

Summary

Town Centre Futures: Evidence and ideas for recovery

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Delivering London's Future Together

Town Centre Futures: Introduction

London's town centres shape our daily lives and the success of our city in many ways – they provide for our day to day needs, affect our enjoyment of the city, and offer a wide range of job opportunities. In doing so they also impact our health and wellbeing, economic outcomes and identities.

The coronavirus crisis has dealt London a particularly harsh blow and has piled pressure on our town centres. The capital has always been a place of rapid change, but our town centres now need to respond and adapt to the lasting shock of the pandemic, and the long-term challenges of the climate crisis, of the growth of online retail, of Brexit, of automation, of inequality and of an ageing population.

Whilst the longer term impact of the pandemic is still uncertain, there are now opportunities for rethinking how London functions, and how people work, live and travel around the city, and to respond to the city's longstanding challenges.

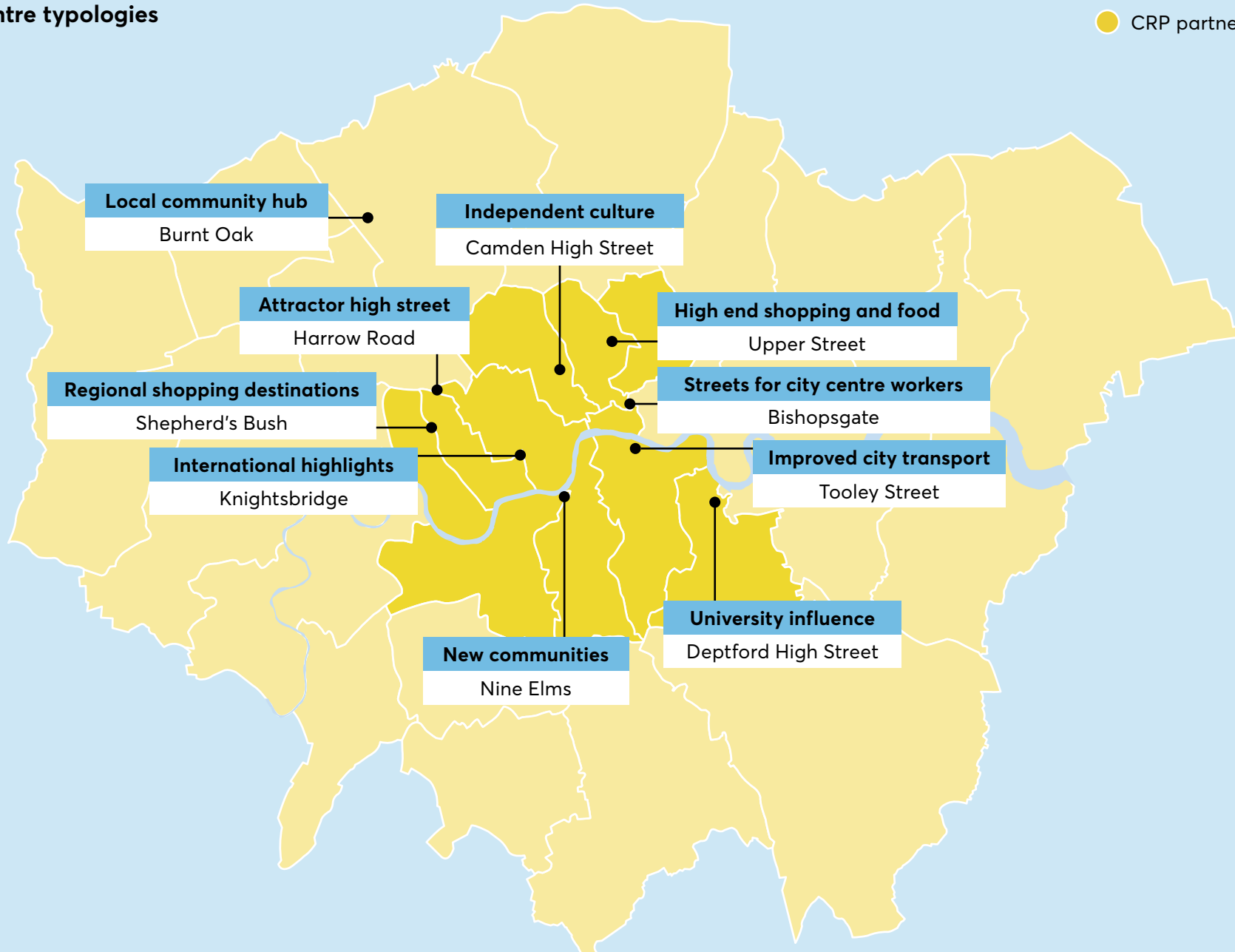
Town Centre Futures: Report content

This report has been commissioned by [Cross River Partnership \(CRP\)](#) to enable its members and partners to think through and respond to the potential impact of the pandemic on London. The report consists of three sections, each offering different resources:

- The **thematic evidence** reviews offer a summary of the changes and challenges brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, to inform recovery responses. This section reviews how to plan for healthy and adaptable town centres in a context of change, and the impact of the pandemic on the city with a specific focus on mobility, workforce and employment trends, and on the Central Activity Zone.
- The **case studies** showcase some of the key challenges and opportunities for London's medium and large centres, illustrating where these differ across places, and offer possible future directions for its town centres.
- Our **recommendations** offer practical steps that local authorities, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and their partners could take to improve London's town centres in 2021 and 2022. These build on the evidence collated through the thematic reviews and the case studies.

Town centre typologies

● CRP partner boroughs



Town centre typologies

Type	Illustrative case study	London borough	New London Plan classification
Improved city transport	Tooley Street	Southwark	Unclassified/CAZ
Regional shopping destinations	Shepherd's Bush	Hammersmith & Fulham	International centre
Local community hub	Burnt Oak	Barnet and Brent	District centre
New communities	Nine Elms	Wandsworth	Unclassified/Future CAZ
University influence	Deptford High Street	Lewisham and Greenwich	District Centre
Independent culture	Camden High Street	Camden	Metropolitan centre
International highlights	Knightsbridge	Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea	International centre
Streets for city centre workers	Bishopsgate	City of London, Tower Hamlets and Hackney	CAZ
High end shopping and food	Upper Street	Islington	District Centre (Church Street)
Attractor high street	Harrow Road	Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, and Brent	District centre

NB. A table with detailed characteristics on each typology is provided in appendix.

Recommendations

The recommendations suggest practical steps that local authorities, local businesses, Business Improvement Districts, the Greater London Authority and their partners could take to improve London's town centres in 2021 and 2022. Of course, not all ideas will work in all places, and some places will already be using some of the recommendations but we hope most areas will find some ideas which are useful to them. Different areas may choose to use one recommendation or several in combination, depending on what has already happened locally and what local priorities are. BIDs can play an important role in guiding this decision making.

These recommendations also build on a rich set of sources and ideas for ways to support London's recovery – which are featured in the [Recovery programme](#) and work with Arup on the [economic future of the Central Activities Zone](#), the West End Partnership's [Future vision for the West End](#), and the [High Street Taskforce](#).

Headline recommendations

1. **Support London's creatives** and build sense of place with outdoor performances (subject to social distancing) and visual art displays – murals and beyond - during pandemic recovery.
2. **Boost outdoor eating and drinking options** for restaurants, cafes, bars and street food sellers. Even if social distancing is no longer required, some people may still prefer to be outside, or there may not be enough inside space for everyone.
3. **Create new ways for local people to be involved** in decisions about their high streets – building on the community spirit and increased attachment to local areas during lockdowns. Public involvement can help keep high streets lively and vital when some businesses close.
4. **Optimise freight and delivery** vehicle movement on the high street, to reduce air pollution and create more space for active transport and outdoor leisure.
5. **Create new workspaces** that suit the needs of remote workers, such as focus and social interaction spaces – to increase activity in town centres.
6. **Redesign roads and streets to make them child-friendly and healthier**, and to decarbonise transport journeys. This can be done by introducing designs that facilitate active travel, and reduce access for vehicle uses that contribute to air pollution. CRP's Healthy Streets Everyday programme offers guidance on how to do these interventions well.
7. **Improve amenities for visitors and workers** – for example ensuring that visitors have easy access to clean toilets, comfortable waiting areas and (covid safe) water fountains.
8. **Future-proof community assets** by transferring ownership to community groups, to deliver bottom-up change.
9. **Introduce better lighting** to make the public realm feel safe and secure after dark, and value local heritage by lighting landmarks.
10. **Increase meanwhile and temporary use of vacant spaces** to add footfall and vibrancy to the town centre, and experiment with future uses.
11. **Increase access to health services** and promote reuse of vacant commercial facilities by opening health facilities on the high street.

How we chose the case study areas

London has many town centres. The most recent London Plan includes 241, ranging from Oxford Street to small local shopping areas.¹ Each of them is unique. The examples that follow are intended to showcase some of the key challenges and opportunities which affect London's medium and large centres.

In selecting them, we have looked for places which differ in how they work now: their size and the area from which they draw visitors, the types of businesses they contain, whether they are largely used by residents, students, visitors from outside the area or office workers, and how people usually get to them. We have also thought about how they might change and develop in future – either because regeneration is already taking place or because it is being considered.

Our chosen areas are largely but not exclusively within the Cross River Partnership member boroughs, because of their particular interest in this project. We have not chosen the major shopping and entertainment areas of the West End, including Oxford Street and Covent Garden, because they are being considered in more detail in specific pieces of work.²

We hope that people who work on London's many other town centres will be able to see commonalities with their own areas and find recommendations which are helpful to them.

Space and time constraints for this report mean we have not been able to include full details on the town centres we mention, and in particular on their plans for regeneration and renewal. Local authorities and other key organisations – as well as local people and businesses – have far more knowledge than we are able to cover in this report.

1. Mayor of London (March 2021). The London Plan. Town Centres Network p481. Retrieved from: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/the_london_plan_2021.pdf#page481
2. Mayor of London (1 February 2021). Central London hit hardest by COVID but strong recovery possible [Press Release]. Retrieved from: <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/report-shows-central-london-can-recover>