

Expert Solution Based Report

Haslingden, Rossendale

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About this report

The High Streets Task Force visited Haslingden to undertake an Unlocking Your Place Potential visit in July 2023, which subsequently produced a report recommending how your town could benefit from additional support.

As such, Diane Cunningham was prescribed as one of our HSTF Experts to provide help and guidance in the area of town centre activation.

Diane Cunningham and Joe Barratt, the Expert Co-Ordinator from the High Street Task Force and co- founder of Teenage Market visited Haslingden on 6th February 2024 to revisit the expert support proposed, as the town's regeneration programme had made significant progress since our last meeting in October 2023.

We agreed that the support would be refocused slightly to signpost and advise on how to actively engage with landlords and property owners, as well as creating the right trader mix/managing applications for the new market space, following refurbishment works. Some of the support previously proposed to provide reflections on the town centre events programme and showcasing meanwhile use ideas was also retained.

Haslingden is also hosting a Placemaking Workshop on 26th March 2024 and a separate report will follow on the outcomes from that session.

Our recommended support focuses on activating the town centre via events, bringing buildings into use and preparation for the market's relaunch.

Given the limit on our time in supporting towns, we have, in some cases, provided best practice guidance to enable you to progress the relevant areas once we have stepped away.

On behalf of the High Streets Task Force, may I take this opportunity to thank all those who gave up their time to help inform this report and for the frank and positive manner throughout our engagement with your town. It was also good to see the previous reports shared widely.

It is clear that there are great opportunities in Haslingden as a result of funding wins, extensive community engagement and a strong town centre team and we hope that this report will help to complement that process as you seek to transform the town.



Matt Colledge

High Streets Task Force Project Director

Introduction

Rossendale Borough Council is managing a number of projects across the borough, with Haslingden less progressed than neighbouring towns Rawtenstall and Bacup. There is a strong focus in each of the town centres supported by heritage, UKSPF and Levelling Up funding and dedicated town centre managers in each.

Some works have already been completed in Haslingden, with improvements to shop fronts, and works will shortly begin on the market refurbishment (due to start in March) and public realm changes (The Big Lamp project) which is running through to late 2024.

It is recognised that the town has challenges in creating more reasons to visit – both daytime (increasing footfall) and in developing a nighttime offer; convincing landlords and property owners to invest in their properties for temporary and permanent activation and with reducing ASB hotspots.

With a strong town centre team and funding in place we believe that Haslingden will benefit from signposting to activation activities which have worked well in other towns and specific advice around property and markets to support the work already underway.

Information Gathering & Engagement

We have had several points of engagement with Rossendale over the past few months.

In October, we heard from Mhorag Saxon, Heritage Regeneration Project Manager who presented on town centre projects across the three main towns at the Heritage Trust Conference.

We met Megan Eastwood, Head of Housing and Regeneration on 16th October 2023 to discuss the scoping session and also met with town centre officers and colleagues, Megan and chief executive Rob Huntington on 18th October 2023 (both online) to discuss how the remaining HSTF support could support Rossendale's town centre regeneration programme.



On 6th February 2024, Diane Cunningham and Joe Barratt visited Haslingden for a town tour with Dawn Lawler, Town Centre Regeneration Officer and Leah Armitage, Economic Development Officer to ensure the remaining support was tailored to the town's needs.

Image: Joe Barratt, Leah Armitage, Diane Cunningham, Dawn Lawler

Findings & Analysis

From our meetings and visits, it is clear that there is a lot of opportunity in Haslingden as regeneration projects continue, new people move into the area and the community engages with the changes taking place.

We found the town to have many positive attributes, from the historic buildings and restored shop fronts to the opportunities presented by the market refurbishment and the Big Lamp Project, which will all bring more vibrancy to the town centre in the hope of attracting more people to use it.

It was clear that the library was the busiest space during our visit and we heard about the activities it hosts, from Lego club to providing a meeting and workspace.

There is a strong stakeholder group in place and the council has initiated volunteer groups to clean and tidy the town and there are a wide range of events taking place with DJs and fashion shows proving popular on TikTok.

There is a strong connection with food in the borough, reflected in the number of food-based businesses including local bakery Manning's, which has a presence in each town, and a butchers referencing local produce.



Image: Local butcher showing meat sourced within 30 miles of premises

Despite these positives there remain challenges as a result of changing lifestyles and the role of high streets. We discussed the challenges as being:

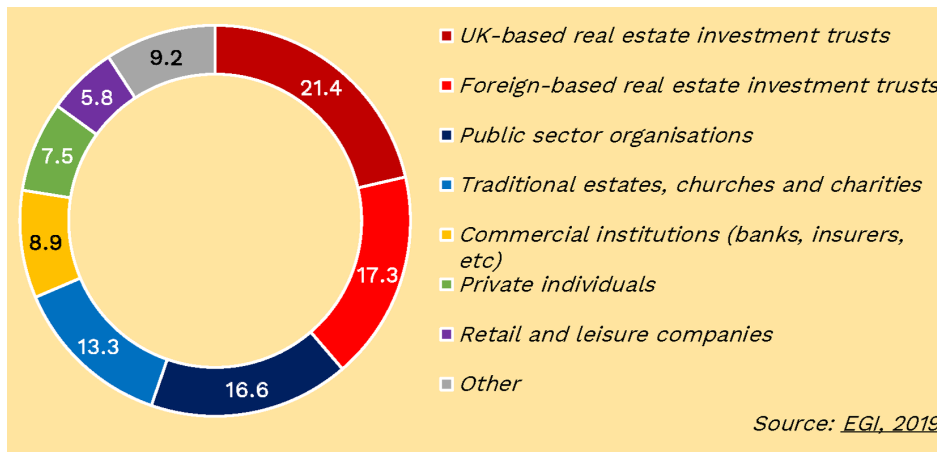
- Improving the town centre offer (including young people) and animating the town in both the day time and evening providing reasons to visit throughout the year
- Ensuring the focus on events is aligned to the town and celebrates its multicultural population
- Antisocial behaviour connected to drug issues and, in some cases, HMOs (houses of multiple occupation). A planning application is being considered for a recovery hostel (*If this goes ahead, you may find it useful to look at Vitality Homes / Damien John Kelly House in Liverpool based on Wavertree High Street ([Facebook link](#))*)
- There is no offer or wayfinding for visitors – cyclists and walkers – despite wayfinding being noticeable in other towns, particularly Waterfoot
- Improving the public realm, specifically alleyways

Potential Solutions

A summary of our findings is included below and should be read with the accompanying appendices which includes case study examples and signposting to further information.

1. Landlords and vacant property

Traditionally, high street shops were owned by pension funds and other financial institutions, however, the ownership of town centre properties is now highly fragmented. Ownership proportions below are likely to relate to most UK high streets although the council are building an ownership list of the key buildings in Haslingden believing individuals to have ownership of more than one and in other cases absent owners/landlords



A focus on understanding the ownership structure of the town centre is key and the appendices highlight different ways in which places and organisations have undertaken this.

Councils have the power to use Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) on regeneration grounds but in practice they have been reluctant to use it. It is unclear how this is managed within Haslingden.

Appendix	Issue	Potential Solutions
1. Landlords and vacant properties	Absent landlords or disengaged	<p>In overcoming access to landlords and property on the High Road, there is a wealth of information on the High Streets Task Force website.</p> <p>Property ownership is being mapped as a starting point</p>

Appendix	Issue	Potential Solutions
1. Landlords and vacant properties	Business Association is slow to gain momentum	Business Associations are often difficult to start. If numbers are low, identify 1-2 businesses owners in different parts of the town centre who can encourage their neighbours to attend in the hope numbers build over time

2. Activating empty buildings

Meanwhile use is now a familiar option for town centre vacant properties. There are greater considerations when it comes to converting larger premises.

Appendix 2 includes examples for where a former Poundland store, office buildings and a bank have been converted into new uses bringing a new type of visitor to the high street.

There are also examples for a retail incubator programme, performance space and pop-ups from climate emergency hubs to art and fashion.

Appendix	Issue	Potential Solutions
2. Activating empty buildings	Existing units are vacant	Develop a model for how people can use them – is there an option for community ownership or a charity taking them on? Power to Change offer advice on how this might happen in their Take Back the High Street report.
	Units are eligible for business rates	Consider subdividing units into small spaces that then fall below the business rates threshold

3. Events and Festivals

From the council’s list of events which have taken place over the past 18 months show which have been successful despite a constricted brief in relation to matching event to funding.

It appears that the most successful have been those marking significant occasions including Eid, VE Day and the Christmas Market.

Appendix	Issue	Potential Solutions
3. Events & Festivals	Interpretation of what’s working from previous events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that occasions can be marked town-wide to include shops, encouraging them to open later if it’s an evening event or provide an event related produce/service • Find local venues to rerun the successful signwriting and skills workshops ensuring that venues are in the town centre or market locations Activities appear to work well, particularly those involving children and families but consider the older residents too (hence the popularity of VE Day) as we discussed there being supported housing in the town centre • Start the Christmas event later in the day so it is set up for the light switch on and runs into the evening rather than trading all day • Map the events which are taking place already, some may be small and unknown but might grow into something bigger or be incorporated into another event. For example, there might be a Repair Café taking place (we already know about the Lego Club), walks, book clubs etc. There is likely to be more happening that you think

Appendix	Issue	Potential Solutions
	Events don't always happen in the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link events in other locations eg. Those taking place at Victoria Park by using town centre food-based businesses to cater and then replicating a skate park event in the town centre to make stronger connections between locations
	Consider a borough-wide festival and ensure Haslingden is included (medium to long-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Glaston-Bury example in appendix 3
	Consider empty spaces and what might be possible to happen in them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Mala example in appendix 3
	Celebrate the town's food businesses and heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to National Weeks celebrating food to raise the profile of the town's food businesses identifying one business for each week to lead activities. Many are listed on the sites below and we discussed how this might connect with young people too British Food Weeks International & UK Food Days

4. Evening activation / night time economy

From our visit and earlier conversations, it is clear that increasing activity in the early evening is a challenge with the existing offer. However, the library is open one evening and neighbouring Rawtenstall hosts Foodie Friday once a month so there are opportunities to test evening activity and build on the reopening of Haslingden Market to see what activities attract people.

We recommend that you start by capturing the activities already taking place using the template provided in appendix 4a.

Appendix	Issue	Potential Solutions
4. Evening activation / Night Time Economy	Limited night time activity (a few restaurants) and a challenging starting point	<p>A mapping template and guidance notes are in appendix 6 to develop an understanding of where your night time activity is taking place and where the opportunities are.</p> <p>It would also be useful when planning your event programme for 2024 to consider which events could be extended into the early evening.</p> <p>This area is supported with links to additional reading and case studies from other locations. (<i>Appendix 4: (plus appendix 4a): evening activation</i>)</p> <p>Revisit existing research and movement patterns to map night time activity and use the network of community groups to gain more insight into what types of activity would be welcome and/or closing times. Link to the empty premises item above as to where activities could be created on council owned sites.</p> <p>Link an evening even to late opening at the library (Tuesday) or take an established club such as Lego to another location for the night.</p> <p>Appendix 4 shows examples of night time activity in other locations across the north west which could work in Haslingden or spark ideas.</p>

5. Public realm improvements and greening

Haslingden was lacking in green space and seating areas on our visit. As per our previous conversations and the weather on the day of our tour, the climate is not naturally suited to creating areas to dwell.

Despite this, there are ways of softening the town centre’s public realm, greening areas and encouraging people to take another look.

Appendix	Issue	Potential Solutions
5. Public Realm Improvements & Greening	Lack of greening initiatives (and alleyways need improving)	Appendix 5 shows initiatives from other locations where seating has been added and greening including a project in Darlington linked to improving alleyways Incredible Edible are already active in Rossendale but it would be worthwhile in speaking with them about locations for events to bring them into the town centre or the market
	Grey/traditional stonework landscape	Appendix 5 shows an example from Wilderness Street in Ilford delivered by <u>Jan Kattein Architects</u> as a temporary installation to create dwell space and add colour to a town centre
	Lack of family focused activity / things of interest	Appendix 5 shows the use of a toy and book exchange added to an urban street (self managing) and on street play installations

6. Relaunching Haslingden Market

The market is about to undergo refurbishment with contractor expected to be on site before the end of March. The existing market space will be reconfigured to create a flexible



area for performance with seating creating a new event space in the town. The market will have a roof and a covered seating to accommodate the weather. The new market will house four permanent stalls and one for pop-up/temporary traders with an expected early summer launch.

Image: Haslingden Market

It was good to see the market included in the Town Centre 2040 Vision Update (in the library) however, it was asking potential traders to email Dawn if they were interested in trading.

Given that there are only a handful of spaces available, without a clear enquiry handling process, it can create a lot of work in handling emails and qualifying who the most suitable traders might be. It also leaves the potential traders with many questions.

Our recommendation would be that you:

- Create an online application form (keep it simple in Google or other council-accessible software) – appendix 6 includes suggestions of data to capture – which outputs an applicant list.
- Develop a criteria for appointing traders – should they be local, a start-up, a young person, someone who has an established following (via social media) already etc
- Provide information online about the market, the space available and costs and terms and conditions (and costs) of trading (appendix 6 shows a templated document you can adapt)
- Promote the link across social media (and in shop windows/on counters if applications are slow) and encourage businesses across the borough to consider trading
- Programme activities over the year linked to events, specialist markets – farmers' markets, Teenage Market etc – and activities (as outlined in Dawn's overview of events) once the space capacity is known for the market post refurbishment
- Understand what the town is lacking the market could offer or what is successful that could also become part of the market. This will require testing days to see which commodities work

Conclusion

We hope you have benefited from HSTF support and thank you for your engagement throughout. Please contact us if you would like to arrange a meeting to talk through the material provided.

We look forward to seeing the changes in Haslingden (and across the borough's towns) as the regeneration projects continue and the market is relaunched. We hope that you can implement some of the recommendations to help you along the way.