

LICHFIELDS



institute for
local governance



Town Centres: Planning for the Future

Presentation by Jonathan Wallace

10 July 2019

Our work in town centres



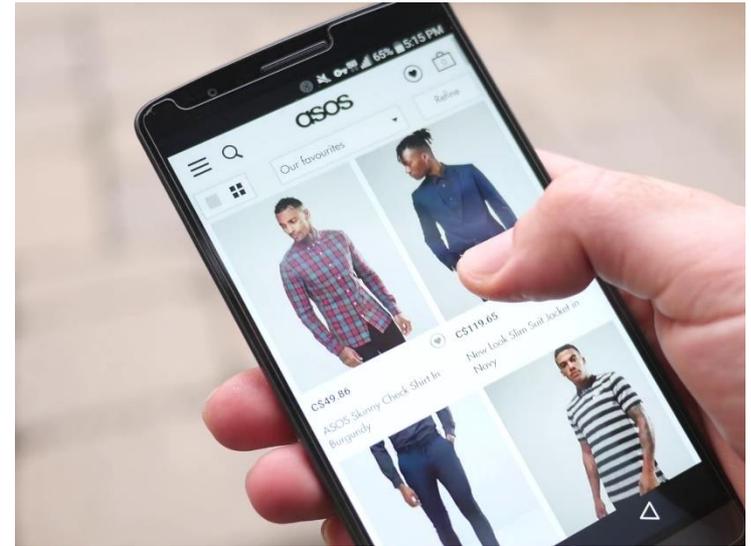
Structure of Presentation

- **Context**
- **Town Centres: Planning for the Future**
- **Concluding Thoughts**

Context

Town centres are facing ‘a perfect storm’

- The challenge of multi-channel retailing
- Movement from product purchase to subscription models
- The increasing importance of convenience
- Decline in brand loyalty

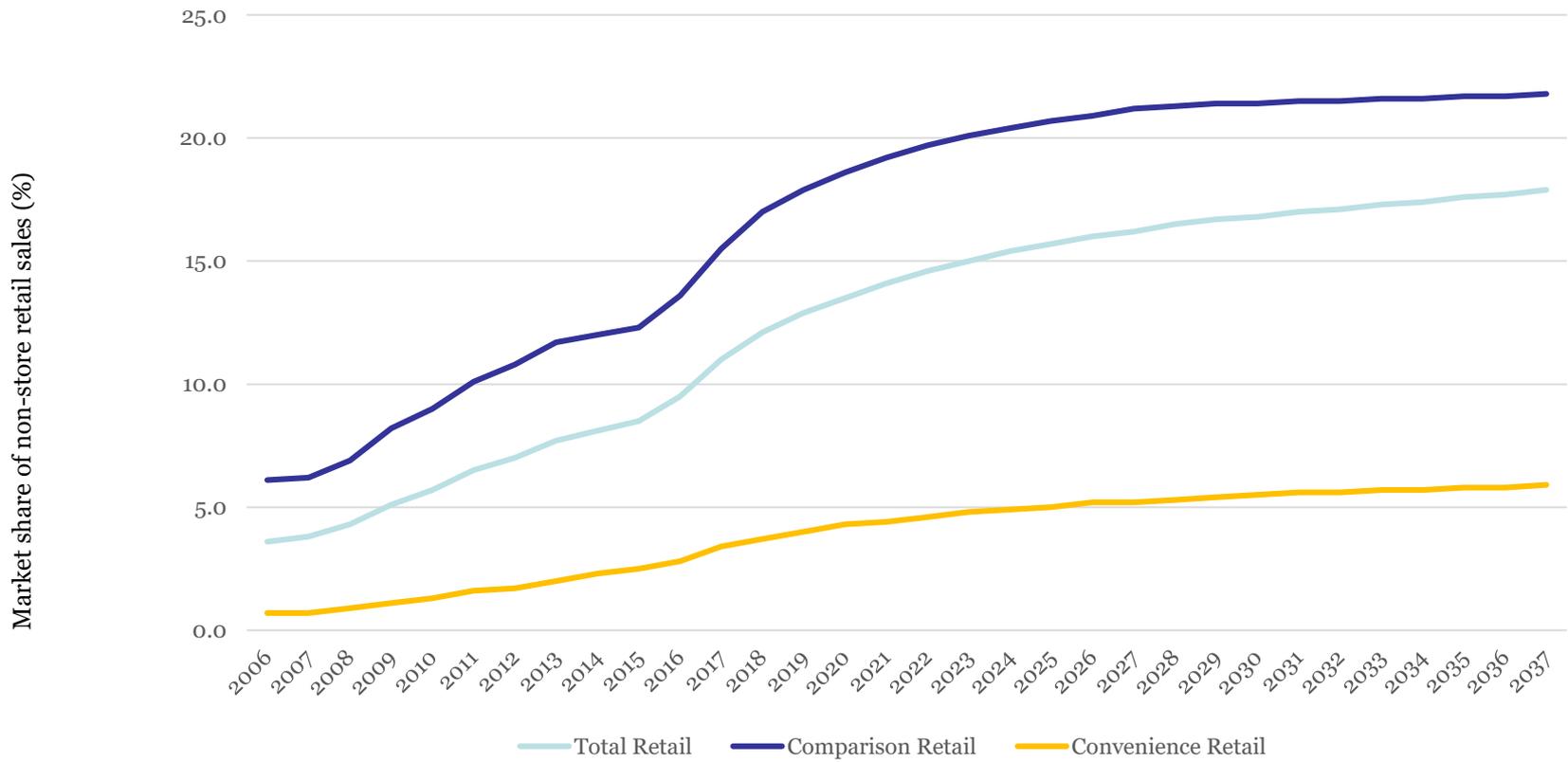


A bloodbath of national retailers

- Retailers squeezed by rental levels and business rates – full effect yet to be felt
- A large number of operators have gone into administration or entered CVAs
- New store models adapting to meet challenges



Online retail is still growing (and not slowing down just yet)



Source: Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 16 (December 2018)

A need for change

Town centres are still an important focal point for communities but:

- Town Centres are facing significant challenges
- A need to improve our understanding of how centres can adapt to change
- Lichfields and the North East England Chamber of Commerce agreed to work collaboratively on a research project: **“Town Centres – Planning for the Future”**





North East England
Chamber of Commerce

Town Centres: Planning for the Future

LICHFIELDS

Project Aims

- To identify the main issues affecting town centres
- To engage with stakeholders – including operators, developers, agents and the public sector
- To look at different towns in the North East and identify example of best practice
- To recommend improvements and work together to implement them

Methodology

- **Series of roundtables with stakeholders to consider different aspects of town centres:**
 - Economic Characteristics
 - Planning and the Physical Environment
 - Business Improvement Districts and Other Regeneration Initiatives
- **Field work identifying best practice from the UK**
- **Report for the region feeding into other work on town centres locally and nationally**

Newcastle



Middlesbrough



Berwick



Hexham



Stanley



Key Findings - Economic Characteristics

- Ageing and dwindling customer base
- Town centre workforce reducing
- Shift from retail to leisure – shopping as a leisure activity
- Too much reliance on retail
- Need for diversity and non-retail anchors
- Regular events draw people in
- Public can play a role – do they want a town centre?



Key Findings – Planning and the Physical Environment

- Mixed approach from local authorities
- Budget cuts have led to reduced staff resources/expertise
- Importance of ‘civic pride’
- Need for a holistic approach
- Use of planning and other powers inconsistent
- Lack of flexibility over change of use



Key Findings - Business Improvement Districts and Regeneration Initiatives

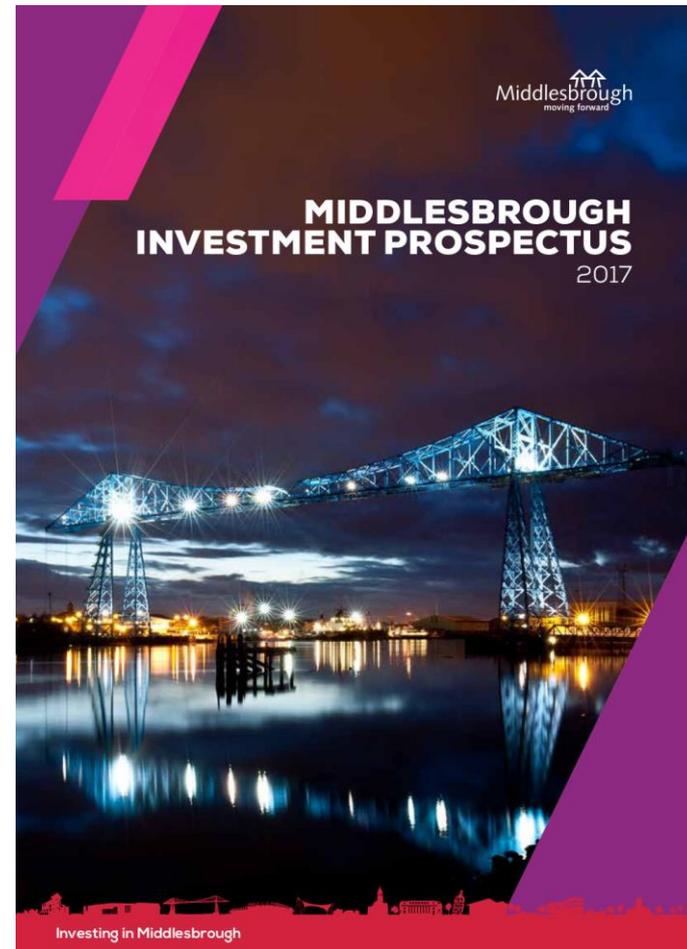
- Mixed success for BIDs
- Many businesses don't engage
- Town Centre Management can be effective but rare in practice
- Very limited business support for retailers



Recommendations

Creating a Vision

- Create a vision
- Develop a USP
- Promote the Centre



Recommendations

Broadening the Offer

- Expand the offer through a more flexible approach
- Make it family friendly
- Create new anchors which maintain and drive footfall



Recommendations

A pro-active and holistic approach

- Improve the environment
- Events and activities
- Accommodate residential development



Recommendations

Business Leading the way

- Foster collaboration
- Support independents
- Embrace online and multi-channel retailing



Concluding Thoughts...

The Government is finally grasping the nettle...

- **The High Street Report and Response to Select Committee:**
 - Town Centre Taskforce
 - Future High Streets Fund
 - Changes to Permitted Development (PD) Rights
 - Proposed changes to Use Classes Order
- **Business rates changes**



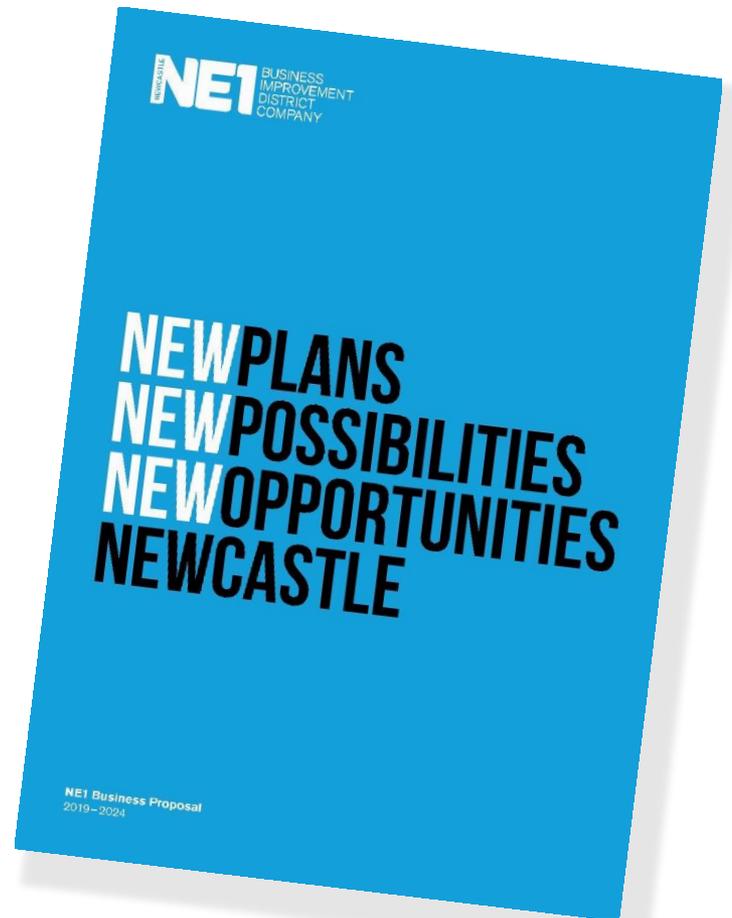
What can local authorities do?

- More flexible planning policies
- Broaden the offer within town centres – increase the reasons to visit
- Create new anchors
- Reinforce their role within the community through events/activities
- Support the independent sector where possible



A range of tools are available

- **Need realistic yet positive strategy for town centres**
- **LA's should consider scope for AAPs, LDOs, CPOs, HAZs**
- **Other potential vehicles for change:**
 - Business Improvement Districts
 - Town/City Centre Management
 - Mayoral Development Corporation



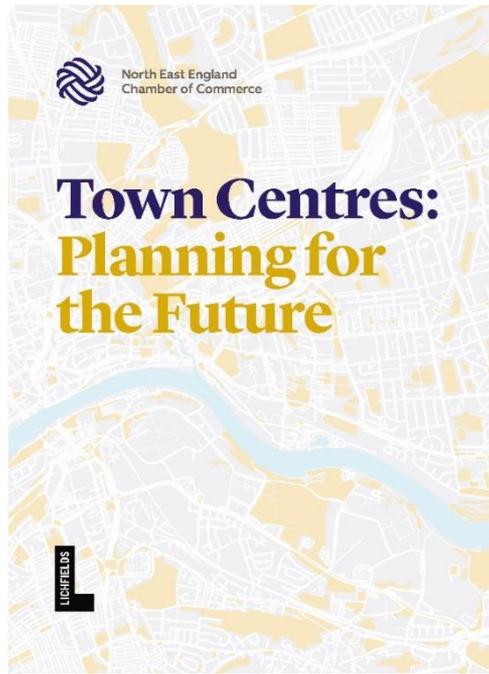
“Retail most definitely does have a future, people will continue to use physical stores in all of our lifetimes. Believe it or not, a high street 20 years from now might not even look radically different from its current incarnation, albeit with a reduced overall retail footprint, a greater sense of purpose and a lot more love.”

Stephen Springham
(Head of Retail Research, Knight Frank)

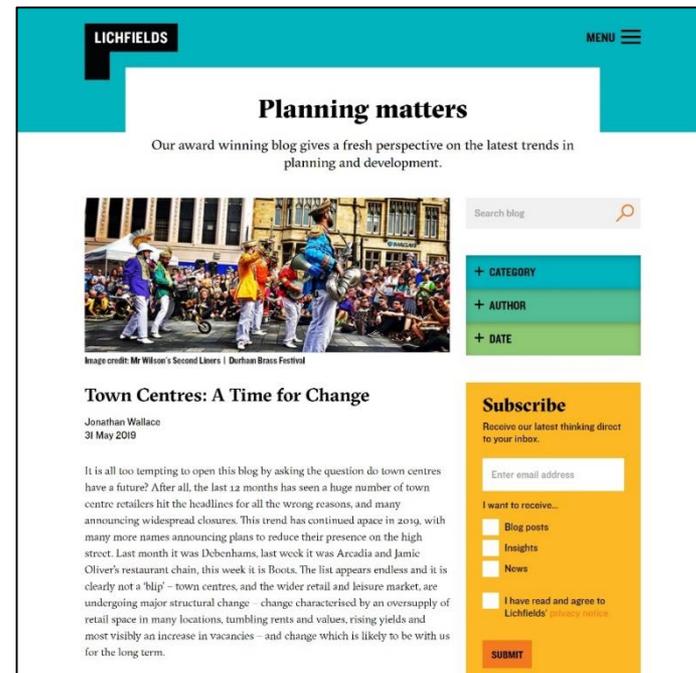
Questions?

Insight from Lichfields

Innovative, industry-leading thinking on planning and development



<https://lichfields.uk/content/insights/town-centres-planning-for-the-future>



<https://lichfields.uk/blog/2019/may/31/town-centres-a-time-for-change/>

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