ways. This was followed by 26% saying that the experience has remained the same. While 24% of respondents said that their experience had worsened, this is a slightly smaller proportion than that of the national response. This indicates that there are opportunities and space for improvement to support the already generally positive opinions about the town.

Recommending a town centre visit

When users were asked if they would recommend a visit to Baldock town centre, 166 out of 201 of users said yes, which indicates that more than four fifths (83%) of users are indicating the town centre as a valuable experience for external visitors. Such a positive response is higher than the one expressed nationally, showing that the town centre is appreciated by local users.

	National Small Towns %	Baldock (number)	Baldock %
How has your experience of the town centre changed in recent years?			
Improved	17%	52	26%
Changed -good & bad	23%	43	21%
Stayed the same	24%	53	26%
Worsened	29%	48	24%
Not appropriate	7%	6	3%
Would you recommend a visit to the town centre?			
Yes	69%	166	83%
No	31%	35	17%


Visit Recommended
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
National
Baldock
Yes
No


Changing Town Centre Experience in Baldock
3%
26%
24%
21%
26%
Improved
Changed -good & bad
Stayed the same
Worsened
Not appropriate

KPI 8: Digital Development

As part of this baseline survey of the town centre, an initial 'digital diagnosis' was undertaken to understand development challenges and priorities.

The diagnostic approach taken draws on the findings of Digital High Street 2020 Report and Digital High Street Index. This gives an appropriate framework for a broad perspective and initially provides indicative and comparable information to help determine more in-depth research needs.

Digital Business Skills and Infrastructure

This section will be updated when the business confidence survey responses get collected. As an adjunct to the business survey, preliminary questions were asked using a simple scoring system, in order to assess the current level of digital take-up and the priority given to its different aspects:

What priority does your business currently give to:

a. Creation and management of business web site
b. Regular use of social media to promote business and engage with customers, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
c. Generation and provision of on-line sales
d. Collection and analysis of customer data to help target marketing

A second question was asked about the priority for investment in digital infrastructure:

How important are the following to the future operation of your business?

a. Fast broadband connection
b. Digital phone network coverage
c. Town centre Wi-Fi coverage

Customers' Digital Engagement

In the town centre users' survey, a corresponding set of questions was asked to give an indicative understanding of the level of digital uptake by customers and how they have engaged digitally as part of their visit and their strength of feeling around infrastructure provision:

As part of your visits to the town, how useful do you find:

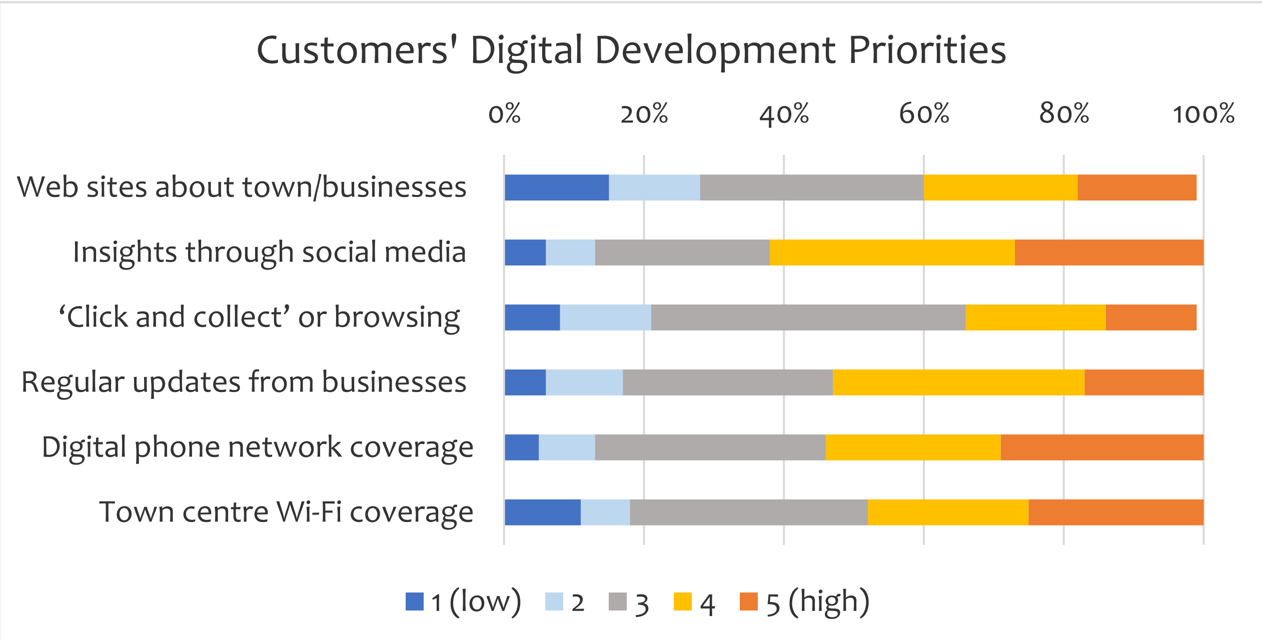
a. Web sites about the town or businesses to help plan your visit in advance
b. Insights through social media about businesses, products, places to eat, things to do
c. 'Click and collect' or the ability to browse products as part of your visit
d. Updates from businesses about special offers, things to-do etc.
e. Digital phone network coverage
f. Town centre Wi-Fi coverage

Analysis

Town centre users

The tables and charts below give the corresponding priorities for town centre users surveys for the use of businesses' digital services and the convenience of town-wide digital infrastructure.

Users' digital priorities	No. of responses	1	2	3	4	5	Baldock average	National average
Web sites about town/businesses	210	15%	13%	32%	22%	17%	3.14	3.75
Insights through social media	210	6%	7%	25%	35%	27%	3.7	3.89
'Click and collect' or browsing	210	8%	13%	45%	20%	13%	3.19	3.09
Regular updates from businesses	208	6%	11%	30%	36%	17%	3.48	2.98
Digital phone network coverage	208	5%	8%	33%	25%	29%	3.65	3.59
Town centre Wi-Fi coverage	208	11%	7%	34%	23%	25%	3.44	3.11



Use of social media and insights about businesses, products, places to eat, things to do (62%) received the highest response as priority or high priority amongst digital development options for the town centre's customers. This is followed by the digital phone network coverage (54%) and priorities related to regular updates from businesses about special offers and things to do (53%) and town centre Wi-Fi provision (48%). Provision of 'click and collect' services received lowest amount of priority and high priority in total (33%).

Local Leadership: Creating a Forward Framework

For a partnership to evolve in its effectiveness, it is important to plan for constant progress through regular review and writing things down! This can be achieved by annually reviewing the checklist and updating a 'Forward Framework' comprising an over-arching strategy and two component plans:

Business planning: Partnerships & People

Revitalising a town centre is a complex, long-term venture and experience shows that it requires resources and leadership that should not be left to chance.

The form of an organisation refers to its set-up, structure, governance, partnerships and legal status. The form of a partnership should follow its function. Key determinants of this organisational form to consider include: the balance sought between being a consultative partner or can-do delivery body; available financial support and the need for independent fund raising; and close alignment with council policy verses the capacity to reach-out, engage with and empower sectors of the community.

There are many variations of the organisational models available for leading town centre revitalisation. Different options for organisational form include: council-led partnerships which coordinate activity and often inform policy; business-led town teams which can be very "can-do" and have a marketing focus; neighbourhood planning groups which can help shape future growth and its impact on town centre; development trusts which are very adept in managing community property; and BIDs which combine financial independence and business leadership. The appropriate organisational form is also likely to evolve over time and two organisations can work side-by-side with clearly defined roles.

An organisational business plan covering the foundations, form, folk and organisational finances will determine whether there is an effective and sustainable partnership able to deliver improvements. This organisational plan should define the inter-relationship and respective roles of partners such as the local authority, town council, business partners, Chamber of Commerce or a BID.

Overleaf is a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to partnership development which has been taken from a case study of creating talented town teams prepared by the People & Places Partnership for the LGA.

Action planning: A Timetable for Change

A town centre action plan is necessary to determine and define objectives, projects, responsibilities, budgets, timescales, outcomes and impact measures as the building blocks of the coordinated delivery of improvements on the ground. The annual review of such an action plan should begin and end with a review of available evidence and the monitoring of impacts and changes.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Approaches to Partnership Development

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
Council-led partnership	Close connection to other council departments; budget provided	Vulnerable to council budgetary pressures; can be difficult to engage with community & businesses
Council-coordinated partnership	Good connections to council departments; brings stakeholders together if clear purpose and/or delegated budget	Vulnerable to changing priorities; can create imbalance between action & strategic influence if role unclear
Town centre manager & forum	Partly arms-length though probable budget contribution from council	Vulnerable to cuts; important to get balance between strategic influence and engaging with business & community
Town council hosted partnership	Close local links; arms-length though conduit between authorities; modest budget need and ability to access some external funds	The 'can do' attitude can be stifled if too formal; can be difficult to fully engage with businesses without suitable sub-group or link to a Chamber of Trade, for example
Business-led town team	Business-like approach & understanding of economic issues and collective marketing	No assured funding stream; can have narrow business focus & lack strategic influence
Neighbourhood Plan group	Considers wider economic and community planning; exerts long-term influence	Long-term and strategic process; can lack tangible, short-term impacts or town centre focus
Development trust	Capital asset base generates revenue income; strong community focus	Requires available property and large capital investment; can have narrow focus & lack strategic influence
Business Improvement District	Income stream from rates levy; strong business focus and contacts	Can have narrow business focus & lack strategic influence if not part of wider strategy alongside council
Public-private partnership	Combine council, commercial expertise and investment with strong focus to deliver key sites	Likely to have a narrow, site-based focus and limited life though should sit within wider strategy

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An organisational business plan covering the foundations, form, folk and organisational finances will determine whether there is an effective and sustainable partnership able to deliver improvements. This organisational plan should define the inter-relationship and respective roles of partners such as the local authority, town council, business partners, Chamber of Commerce or a BID. At the heart of any such a partnership should be a core group of committed representatives able to take responsibility for coordination and communication as key activities that will drive success.

Overleaf is a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to partnership development which has been taken from a case study of creating talented town teams prepared by the People & Places Partnership for the LGA.

There is no clearly defined partnerships or active business support groups in Baldock therefore establishing communication with local business representatives has to be considered as a first step as well as partnership between Baldock Events Forum and North Hertfordshire council.

Action planning: A Timetable for Change

A town centre action plan is necessary to determine and define objectives, projects, responsibilities, budgets, timescales, outcomes and impact measures as the building blocks of the coordinated delivery of improvements on the ground. The annual review of such an action plan should begin and end with a review of available evidence and the monitoring of impacts and changes.

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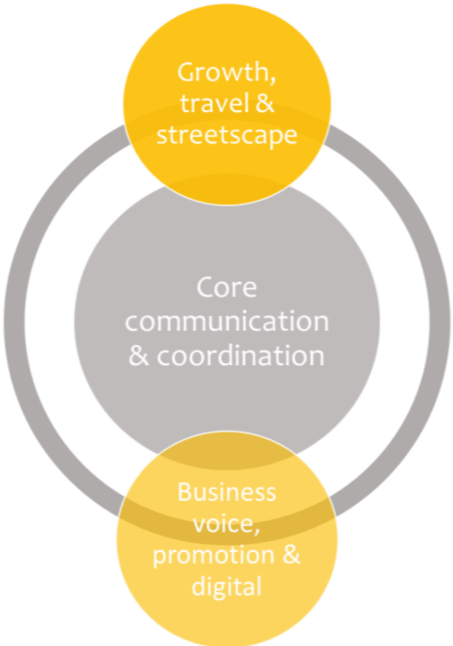
Getting organised: Local and district level governance

Baldock's Recovery Themes

This review of existing strategy, town centre metrics and stakeholder perceptions, points to potential themes for the 'how' and the 'what' of revitalising Baldock town centre. These themes could translate into working groups that bring relevant stakeholder organisations together and have a small coordinating group at the core.



THEME 1: Growth, travel and streetscape

This theme could reflect on already achieved town centre transformations as well potential, long-term, strategic issues facing Baldock town centre including large scale housing development to the north and east of the town centre, new pedestrian and cycling links, delivery of Letchworth/Baldock transport strategy, and a recommended parking review. It can cover the following project areas:

- Planning & property
- Parking, travel & access
- Streetscape & public realm

THEME 2: Business voice, place promotion and digital development to boost appeal

A second potential theme for an integrated approach to town centre revitalisation in Baldock, could include support for improved business engagement, marketing and promotion of Baldock drawing on recognised qualities, and improving its digital footprint. It can cover the following project areas:

- Business support
- Place branding & marketing
- Digital technology & data

THEME 3: Partnership development driven by effective communication and coordination

An overarching third theme focuses on how town centre recovery and revitalisation is delivered through partnership development between key stakeholders. The challenge in Baldock is that there is currently limited local organisational capacity to build on. This theme can cover:

- Communications & engagement
- Coordination & monitoring

Agreeing a Forward Framework

The table below provides a template for agreeing a town centre forward framework for Baldock using the checklist of issues from the LGA Handbook on revitalising town centres and the evidence identified through the survey work. The table can be used as a basis for developing a detailed delivery plan by partners with budgets, responsibilities, defined outcomes and measurable indicators of success.

Issue & potential project/initiative	Outcome sought (years 2 & 5)	Timetable
THEME 1: PLANNING, TRAVEL & STREETSCAPE		
Planning & property: Are there robust town-centre-first policies, master-planning, priorities within and between towns and has work been coordinated with town centre businesses and landlords?		
Addressing the planning and property theme in Baldock town centre will involve maintaining and improving current business mix and planning for the future increase in number of town centre users as new housing is developed. The North Herts Local Plan aims to promote, protect and enhance the provision of shops, financial and professional services, café or restaurants, pubs or and hospitality businesses in the District's town centres. The main planning tool proposed to achieve this is the protection of primary and secondary retail frontages within the town centre. The Local Plan recognises the proportionally small size of the town and lack of vacant units that restrict any proposals for the expansion of towns retail functions. The main site to accommodate projected growth is the Tesco superstore, however there are no defined plans in place. The most recent Baldock town centre strategy was adopted in 2006. Themes that were addressed are built environment; public spaces; the street scene; enhancement opportunities; land use activities; community facilities; transport and access; community safety; promotion and marketing. There was a particular focus on policies for enhancement of the streetscape, traffic, and pedestrian access. Since the strategy's publication, many of the highlighted issues were addressed through construction of the Baldock A505 bypass the subsequent town centre transformation completed in 2009. When considering the scope for the updated town centre strategy, it will be important to review these themes based on an understanding of the impacts of the town centre upgrades that have taken place and consideration of any necessary additions. Baldock is anticipating a significant housing expansion including the proposal for a large-scale development to the north and east of the town centre. The development aims to deliver new 3,300 homes with supporting infrastructure, schools, a country park, and an advanced network of cycling and walking routes to the town centre and the railway station. Delivery of this scheme could significantly affect the town centre and its businesses. The Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan supports this by setting-out how the proposed large-scale development to the north of Baldock could create physical connections between old and new parts of the town, as well as efforts to promote community activities that can bring existing and new residents together.		

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Analysis of the current business mix in Baldock indicated that current the retail offer focuses on the provision of comparison retail such as items for personal care, home and luxury. While the proportion of convenience retail businesses is low, taking up only 5% of the total business mix, that includes the Tesco Extra supermarket that can cater for much of local residents' convenience shopping needs and can attract shoppers from the surrounding area. The majority of customers surveyed (47%) typically visit Baldock for everyday convenience shopping and everyday services such as food shopping or newsagents, of which significant proportion will centre on Tescos. The second most popular purpose of a visit (37%) is for leisure and is likely to include socialising by visiting many pubs and cafes located in the town centre

Retail, hospitality and general business mix also appeared as a main future priority (42%) across Baldock's customers. Comments were expressed about a lack of business diversity (14%), calls for more hospitality (7%), independent shops (5%) and grocery and market retail (4%). A further 7% of customers highlighted lack of banking facilities as a separate issue.

Such comments were also reflected in customers positive and negative perceptions of the town centre. Aspects that received by far the most positive response was Baldock's provision of hospitality services - cafes and restaurants (90%) and pubs and bars (82%). Customers were also positive about customer service (69%), the grocery retail offer (64%) and independent shops (54%). Customers were most negative about access to banks and ATM's (66%), the comparison retail offer such as clothes and gifts (52%), presence of national chains (38%) and the overall mix of businesses (30%).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Town Centre Planning and Development Strategy incorporating use class review: A review should be undertaken of the current priorities and themes considering recent improvements to the town centre and addressing the expected consequences of the future housing development project. The strategy could also add policies on business support and digital development and strengthen policies for sustainable travel routes.</td><td rowspan="2">Renewed vision and priorities leading to balance of business uses and function to best serve resident and visitor needs.

Positive business and customer perceptions in biennial resurvey.

Improved appeal demonstrated by increased footfall and improved perceptions in biennial resurvey</td><td>2022-23</td></tr>
<tr><td>Assessment of the link between town centre and Tesco: Further work should be undertaken into the prospect for retail growth on the Tesco site along with analysis of the current foot-flow and usage of the route between the supermarket and the town centre to assess need for improvements in legibility and signage.</td><td>2022-23</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Parking, travel & access: Is an integrated and customer-focused parking, travel, and access strategy in place?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Survey results indicate that a high proportion of movement by regular users into the town centre is performed on foot (68%), followed by car (29%). There is a significant proportion of town centre users that use cycling as a secondary option (9%), suggesting a good potential to implement active travel plans further.

The new housing development scheme to the north of the town centre presents a great opportunity to deliver better provision of cycling facilities connecting new and existing homes to the town centre by extending cycling routes within the town. The Letchworth/Baldock transport strategy</td></tr>
</table>

identifies such opportunities through links to a central sustainable corridor encompassing Baldock town centre and the Station as a crucial, interchange for locals and visitors. When customers were asked to indicate their perceptions of the current condition of the town centre environment, traffic (39%) received the highest number of negative responses, followed by public transport (28%). This was also reflected in stated priorities for improving the town centre in future, where parking and travel issues accounted for the main theme of comments received. Within this, sub-themes included a desire for better parking provision, such as extended duration, easier payment systems, and longer free-stays (7%), and traffic management (6%), including traffic reduction and speed restrictions. A moderate number of further comments were made for a priority to the provision of public transport (2%), improved cycling facilities such as cycling lanes (2%) and improved conditions for pedestrian safety (1%). The initial data collected for 2 private car parks and 1 public car park serving Baldock town centre shows there are a total of 849 spaces. Most of the car park spaces are available on a short-stay basis (86). There are additional on-street parking spaces.		
Evolution and engagement on active travel strategy: Clarify and engage the local community in the development and delivery of town centre elements of a transport and active travel strategy, including symbolic 'quick wins'. This will focus on the opportunities created by the new housing development and assessing pedestrian and cycling links to and within the town centre and connections to Baldock Station. Early progress can be made in installing cycle racks and other facilities as well as behavioural change programme.	Increased use of active travel and public transport to access the town centre in line with Councils sustainability agenda and increased footfall.	2022-30
Parking provision & perceptions: Customer-focused parking review covering quality, quantity and cost of provision as part of wider town centre access using People, Places & Parking process or similar approach. Particular review of the access and use of on-street parking on High street and Sun street.	Positive stakeholder perceptions shown by re-survey of impact of parking.	2022-23

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">THEME 2: BUSINESS SUPPORT, PROMOTION & DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Business support: Is there tailored training/mentoring and a strategy to enhance the quality and distinctiveness of retail, services, hospitality and leisure businesses based on current provision, trends and knowledge of competing centres?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Local business needs are not represented in Baldock due to lack of BID or other business representation body. That is also reflected in lack of business responses to the survey thus limiting opportunity to grasp opinions on of Town centre from businesses’ perspective.

The business data for Baldock indicated that current retail focuses on provision of comparison shopping such as items for personal care, home and luxury. While the proportion of convenience retail businesses is low, taking up only 2% of the total business mix, that includes the Tesco Extra supermarket that caters for residents’ convenience shopping needs. The number of retail service providers is quite low, indicating that some of those needs have to be met elsewhere. The proportion of hospitality mix is good, providing a good offer for local residents with 15% of cafes and restaurants, 5% bars and pubs and 7% of take aways. Levels of Sui Generis are slightly higher when compared to other smaller towns and indicate presence of diverse service, majorly those for personal care.

Customers were the most negative about access to banks and ATM’s (66%), the comparison retail offer such as clothes and gifts (52%), the presence of national chains (38%) and the overall mix of businesses (30%).

When asked how their experience of Baldock town centre had changed in recent years, 26% of town users said it had improved and further 21% stated that it had changed in a mixture of good and bad ways,he followed by 26% saying that the experience has remained the same. While 24% of respondents said that their experience had worsened, this is a slightly smaller proportion than that of the national response.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Business engagement and support: Develop a plan to introduce a local business’ network that enables engagement and understanding of businesses’ needs and work to ensure vibrancy and prosperity of the town centre.</td><td rowspan="2">Increased business membership and engagement

Improved customer perceptions and business performance in biennial resurvey.

Increased sustainability of town centre businesses.</td><td>2022-26</td></tr>
<tr><td>Provide ongoing support: Provide ongoing support to local independent businesses, hospitality and market to ensure that vibrancy and unique character of the town is preserved and enhanced, including digital skills training to develop more ‘social media stars’ as part of promoting ‘products and place’.</td><td>2022-26</td></tr>
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<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Place branding & marketing: Is there a clear understanding of the town brand with pooled budgets and a creative, collective marketing campaign?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Developments completed in 2009 enhanced Baldock’s character as a market town, with the new market square becoming a place available to host local events. The Baldock Events Forum is leading the delivery and promotion of a variety of events. Further promotion and marketing of ‘product and place’ could help promote Baldock’s already positive identity to residents and as a destination for visitors from surrounding towns, increasing foot-flow and supporting local businesses.

It is evident from the survey responses that the majority of customers (47%) typically visit Baldock for everyday convenience shopping and services such as food shopping or newsagents and hairdressers. These responses are likely to include visits to Tesco. The second most popular purpose of a visit (37%) is for leisure and is likely to include socialising, activities as well as visiting many pubs and cafes located in the town centre. Comments listed as ‘other’ mostly included a blend of activities, exercising, use of outdoor spaces, attending Town Hall functions and commuting from the station. Only 3% of respondents said that they use town centre to access services and 1% come here for comparison shopping.

When asked how often users visit town centre now with the pandemic restrictions being lifted, 43% of users responded that they are visiting more than once a week, 30% are in the town centre daily and 15% are visiting Baldock weekly. Overall, Baldock appeared to be visited frequently, with only 2% of respondents visiting town fortnightly.

As part of the survey, users were asked which other local towns they visit regularly, making at least one trip per month. Letchworth Garden City appeared to be visited by 79% of respondents, Hitchin is visited by 47% and Stevenage by 26%.

Visitor economy, promotion and events theme (3%) received comments in relation to better provision of cultural events (1%), better options for evening activities (1%) and improved promotion of the town (1%).</td></tr>
<tr><td>‘Product and place’ promotional plan: Build on Baldock’s identity as an attractive market town by promoting the recognised additional appeal that animate the ‘place’ such as its track record of events and growing focus on exploring it by sustainable travel. In addition, more should be more made of the recognised appeal of it ‘products’ represented by its variety of hospitality businesses, outdoor seating, independent shops, markets and well-regarded customer service.</td><td rowspan="2">Improved customer perceptions and business performance in biennial resurvey.

Increased footfall and foot-flow including evidence of new and return visitors for events.</td><td>2022-23</td></tr>
<tr><td>Support Baldock Events Forum in promoting annual events programme: Work in partnership with Baldock Events Forum to promote an annual events programme created by itself and partners as a way of boosting pride in place and increasing visitor numbers.</td><td>2022-26</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">**Digital technology & data:** Is there an ongoing assessment of digital infrastructure and skills with an investment plan and approach for the collective use of data in marketing and monitoring the town centre</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">There is no comprehensive strategy for Baldock's digital development and the town's presence on social media is relatively limited.

The main online sites promoting Baldock are the web site, Instagram and Facebook accounts managed by the Baldock Events Forum. There are also three private, community Facebook pages with a combined total of 7,300 members and one group specifically dedicated to raising awareness of local businesses and organisations with 1,600 members.

A new mobile phone-based footfall monitoring system for Baldock and neighbouring towns has recently adopted by North Herts Council. This system will potentially give very useful baseline data as well as routine updates to understand the changing use of the Baldock town centre including movement around town.

Town centre users were slightly more negative than positive about online information covering Baldock (29:27%), although the main sentiment was indifference (44%).

Use of social media to provide insights about businesses, products, places to eat, things to do (62%) received the highest response as a priority or high priority amongst digital development options amongst the town centre's customers. This is followed by the digital phone network coverage (54%) and priorities related to regular updates from businesses about special offers and things to do (53%).</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Enhancement and delivery of digital promotion through mentoring:** Stakeholder engagement with businesses and community groups to establish social media channels and deliver an enhanced social media profile for Baldock, local businesses, and events.</td><td rowspan="2">Increased digital activity and profile of businesses and town.

Improved foot-flow revealed in monitoring as well as customer perceptions and business performance in biennial resurvey.

Improved evidence-based understanding of customer activity/profile and impact of interventions.</td><td>2022-24</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Regular footfall monitoring and review:** Adopt a template for quarterly footfall and foot-flow monitoring including assessment of impact of interventions with partner organisations.</td><td>2022-24</td></tr>
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<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">THEME 3: PARTNERSHIP WORKING: COORDINATION & COMMUNICATIONS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & COORDINATION: Is there strong public, private and community engagement with active and coordinated involvement in planning and delivery that extends to community assets development and is backed by a clear communications plan?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Proposed activity as part of Baldock town centre recovery and revitalisation includes numerous opportunities to boost the town's identity and sense of progress through ongoing and proposed new activity. Research promoted as part of the UK Levelling Up shows the importance of vibrant town centres and community participation in boosting pride in place. Effective coordination between organisations and clear communication of proposals and achievements to the wider community will be important in creating such positive sentiments. It will be important to engage businesses as part of this and reach out especially to younger generations including families.

Communications planning should cover the delivery of internal communications between partners and external engagement and marketing with wider stakeholders. Elements of the roll-out of communications and engagement can include:
• mechanisms for internal coordination between key partners around key themes
• involvement of wider business community including upskilling in digital activity to deliver demonstrable benefits
• engagement of wider stakeholder groups and community organisations activities and events.
• working with established social media and press to promote positive storis and evolving town identity/brand

The challenge facing Baldock, is that apart from the Events Forum, there is a lack of local organisations with a town-wide economic or community development focus. This will need to be addressed through the potential formation of a business network discussions with the Events Forum about its aspirations to serve a wider community development role. Lessons will need to be learnt from the operation of the Baldock Town Partnership CIC from 2007-2018 and why it was dissolved.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Communications planning: Preparation and delivery of internal communications between partners and external engagement with wider stakeholders.</td><td rowspan="2">Positive community & business perceptions shown in re-survey including improved experience of town centre.

Tracking of positive social media activity.</td><td>2022></td></tr>
<tr><td>Stakeholder engagement: Proposed, new digital platforms can convey informative and positive updates for stakeholder groups and wider community, incl. promoting heritage, cultural offer, activities and events</td><td>2022></td></tr>
</table>

COORDINATION & MONITORING

There is the opportunity to use this initial forward framework for evolving the already increasing joined-up delivery to create measurable, town-wide change. Part of this can involve improving various aspects of the 'how' of delivering town centre revitalisation through enhanced partnership working to achieve increasing ambitions. Elements of this partnership working that may need active strengthening in future are:

- *capacity & partnership mapping* including resourcing needs; involvement of volunteers; employment of necessary staff; and joint working between stakeholder groups.
- *finances & investment* including expertise to identify and bid for external funding; financial accountability; diverse and sustainable funding mechanisms.
- *governance & influence* including coordinating stakeholder activity across themes; influencing strategic partners; and options for evolution of a formalised partnerships.
- *strategy & plans* including an evolving forward framework with a rolling partnership development and action plans that coordinate and monitor delivery on the ground using a suite of monitoring indicators.

Facilitating partnership working groups/themes: Organisation, involvement, evolution and reporting of two theme-based working groups and coordinating 'hub' as part of District-wide local and strategic partnership development.	Evidence of effective partnership working with evolving plans to deliver projects and achieve strategic influence. Additional fundraising and investment achieved. Suite of monitoring indicators that demonstrate success & inform revised plans.	2022-26
Quarterly footfall and foot-flow analysis: Regular analysis and stakeholder engagement during recovery and beyond using quarterly footfall monitoring reporting.		2022-26
Digital impact monitoring: Investigation & installation of affordable, digital impact monitoring systems such as Maybe* social media benchmarking sentiment analysis		2022-26
Biennial town centre survey: Repeat of town centre business and customer survey to monitor progress and perceptions of town centre recovery and revitalisation.		2023 & 25

Next Steps

This report is a detailed piece of work that necessarily pulls together existing policies/proposals and a stakeholder perspective of issues in a systematic way. Its aim is to provide an action-orientated approach that can be delivered by a coming together of key local partners and a realistic appraisal of priorities and resourcing needs. In this way it is possible to set about making a meaningful difference to the long-term vitality and viability of Baldock's town centre. Realistically, this should be viewed as a 5-10 year project that will need extra resources including organisationally to coordinate delivery.

The key opportunities for Baldock are that it has a recently transformed town centre along with other accepted qualities of its business mix, accessibility, events track record and prospects for housing growth. The challenge is to build the capacity to make the most of these opportunities in a way that raises its profile in a way that further animates the town and enhances the experience for residents and visitors.

Below are the proposed next steps that partners will need to consider and undertake in the process of developing and delivering a robust partnership and action plan able to aid the town centre's recovery and revitalisation.

1. *Finalise development plan and 'forward framework'*: Key stakeholder organisations need to review and comment on this draft development plan and its forward framework to enable People & Places to finalise it.
2. *Publish stakeholder summary*: A short, illustrated version of the development plan findings can be published by People & Places for wider distribution, possibly supported by an accompanying video presentation.
3. *Initial business engagement and survey*: The publication of the summary should be used to begin engagement with businesses through visits, meetings and a survey to gauge their perceptions, priorities and reaction to proposals. People & Places can help assist in as extension of the current work.
4. *Meetings of theme-based sub-groups*: Initial meetings need to be organised of theme-based sub-groups to discuss the development of proposals for the three thematic areas and partnership working/governance. People & Places can help assist in determining the membership and format of these groups, as required.
5. *Partnership development and governance*: The existing stakeholders as well as businesses representatives need to determine the partnership development and governance arrangements for revitalising Baldock's town centre. This includes focusing on the representation and roles for a core group responsible and equipped to manage the coordination of activity, including identifying resources, communication and engagement with wider stakeholders.
6. *Determine initial delivery priorities*: The evolving partnership needs to determine initial delivery priorities that underpin long-term strategy and capacity as well demonstrate 'quick wins' to stakeholders and the wider community. The Shared Prosperity Fund provides an initial and flexible injection of funds to help achieve this.