

Developing a forward framework for Oakham

It is proposed that the report and recommendations for Oakham should follow the methodology recently published by the Local Government Association in its “Revitalising Town Centres”.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/revitalising-town-centres-handbook-council-leadership>

This handbook proposes using the F-factors checklist developed by the People & Places Partnership for creating a ‘forward framework’ for town centre revitalisation. Key elements to consider 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 should begin with a clear statement of identified issues; recognition of council and partners’ roles; the creation of suitable responses; acknowledgment of gaps in delivery; and 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.

Using the ‘town centre checklist’

Revitalising a town centre involves coordinating a range of activities, possibly over many years. The handbook provides a self-assessment ‘town centre checklist’ that can then be used to guide ongoing delivery. This checklist uses a series of prompts to help councils and their partners gauge current and future processes in strategy development and the delivery of town centre improvements. The remainder of this handbook provides advice on taking forward each of these component activities and links to further resources.



Town centre checklist: Success Factors	
FOUNDATION	
Evidence and objectives	Has a baseline survey of issues been completed, aims defined, objectives, scope and long-term monitoring of impacts agreed?
FUNCTION	
Parking, travel and access	Is an integrated and customer-focused parking, travel, and access strategy in place?
Planning and 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?
Streetscape and public realm	Has a funding strategy and ongoing, prioritised streetscape and public realm improvement plan been agreed with an understanding of 'connected value'?
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?
Place branding and marketing	Is there a clear understanding of the town brand with pooled budgets and a creative, collective marketing campaign?
Digital technology and 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?
FORM	
Governance and influence	Is there an appropriate structure, membership and credibility to coordinate local stakeholder activity and influence cross-departmental or other 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?
Roles and capacity	Are there an effective chair, suitably skilled board, employment of necessary staff, effective management of trained volunteers and clear lines 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 delivery on the ground?

Forward Planning: Strategy and plans

The handbook advocates that for or 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 overarching strategy and two component plans:

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 interrelationship and respective roles of partners such as the local authority, town council, business partners, Chamber of Commerce or a BID.

Action planning

A town or city 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.

Recommendation

The recommendation for Oakham is that the Task and Finish Group produces an initial Forward Framework for the town comprising:

- Factual evidence base of key performance indicators and user/non-user/business perceptions of issues and priorities.
- Analysis and agreement on priority issues and monitoring indicators to guide project planning by partners and wider stakeholders
- An ongoing communications and engagement plan for broadening understanding, support and involvement of stakeholders
- An outline partnership structure including coordinating group, theme-based delivery sub-groups, partners and responsibilities
- An initial statement of future resourcing needs for partnership development and project delivery