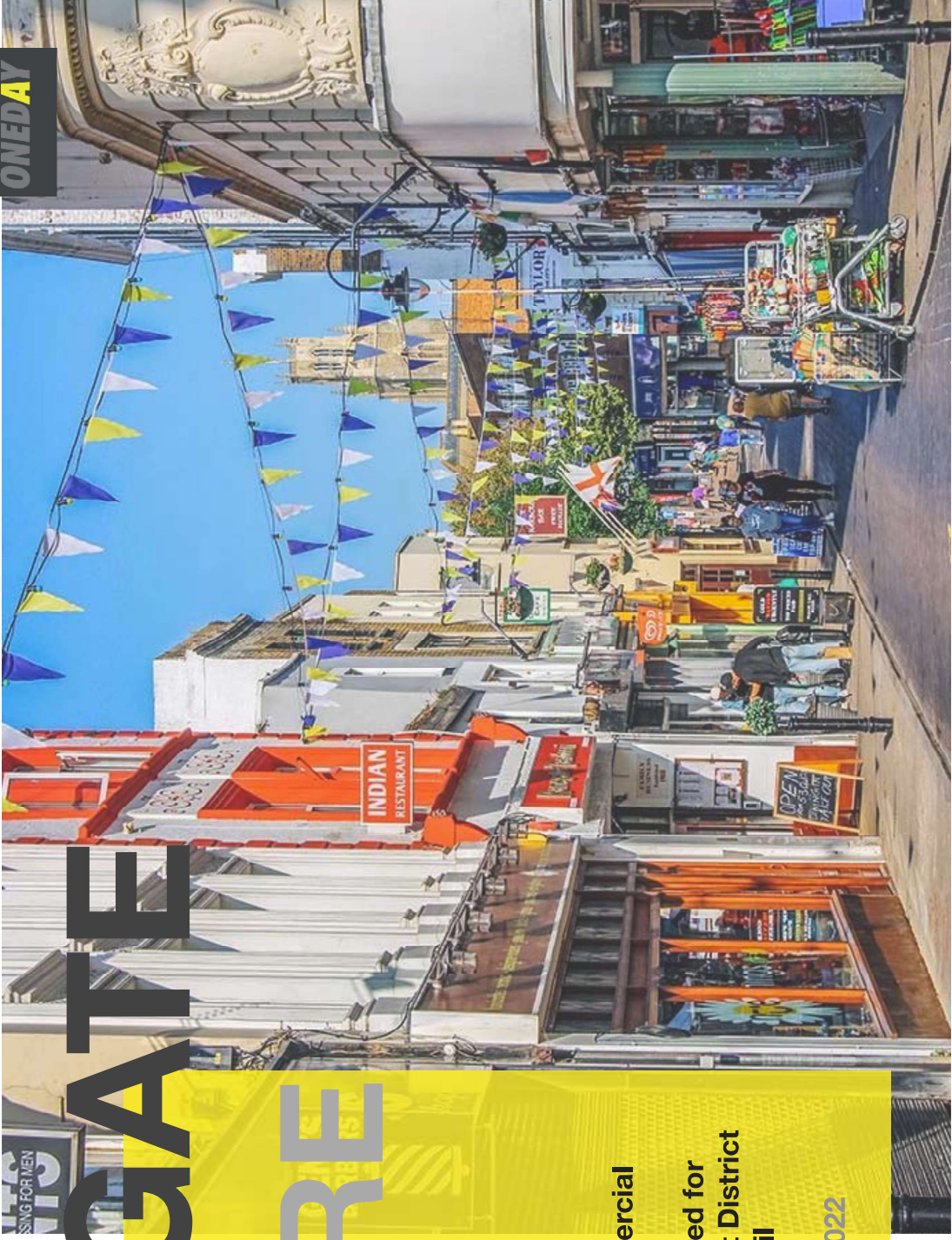


ONEDAY



RAMSGATE TOWN CENTRE

Commercial
Study
Prepared for
Thanet District
Council

April 2022



Historic England

CONTENTS

Introduction	02
Insight	05
Market Review & Vacant Units	13
Conclusion & Recommendations	18
Appendix	27

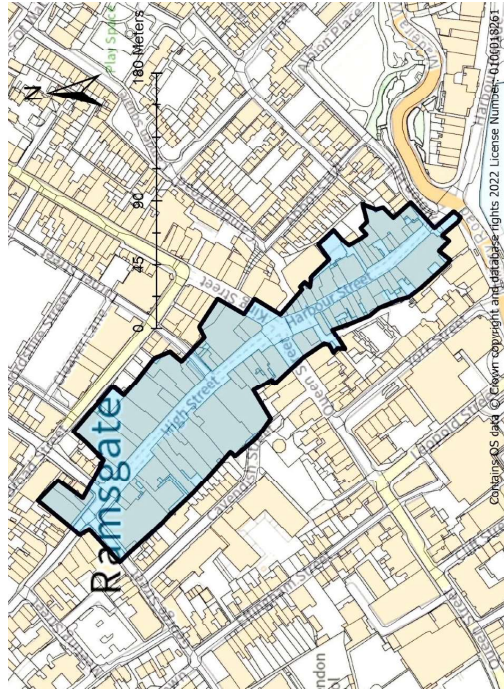
Introduction

Historic England has designated part of Ramsgate Town Centre as a High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) including Harbour Street and the Lower High Street. The HSHAZ aims to revitalise the historic high street with a project that combines capital works, including the repair and reuse of vacant buildings, community engagement and cultural activities. Thanet District Council has been awarded funding to support this and also for community activities that will form part of a Cultural Programme from 2022 to March 2024.

Thanet District Council (TDC) appointed Oneday to carry out a commercial study of Ramsgate Town Centre to support the delivery of Ramsgate's HSHAZ and to provide evidence-based recommendations on uses and opportunities for the area which includes the surrounding streets which comprise Ramsgate Town Centre.

The project aims were to review the current situation, identify the gaps and to join up the long list of projects already proposed, under discussion or yet to be scoped to develop a clear way forward for the HSHAZ.

The Ramsgate High Street Heritage Action Zone area is shown on the map below and more information is available on [Historic England's website](https://www.oneday.co.uk).



Ramsgate High Street Heritage Action Zone

Activities include:

Harbour Street Shop Fronts and Façades

Early 2022 - March 2024

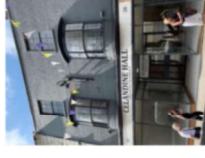
- Shop front and commercial frontage repair grant scheme
- Part-funding available for local property owners and businesses to restore historical shop fronts and improve façades
- Contribute to a shop front and frontage design guide for Ramsgate

Empty Property

Late 2019 - September 2021

- Bringing empty floor-space back into use

Completed



Development & Marketing

Early 2022 - March 2024

- Town Centre study to review current and future uses/design of the High Street area
- Connecting with landlords and agents to work towards sustainable use of empty shop units on the High Street
- Re-imagining the High Street and its future in Ramsgate

Community Engagement

Early 2022 - March 2024

- Funding for community engagement activities
- Funding for events related to the Historic High Street
- Support the development of local groups, including a 'Cultural Consortium' to represent local interests
- Other community initiatives

Image: <https://www.tbpanel.gov.uk/campaigns/ramsgate-future/?tab=5>

The image above shows a snapshot of the main components of the HSHAZ project.

The project took place during March and April 2022 and included engagement with key stakeholders, a review of existing frameworks and plans and a review of the town centre incorporating best practice from the High Streets Task Force (HSTF). The main component of the project was to carry out a detailed market assessment to include a high level gap analysis which considers the future offer of the high street, available (vacant) property and recommendations for how these may be brought back into use.

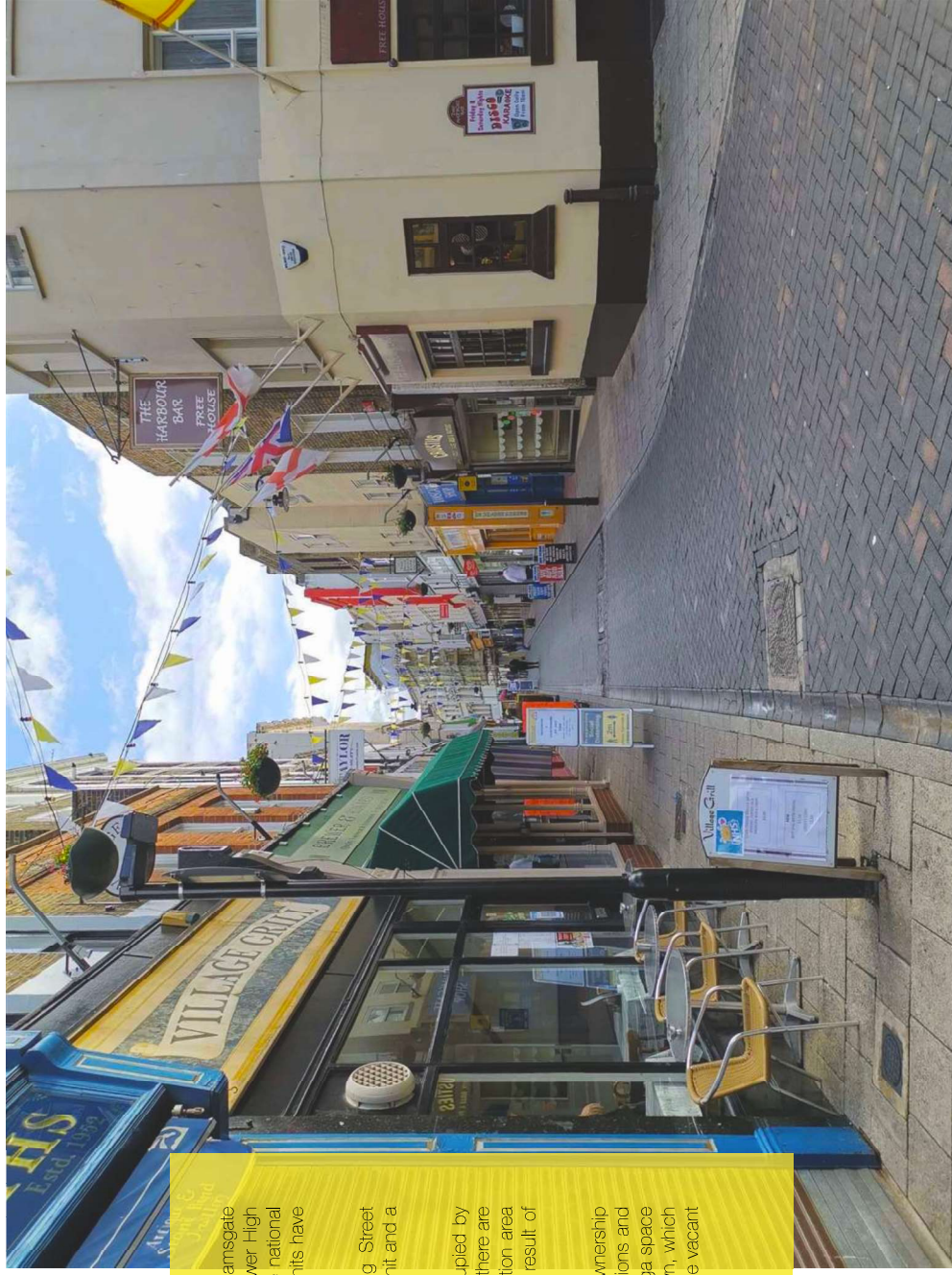
Town Centre Overview

Despite the development of out-of-town retail centres and the growth of online shopping, Ramsgate retains a recognisable, if rundown, town centre still used by the local population. The Lower High Street area is fronted, in the main, by deep-plan retail outlets designed to accommodate national multiples. Some of these floor plates are in the region of 1,000 sqm and many of these units have long-established rear vehicular accesses.

The Cross, where the High Street and Harbour Street meet Queen Street and King Street represents the historic centre of the town and houses two banks, a vacant former bank unit and a Timpson.

The Harbour Street area also has retail frontages. These smaller units are generally occupied by independent outlets. The street is dominated by rundown or inappropriate shop fronts and there are long-standing vacancies in several of the larger units. The HSHAZ sits within a conservation area that is deemed 'at risk' because the buildings' are of diminished historic character as a result of previous alterations.

The impact of the pandemic on retail over the past two years has seen movement in the ownership and development of a number of the buildings along Harbour Street, with several conversions and refurbishments now underway. A number of new businesses have opened including a yoga space and cafe, as well as the introduction of several studios and pop-up spaces across the town, which clearly shows there is still appetite from independents to realise the potential of some of the vacant units in the town centre.



What We Did

To meet the requirements of the project we carried out a five-stage process which included:

1. **Project Inception:** clarification of the brief, communication channels, project timescales, milestones, stakeholder lists and project deliverables.
2. **Insight Review:** familiarisation with current activities and sites which could have an impact on the future experience for visitors and businesses. Tasks included identifying relevant case studies; asset and stakeholder mapping and policy review.
3. **Site Assessment:** assessments of the public realm and built environment in the form of an end-to-end customer journey analysis to provide a complete report for the town centres. The assessment included everything from public realm and the associated infrastructure (e.g. benches, litter bins) through to the landscape features, accessibility and the wider streetscape.
4. **Engagement:** during this process we engaged a range of people from the Ramsgate community.
5. **Report and Recommendations:** this final report to include a detailed town 'scorecard' and outputs; recommendations including short, medium and long term actions.



The Oneday Assessment Team consisted of Diane Cunningham, Matt Bell, Chloe Purcell and Matt Roche.

Diane Cunningham: a High Streets, Pop-ups and Markets development expert with 15 years' experience across the UK. **Matt Bell:** experience has been gained within the retail, commercial and property sectors specialising in the creation of commercialisation and placemaking concepts and strategies

Chloe Purcell: has a background in architecture and the stakeholder and community engagement required to shape and visualise a vision and concept around the strengths and needs of a place

Matt Roche: over 20 years experience in developing customer and user led strategies, across multiple sectors including: retail, transport, sports and financial services

INSIGHT

Strategic Context

Three main towns form the largest centres in Thanet, these being Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs. Despite the towns being their own entities, the district – Isle of Thanet – is small meaning the economies of the towns are interrelated from people owning businesses or working in one and living in another in one trip, therefore they can not be viewed in isolation.

Margate's revival as an arts and culture-led seaside town is proving successful attracting day visitors, holiday makers and people moving from London to start businesses and/or commute. Margate's circumstances changed with the opening of the Turner Contemporary Gallery in 2011.

Broadstairs is an historic seaside town that continues to offer a family-friendly traditional seaside experience with a strong connection to Charles Dickens and a busy programme of events taking place throughout the year. Ramsgate is perhaps the least known of the three towns. Despite its strong heritage, the only Royal Harbour in the UK and a great deal of maritime and wartime history, it is often in the shadow of its neighbours. While it suffers from similar levels of deprivation to Margate, these have remained unchanged in Ramsgate over the past ten years while Margate has seen some reduction. Ramsgate's town centre appears to struggle with its purpose and positioning within Thanet, which contrasts with the popularity of the Harbour area and beaches.

Ramsgate's population is approximately 40,000 and it is home to 1,665 businesses which are mostly micro enterprises offering limited employment opportunities. As previously outlined, several new businesses have opened as Covid-19 reopening/recovery continues which is driven in part by more people moving to Ramsgate from London which is changing the high street offer.

All three towns benefited from the HS1 train line in 2009, with Ramsgate boasting the shortest journey time of the three Thanet towns via Ashford to St Pancras.



Ramsgate Framework

Several frameworks and town centre plans are in place and these provide a useful context to the commercial review and these are supported by secured funding for Ramsgate and the key projects identified under each (as shown below).

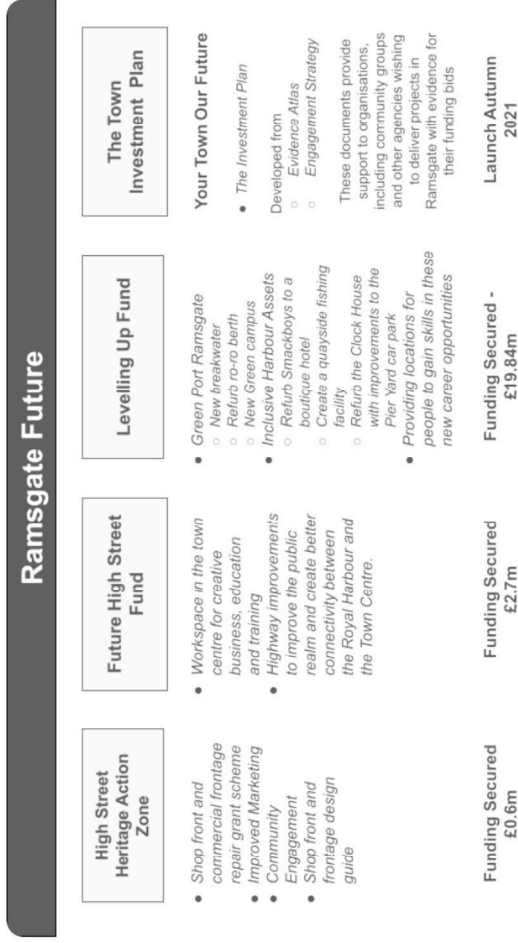


Image: www.ihaneit.gov.uk/campaigns/ramsgate-future

Town Investment Plan

We Made That were commissioned to create a Town Investment Plan for Ramsgate to provide context and planning on the funding awarded to date including the way that Levelling Up Fund money will be spent, and to direct future investment. This was published in January 2022 and focuses on the funding secured as shown in the image on the left.

The Investment Plan shows that the visitor economy is growing (spend has increased by 40% since 2013) but that Ramsgate continues to hold less appeal than Broadstairs and Margate. The council's Visitor Insight data shows that between January 2021 and January 2022 visitor numbers increased by 61% year-on-year although, in line with other places, they are still below 2019 (pre-Covid) levels. People visit 2.5 places on the high street when visiting which is in line with benchmarked data and supports the functionality of the long-term businesses in the town centre including a butcher, greengrocers etc. Dwell time remains unchanged despite the opening of new cafes and children's activity centres which may not yet be reflected in the data.

Ramsgate Conservation Area Appraisal

Ramsgate is home to two Heritage Action Zones (since 2017, with further designation added in 2020) and two conservation areas. The Conservation Area is of historic and architectural interest both as a coastal resort town and a working harbour.

Many buildings in the conservation area are not listed but share similar period details which can make it difficult to argue for their protection or to restrict types of use or demolition. There are also well documented issues with traffic (volume and parking), street clutter, maintenance of the public realm, temporary hoardings and poor building maintenance.

Development opportunities have been identified for the Clock House, Royal Pavilion (ground floor), Ice House, Gunpowder Store, Military Road and Royal Parade Arches and Tide Ball; however, many of these are outside the HSHAZ area for this project.

Proposals are included to reduce carbon emissions and to adapt existing buildings to reduce the impact of climate change with solutions offered for retrofitting period properties and external adaptations to buildings to counteract changing weather patterns and work towards carbon reduction.

Consultation took place on the Conservation Area Appraisal before it was approved by the council in April 2022. Comments included that:

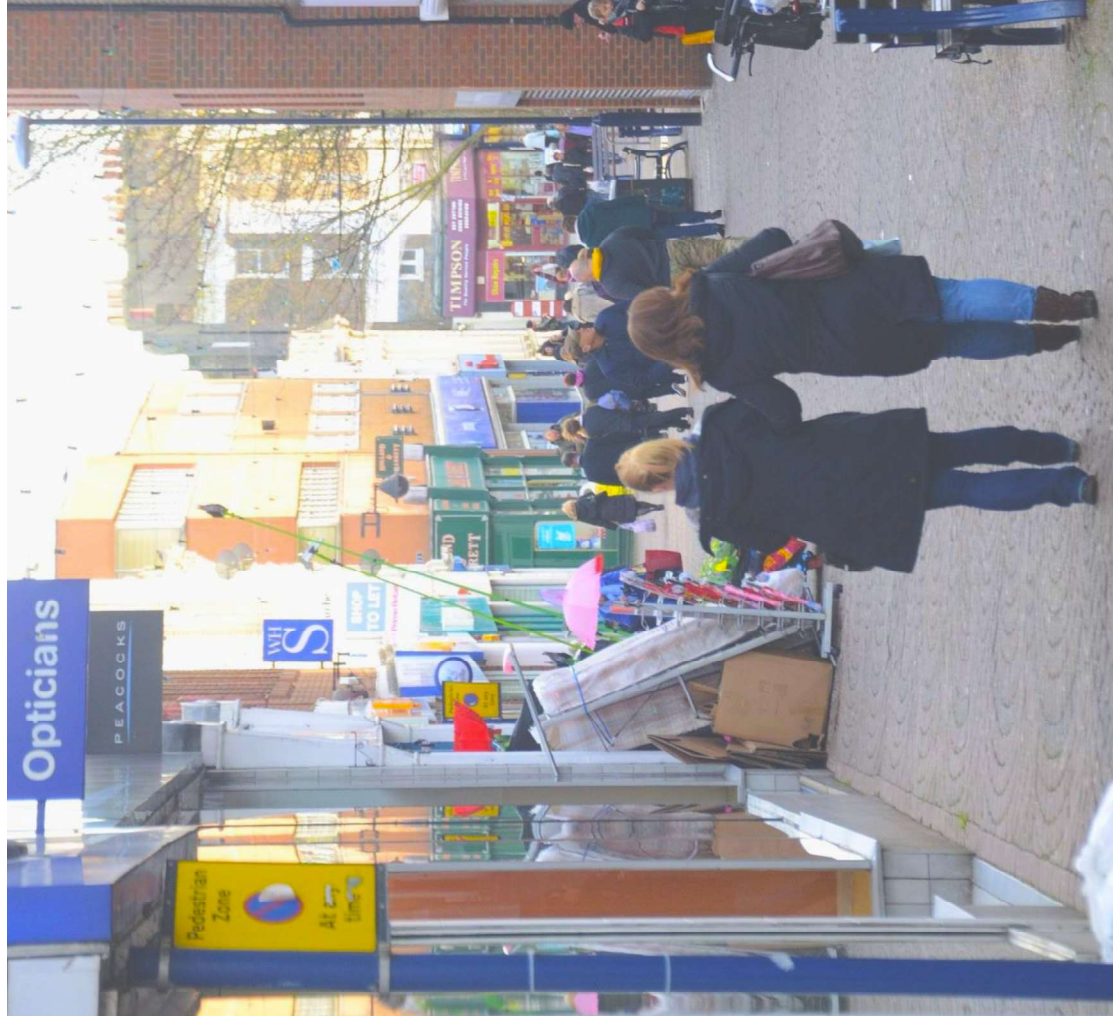
- Enforcement would be difficult due to lack of resource in the planning department (and in terms of the council and conservation officer) and there were suggestions that additional resources are needed to be bought in (for five years)
- A dedicated resource should be based in the town working with both district and town councils to deliver a Conservation Action Plan with an action oriented Task Force running alongside it with heritage, fundraising, enforcement and skills training capacity
- Ramsgate could be a test bed for conservation area and heritage asset management offering practical lessons and guidance for less prosperous, heritage-rich places
- A strong link should be established between conservation and climate change, ensuring buildings are fit for purpose while offering cost effective interventions to sustain them
- There is a lack of awareness on the 'right way to do things' when it comes to refurbishment options for heritage properties. This is related to the availability of guidance materials to help property owners in the form of a digital or physical presence to find information
- A low traffic zone be considered as a contributor to reducing climate change
- The public realm be adapted to create resilient cool spaces
- Heritage buildings be accessible for disabled people

The appraisal identifies many significant heritage assets which date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and place Ramsgate as a town of significant national interest in relation to this era of its heritage. In addition, there are many buildings in the conservation area which whilst they are not listed, add to the high quality of the streets in the conservation area.

Future High Street Fund

Consultation was undertaken to support Ramsgate's Future High Street Fund proposals. While the proposals focus on highway improvements and workspace, there were several comments related to the town centre with the key themes including:

- Vacant properties
- Antisocial behaviour
- Public realm
- Vehicle movements between the town centre and the harbour (and within the area controlled by the traffic gate)
- Seating



SWOT Analysis

Using findings from our town visit and background reports, we have included a SWOT analysis highlighting the areas of importance to Ramsgate Town Centre. Along with this page 13 shows the Oneday scorecard which is completed pre, during and post visit to show the areas of places where they are performing well and those that can be improved.



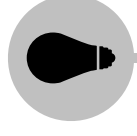
Strengths

- An important history, the only Royal Harbour and numerous conservation areas plus two heritage zones
- New businesses are opening (and of mixed use not retail dominated)
- An innovative and engaged community
- Funding secured
- Movement amongst vacant units
- Cultural Consortium plans in place with buy-in
- Consistent focus from the council - jobs, skills and housing - despite changing political landscape
- Progress being made around the built environment protections with a Shop Front Design Guide proposed for development, and the Conservation Area Appraisal recently approved



Weaknesses

- Visitor accommodation and food and beverage offer is lacking in the town centre
- Long-term health deprivation is poor
- Large areas of the town centre are allocated to cars and car parks contributing to poor walking and cycling provision
- Vacant buildings continue to impact on the town's vibrancy and highlight missed opportunities
- Low attainment levels in relation to qualifications and access to job opportunities and training
- Lack of enforcement on heritage buildings (coupled with a lack of accessible information for new property owners and existing policies against which to enforce (to date)
- Poor quality public realm and cycle and walking routes through the town and along the harbour
- Limited night time economy
- No formal business group eg. BID, Chamber etc
- Low numbers of start-up businesses
- Lack of engagement with young people potentially contributing to ASB
- Limited football monitoring or access to high speed WiFi in the town centre for co-working or to attract people to cafes



Opportunities

- Heritage streetscape and Royal Harbour
- HS1 connection and local transport links
- New residents and businesses bringing fresh thinking
- Increased home working post-pandemic
- Evening economy
- Funding secured and projects this is enabling
- Creative and cultural community
- Coastal location and beach - tourism markets



Threats

- The wider economy is dependent on hospitality, health and education sectors
- Dwell time remains static
- Commercial space remains more expensive than elsewhere in the borough and there is limited affordable, flexible workspace
- Local 'noise' vocalising criticism of the council could prevent buy-in on some proposals
- No sense of place from arrival by train to reaching the harbour and navigating the town centre leading to a lack of activity on the high street to encourage people to walk up from the harbour and down from the train station
- Lack of identity in town centre - what does Ramsgate offer, particularly when compared to other towns in Thanet?
- Thanet District Council does not own any town centre assets and therefore has limited ability to directly control uses

Vital and Viable Places

Government planning policy for town centres has referred to vitality and viability since 1993, however with the structural changes in retail, the financial crash, changing consumer behaviour and COVID-19 it is timely for this to be given further focus by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) and the High Streets Task Force (HSTF).

In 2014, IPM identified 201 factors that influence the vitality (reasons for people to visit) and viability (attractive to visitors and investors longer term) of places. In 2019, the IPM updated this work for HSTF identifying new factors and further honing the root of success (or failure) in places.

These 237 factors could influence the decision making of local place leaders and partnerships, however, how much influence each factor has on the vitality and viability of town centres/high streets will vary from place to place and in relation to the key stakeholders and leadership.

To provide a usable model for places to audit themselves, the High Streets Task Force has identified the Top 25 Priorities that local place leaders should be focusing on in their plans to create places that meet the needs of their users. Adding a dose of reality to even this reduced group of factors, place leaders must consider how much control they have over them to be able to achieve change. The 25 factors and more information can be found on the HSTF [website](#).

Our review highlights the key factors influencing Ramsgate Town Centre as shown.

HSTF factor	Component factor	Relevance for Ramsgate
Activity	Opening hours, footfall, shopping hours, evening economy	Night time economy
Adaptability	Retail flexibility, retail fragmentation, flexibility, store/centre design, retail unit size, store development, rents turnover	Many of the vacant units are large meaning more thinking is required as to how they can be adapted for new uses
Anchors	Presence of anchors - which give places their basic character and signify importance	No anchor building, offer or compelling reason to visit the town centre
Appearance	Visual appearance, cleanliness, ground floor frontages	The deteriorating historic buildings contribute to a run down atmosphere in the town centre
Barriers	Barriers to entry	Access to grant funds for property purchase or council policy to purchase property
Diversity	Range/quality of shops; tenant mix and variety; availability of alternative formats; store characteristics; comparison/convenience; chain vs independent; supermarket impact; retail diversity and choice	There are few clothes shops given recent closures, there are big name supermarkets but less independents offering a lack of choice across the town centre
Functionality and Non retail offer	The degree to which a centre fulfils a role - e.g. service centre, employment, residential or tourist centre, attractions, entertainment, non-retail offer, leisure offer	The centre is still dominated by retail - in use and vacant retail buildings. While new functionality is appearing with a yoga studio and children's centre more planning is needed around what else could work
Innovation	Opportunities to experiment, retail innovation	Pop-ups and temporary activation is extremely limited
Markets	Traditional markets, street trading	Historically, Ramsgate has had a market focused 'The Cross' and this could be a welcome addition to activating the town centre once again

Stakeholder Engagement

The project engaged with representatives from Historic England, Thanet District Council, Ramsgate Town Council and commercial letting agents. Appendix 1 shows who took part.

In discussions, it was clear that there are many reasons why the town centre has struggled to maintain its historic buildings and to bring them back into use, which include access to landlords, accessible information for prospective purchasers or business owners (prior to taking on premises) as to how to care for historic buildings and a lack of a design guide to enforce standards once changes are carried out. There is also a sense that once the buildings fall out of use they degrade and interest in them wanes. When they become boarded up there is a risk of them being squatted and they become even less visible in terms of reletting.

However, there have been some successful restorations. The Albion Hotel which has recently been refurbished whilst respecting the building's heritage, 'Wetherspoons' Royal Victoria Pavilion which reopened in 2018 and brought a derelict building back into use, The Royal Harbour Hotel which has recently added new windows in the heritage style and Madeira Walk and Albion Gardens where the long awaited Pulhamite repairs and refurbishment took place. Given the success of these refurbishments, there is a feeling that this has increased an understanding of the heritage in Ramsgate.

The Council is keen to work with owners to get the balance right on changes versus restoration and there is an option to hide the historic features if they cannot serve a purpose in the business, thereby preserving them. Where the historic features do not exist, the council are not insistent that they be reinstated and they are open to modern alternatives or something different altogether. Despite this, some property owners decide it's too difficult to deal with a heritage building and leave it empty or sell it on.

There is also often limited contact with owners or landlords outside of the planning application process. There are a number of active groups in Ramsgate including the Ramsgate Heritage Design Forum who would be happy to advise people informally on their application but this doesn't happen. If there is no formal application for change of use or development, then there is no contact between the owner/landlord and the Council's Planning Team at all.

Suggestions from this engagement included:

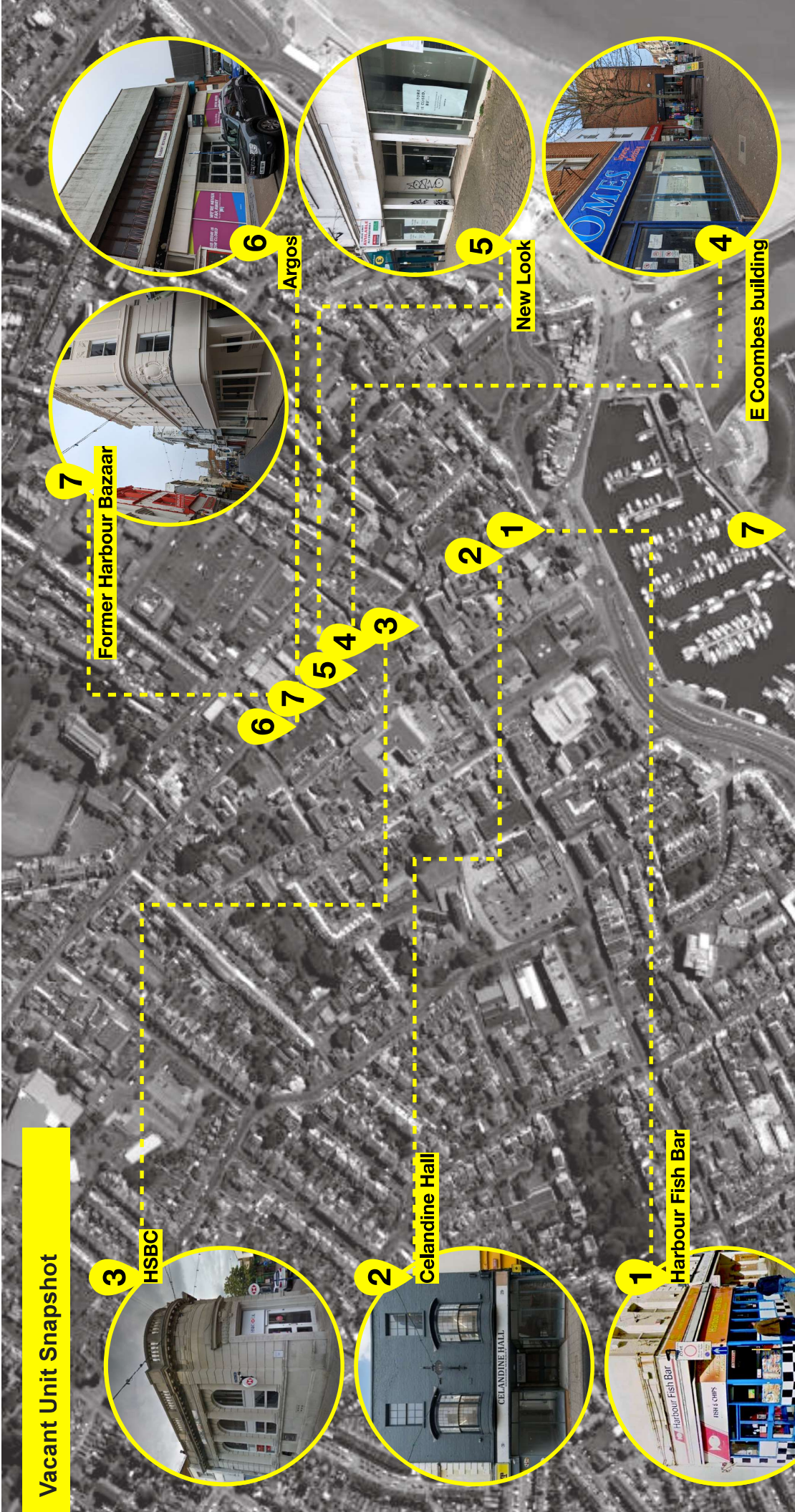
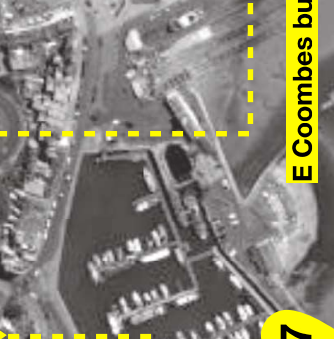
- Improving shop fronts via a Shop Front Design Guide (under consideration)
- Enforcing on changes to heritage building but there is currently not enough resource to do so (and the Conservation Area Appraisal has only just been approved)
- Updating the council's website to include FAQs on owning historic buildings or living in a conservation area to ensure information is accessible up front - this could be supported by a physical presence in the town centre (and via a leaflet)
- Holding a market in the town centre
- Removing the BT phone boxes which attract anti social behaviour
- Restoring town centre frontages and considering appropriate bin storage on Cavendish Street (and in areas where there are HMCOs) in keeping with the HSHAZ
- Restoring the two buildings at 70-76 High Street
- Addressing climate change by encouraging retrofitting buildings to improve their carbon footprint whilst retaining their aesthetic look, installing more electric vehicle charging points and encouraging active travel.
- Developing a night time economy
- Establishing a consistency on heritage street furniture: streetlights, bollards on significant heritage streets
- Creating a centre/more facilities for young people
- Adding more social spaces to the town centre, whether leisure or entertainment.

Scorecard

Scorecard: Ramsgate	Criteria	Score (1-5)	Comments
Pre-Visit	Info finding/fact finding	4	Visit Ramsgate website is good and highlights everything to do. Ramsgate is also included on the Visit Thanet and Visit Kent sites too. RamsgateTown.org is the Town Council's website which is a little dated compared to the other Visit.com sites however it uses the tagline of 'Kent's Coastal Heritage Town' which is the only online place in which we saw any attempts at branding Ramsgate. Results from a Google search offer approx. 14m for Ramsgate compared with 36m for Margate.
Inbound/Return Travel	Inbound/Outbound Travel	4	Train links are excellent with fast and frequent services on HS1 (and slower services) from London and across Kent. The train station and train on the outbound venue had ASB happening which some people could find intimidating.
	Car parking - availability, signage, condition, cost etc.	3	Comments made during the Future High Street Fund Consultation focused on a lack of parking and therefore vehicles driving around the town centre looking for spaces. The main car park closes at 7pm.
	Bus & Rail routes and frequency	4	Excellent. Locally there are frequent bus services via The Loop services (every 8-10 mins) connecting to the other two towns in Thanet (Margate and Broadstairs)
	Active travel and cycling infrastructure	3	Limited - despite being promoted as a cycling destination there is currently a lack of infrastructure. Traffic appears to be prioritised over walking, cycling and public transport. Hills and steps in places limit those with mobility issues.
	Points of arrival/departure and the 'welcome'	2	Poor welcome from the train station with no sense of arrival or clear signage to direct visitors to the town centre and harbour
Town Experience:	Public realm and the associated infrastructure (e.g. benches, litter bins)	3	Worn down and tired. A lot of the town centre is dated and grey particularly around paving etc.
	Landscape features (including trees) and Parks	2	Hard landscaping, mostly concrete. Very few trees, no green space in the centre. Ellington Park is located on the edge of town (15 mins walk) and has recently been the recipient of £2m funding.
	Overall cleanliness	2	Scruffy and grubby streets (see public realm re grey theme). Beach is attractive and sandy (a lot of the south east is pebble beaches)
	Perceptions of safety	3	Town centre atmosphere changed as shops closed around 5pm and the (traffic) gate was opened to allow vehicle access. It felt that ASB was more likely. See comments on inbound/outbound
	Offer	3	Poor. Some of the offer is functional - greengrocers etc. (good) but few clothes shop and limited non-retail offer although this is a growing sector with the yoga café etc. There is limited clustering of offer within the individual streets. Very limited night time economy and cultural offer.
Total score	Markets & Trading Places	2	Markets have not reopened since Covid-19 lockdown (2020). Vacant units are large and are unlikely to lend themselves to small scale trading without adaptation.
	Wider streetscape (e.g. condition of buildings / shop frontages etc)	3	Shop fronts contain some historic features and legacy signage, others have long been lost and replaced with generic ones.
	Accessibility and wayfinding	2	Poor. There is limited signage to connect the train station with the town centre and the harbour
Total score:	Total Score:	40	57% Adequate with significant potential to improve

MARKET REVIEW & VACANT UNITS

Vacant Unit Snapshot



Market Review and Vacant Units

From our engagement with the Town Council and the Senior Conservation Officer it is clear that the town centre has had a mixed experience in relation to maintaining its historic buildings.

Successful refurbishments across the wider town centre area include the vacant building at 22-24 Harbour Street was derelict and has since been sold. The new owner has carried out extensive works to open up the space and make repairs meaning the space now appeals to more people. They have also converted the flats above, bringing residential back into the town centre and they are currently for sale on the open market.

Unit	Ref No.	Impact	Status
Harbour Fish Bar	1	Key gateway site in state of poor repair and tenant poor (currently closed due to food hygiene issues)	Planning to reopen after internal repairs. Leaseholder keen to reopen as soon as possible
Celandine Hall	2	Historic England and landlord have been working together to improve building	About to go under offer
HSBC	3	Closed in September 21	About to go under offer. Advertised for remainder of existing lease to 2024
E Coombes building	4	Eyesore unit left in poor state of repair in key location	Owner had forgotten part of their portfolio and in process of being reengaged
New Look	5	Key sites both closed during covid with remaining leases to expire	Existing New Look lease in place until 2027. Attempts to view the property unsuccessful
Argos	6		No interest from either landlord to market until leases expire and would require significant drops in rental value
EE Shop	7	Empty unit near the centre of the high street	Assignment of current lease advertised. Likely to remain empty until lease ends

Overall many of Ramsgate's vacant units are either being redeveloped or relet. Within the pedestrian area of the town centre there are approximately 90 businesses and vacant properties have reduced. In the High Street there are approximately 35 buildings. As recently as eight-months ago there were 11 closed/vacant but this has now reduced to 5.

The exceptions being the largest units, in particular New Look and Argos. With the decline in the chain retail market and current leases in place with the former tenants these units are likely to remain vacant. There is market demand for these units potentially from the value retailers absent from the town e.g. Home Bargains and B&M however, these retailers are present in the out-of-town Westwood Cross shopping area and therefore alternative uses should be considered to address the shortage of alternative uses such as culture and leisure.

From our study it was also apparent that the location and adjacencies of units are not consistent. Over time work is required to theme areas and cluster complementary uses to shape a coherent offer.

Market Review

Local Trends

During our site visit we witnessed few vacancies overall. Those that do exist are in general either large hard to fill units or clustered in the Harbour Street area. There is clear evidence of significant new openings such as Union Yoga + Cafe and Kids Brighthouse. These new openings are predominantly independent and located within units under £15,000pa. The exception being the children's play centres who have taken larger units.

This evidence was supported by the feedback we received during our consultations with traders, leasing agents and stakeholders. There is currently strong interest driven by businesses established during the pandemic and this includes deals nearing completion for two of the key vacant units Celandine Hall and the former HSBC bank.

It should be noted that Ramsgate benefits from very proactive commercial agencies including Lovett's and Miles & Barr. Their offices have been actively targeting landlords to attract them to list their units and then successfully matching them to new occupiers. In the case of the remaining units more significant enforcement and intervention will be required. Although the local agents have made attempts to bring these properties to the market they remain under lease by their previous tenants and marketed by national agencies. In these cases the landlords will have little incentive to break the current lease and then take the write down on the asset value that would be required to re-let them.

National Trends

The commercial markets have seen significant disruption and uncertainty since 2020, with challenges facing all commercial sectors such as office space, leisure and hospitality, as well as traditional retail.

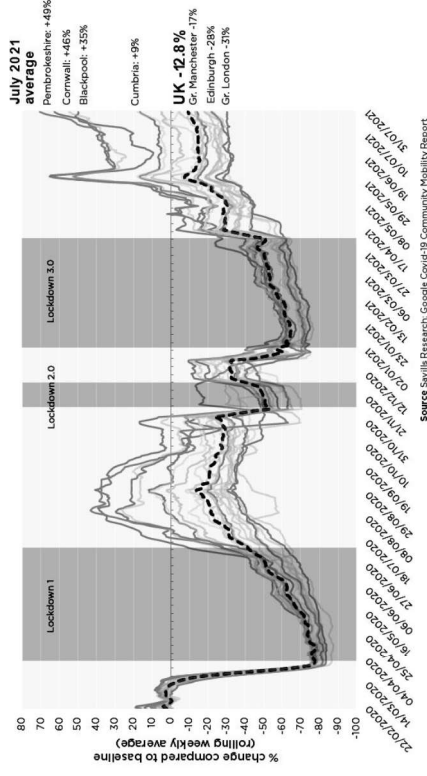
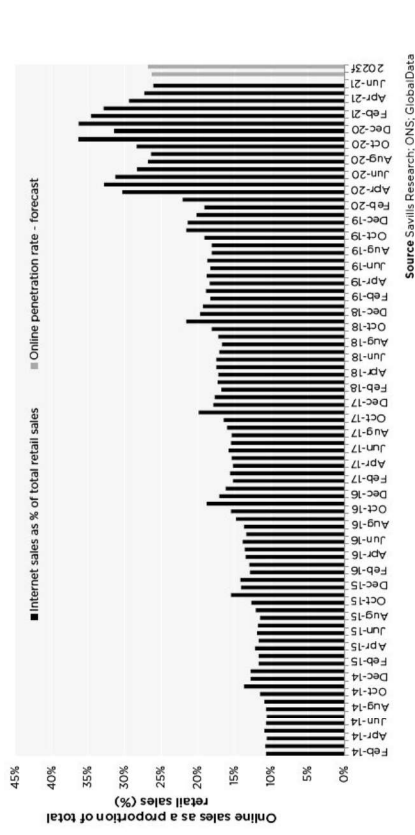
According to research by Savills, rental yields for high street retail space have softened slightly since 2021, but not as significantly as one might expect, given the experience over the last two years during the pandemic and the continuing increase in online retail.

Despite the expected growth in online retail, Savills forecast that demand for online retail will soften in the coming years after the recent spike as a consequence of Covid-19, as consumers continue to return to the high streets and experience retail and leisure, therefore maintaining demand in town centres.

The chart adjacent shows online sales as a proportion of total retail sales and demonstrates the reduced online sales penetration post-lockdown, albeit remaining above pre-Covid levels.

In addition to the expected demand for retail and hospitality, Savills highlighted the growth in footfall is being led by domestic leisure attraction and destination towns, in comparison to city centres, enabling places like Ramsgate to potentially benefit from leisure led consumers

The second graph shows Google mobility data suggests the recovery to footfall is once again being steered by leisure-led domestic holiday destinations while larger city recovery trails behind.



Supply & Demand

Supply

The table below summarises the current vacancy levels on each of the main streets within the town centre (as of April 2022):

Street	Occupied Units	Vacant Units	Percentage
Harbour St	32	12	37%
High Street	30	5	14%
King Street	11	2	15%
Queen Street	15	1	12%
Total:	76	20	20%

The UK average for vacant units stands at 14.4%, the majority of Ramsgate's streets echo this trend with the exception of Harbour Street. It should be noted however that the majority of these units are either in the process of refurbishment or repair which would hopefully indicate that this figure will reduce significantly in the near future as a result of the investments being made currently.

The table below contains the current rents quoted for the main vacant units within the town centre.

Unit	Address	Sqft	ERV	Agent	Current Status
Former Argos	58 High Street	8844	£77,800	Adison Young	Vacant
Celandine Hall	Harbour Street	7,400	£65,000	Miles & Barr	Offer being prepared
New Look	20-24 High Street	16,917	£55,000	Clarke Crittenden	Vacant
E Coomes	28 High Street	Not found	For Sale £368,000	Lovetts	Unmarketed
HSBC Bank	King Street		£77,000	CBRE	Offer being prepared

Demand

Demand for units currently comes from independent operators. These are looking for units of under 1500 sq ft or £15,000 pa. There are now few of these in the Town at present therefore the opportunity to create smaller units by reconfiguring larger vacant ones.

By doing this however the opportunity to create a hub or larger space to bring people together would be lost. The agents we spoke to also noted the low demand for evening related occupiers. It should also be noted that occupiers are potentially outgrowing their space already but have locked into long term leases up to 15 years.

Boots, WHSmith and Poundland represent the largest remaining multiples in the Town. The Poundland store was the only unit trading past 6 pm which indicates it is trading well and a view supported by a conversation with the store team. Boots and WHSmith are however both carrying out large scale consolidations of their portfolios as leases expire.

Benchmarking

We identified Hastings as a comparator being a secondary seaside town which has experienced similar cycles of change to Ramsgate.

Key Vacant Units - Hastings

Unit	Address	Sq ft	ERV	Agent	Current Status
Queen's Arcade	Queens Avenue	757	£9,000	Meridian	To Let
Queen's Arcade	Queens Avenue	484	£8,000	Meridian	To Let
Money Shop	Queen's Road	665	£9,000	Meridian	To Let
Argos	Castle Street	9057	£60,000	John Norris Adams	To Let

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

While there were many comments and observations throughout the project that Ramsgate town centre is experiencing problems with historic buildings and creating a vibrant town centre, when compared with other towns it is holding up well.

The HSHAZ is bringing renewed focus to Ramsgate's heritage which should in turn improve the appearance of the town centre and make it more attractive to new occupiers. It is clear that Ramsgate is undergoing change as a result of new people (from London primarily) relocating to the area which is seeing the town centre offer adapt as new businesses open. However, it is clear that there need to be some quick wins via the HSHAZ project so that changes are visible to residents and visitors and that there is a legacy from the funding.

The town centre is currently lacking activation; from a limited night time economy to markets and temporary pop-ups and an offer that goes beyond retail. There is also a lack of way-finding, particularly linking the train station to the harbour where the town centre is located between the two.

Letting agents are doing a good job with the empty buildings and while rents are high for the wider region (as shown by Hastings ERVs and across Thanet) they remain stable and vacant units are gaining new occupiers. There is a need to intervene when buildings become empty as once the buildings fall into disrepair they are much harder to let.

There are good relationships between local stakeholders (albeit there is recognition that Thanet District Council is under-resourced), and a close connection between the three towns in the district which will support long term change.

Despite people perhaps having good intentions when it comes to purchasing property (for residential or business use) there is a lack of information about how they need to maintain and refurbish listed properties or those in a conservation area. The recently adopted Ramsgate Conservation Area Appraisal and proposed Shop Front Design Guide should go some way to filling this void but it is important that they become public facing documents that are easily accessible.

It remains unclear what Ramsgate's Town Centre offer is in terms of its appeal to residents, businesses and visitors and an improvement in the heritage of the town centre can go some way to adding to the town's appeal.

Sustainable and Net Zero Aspirations

For Ramsgate to be both economically and environmentally sustainable it needs to strike a balance between protecting the environment and supporting the local economy.

The UK retail industry is among the most important contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, contributing approximately 80% more emissions each year than all road transport in the UK combined.

Primarily, emissions come from across the retail value chain. From upstream:

- Emissions on farms and in factories
- Energy required for store operations
- Diesel to power heavy goods vehicles
- Consumer travel to and from retail destinations

And downstream:

- Energy used by customers to power purchased devices and appliances
- Energy used by businesses to operate

Town Centres therefore have an important role to play in promoting sustainability and the achievement of net zero ambitions. Coastal towns, like Ramsgate and across Thanet, face a more urgent response to climate change and the historic nature of the buildings. Flood risk and erosion are increasing threats yet this is not a topic that individual businesses in seaside towns often have a response for.

Town Centres also have a large role to play in supporting the UK Government's ambitions to reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030. We believe Town Centres can play their part in the following by influencing consumers and promoting innovative new products, processes and services:

- Green public transport, cycling and walking - shopping local and procuring local reduces car and freight journeys
- Greener buildings - achieving Net Zero from our own premises, our supply chain and promoting products that enable consumers to reduce the impact of their homes
- Protecting our natural environment - products utilising sustainable/recycled materials and reducing plastic use
- Green finance and innovation - bringing new products to market

The recently approved Conservation Area Appraisal and stakeholder engagement for the Commercial Review both conveyed that taking action to reduce the impact of climate change on the town centre is important both as a custodian of the historic buildings (with an emphasis on retrofitting) and as a town centre user in reducing traffic and increasing provision for electric vehicle charging points, walking, cycling and public transport options.

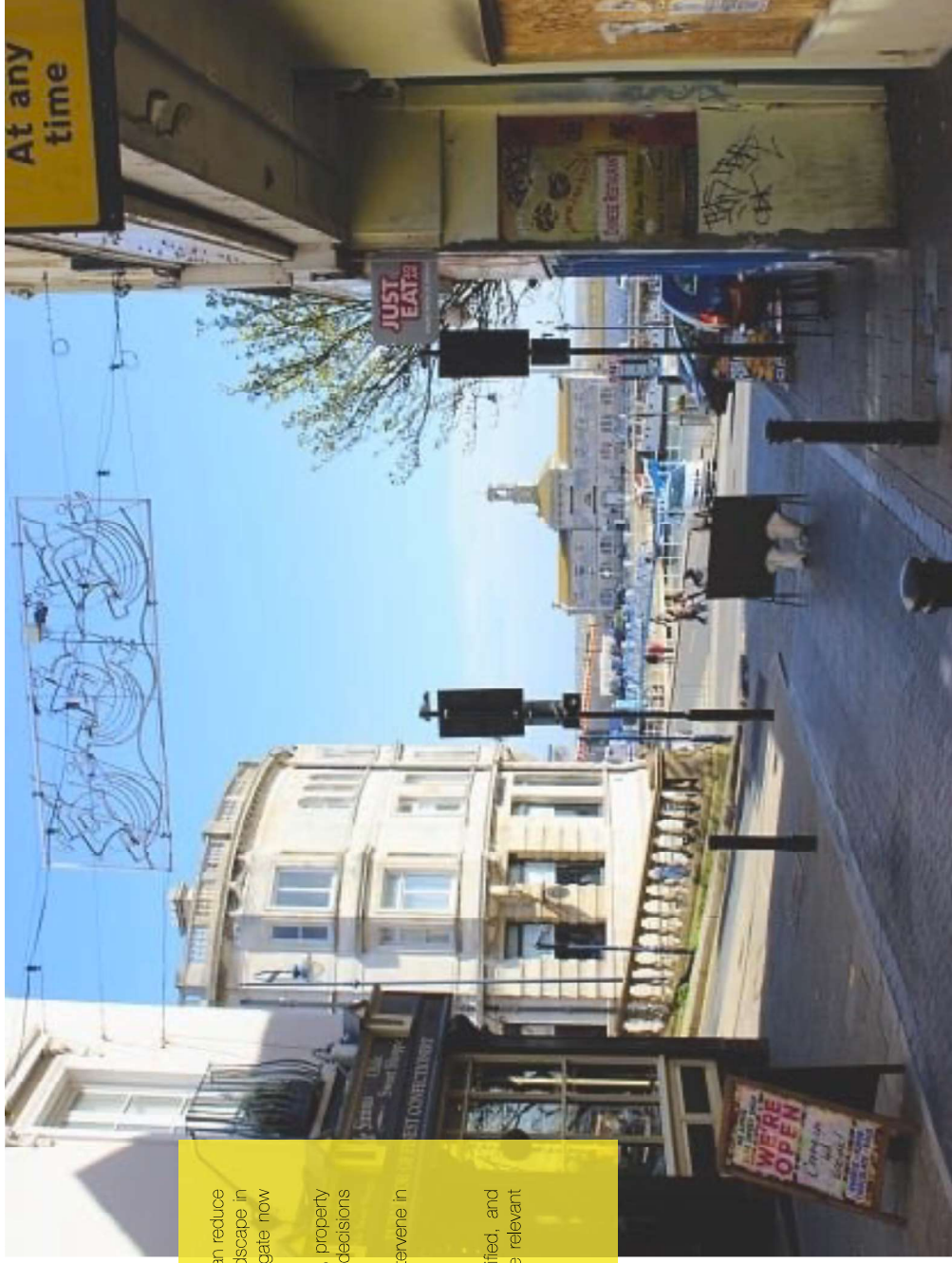
Recommendations

The project has been carried out to recommend ways in which Ramsgate Town Centre can reduce its vacant properties, identify new uses for them and to understand the commercial landscape in comparison to similar locations and against the backdrop of changes impacting Ramsgate now and in the next few years.

These recommendations have been identified to support the District and Town Councils, property agents and business and property owners and leaseholders/tenants to make informed decisions on the commercially viable and sustainable uses of the town centre's properties.

Ramsgate is changing and its key stakeholders must decide to what extent they intervene in the process or let the changes happen.

N.B. please note that funding for the following recommendations has not been identified, and associated bids and strategies for implementation would need to be developed by the relevant stakeholders.



Action Plan Suggestions

Theme	Challenge	Approach	Short Term Actions 2022 Meanwhile Use / Quick Wins	Medium Term Actions 2022-25 Strategic Direction	Long Term Actions 2025-30	Estimated Cost £-££-£££
1. Aesthetics: Welcoming New and Existing Visitors						
a. Visual appearance of Town Centre and Heritage Assets needs improvement	General appearance of Town Centre is 'scruffy'	Coordinate a plan of short term actions and interventions to improve and map current infrastructure. Develop a longer term plan and partnership approach to address in line with delivery of Future High Streets Fund. Levelling Up and HSHAZ schemes	Map current issues and develop ST intervention plan (one off glow-up) in partnership with cultural and heritage operators, in line with delivery of HSHAZ improvements scheme	Implement infrastructure required for longer term solutions eg, paintable walls, a street ranger team (cross sector)	Budget and plan to maintain and update	£ - ££
	People buying property or taking on a lease are not aware of their heritage responsibilities	Educate landlords as part of HSHAZ programme and engage in improving the Town Centre	Ensure the Conservation Area Appraisal and any future materials for example, a possible Shop Front Guide are widely promoted and shared - develop a FAQ document to support these documents which should appear online	Continue to emphasise Ramsgate's heritage and share stories of successful improvements Identify a vacant shop that could house an information kiosk to advise on heritage matters	Enforcement measure for landlords that do not engage Develop into new Tourist Information Centre offer	££ £
	The public realm is tired and dwell time remains unchanged	Significant investment required to address long term issues in particular High Street but opportunities for short term interventions to start process	Street Furniture and Public Realm Review Review the cleaning schedule for the town centre and identify areas of focus Identify small interventions e.g. project to update and brand all consumer information and signage under a new Ramsgate Identity/Branding	Repair current infrastructure Add seating to the town centre to encourage dwell time, aligned to key historic buildings Develop a programme for longer term public realm improvements and funding	Deliver full public realm improvements scheme	£££
	The historic fabric is still visible but needs to be enhanced and support the identity of the town	Ramsgate has a noticeable wealth of shop signage from all decades and typography that could be made into a unique feature	Continue to enforce and increase the resource available to do so	Create a strong vision for Ramsgate building on its heritage fabric and giving it a clear identity		££
2. Culture & Governance: Developing Effective Partnerships						
a. Raising Quality, Aspirations and Ambition	Ramsgate is experiencing a resurgence driven by inward migration and investment but lacks the infrastructure to deliver following a long period of decline and lack of investment	New and existing residents, visitors and businesses need to be engaged to shape an agreed vision for the Towns future	Co-design a 'Launchpad' place plan that secures buy-in to the Town Investment Plan and develops hard and soft infrastructure to deliver it	Deliver plan to improve and co-ordinate cultural and heritage offer. Engage with stakeholders from other successful Thanet (and wider) regeneration programmes to share their learnings	Longer Term Development Plan	££-£££

b. Lack of Co-ordination	Absence of stakeholder and governance groups to deliver change and activities. Understanding of responsibilities of Town and County Councils also unclear	Develop the Cultural Consortium and Town Team to shape a partnership approach between operators, communities and stakeholders to co-ordinate programming, promotion and the future development of Ramsgate in line with the planned new investments	Establish Cultural Consortium to develop quick win events, an identity and join up organisations. Develop Town Team to oversee longer term interventions	Consider creating a Ramsgate Launchpad (see Conwy case study) to bring together the Town Team, Cultural Consortium and Councils to deliver Place Plans and regeneration projects	Expand across county to create a network of towns each with a defined purpose and role within region	££
c. New Residents	Significant inward migration bringing in new residents but increasing cost of living e.g. housing prices	Opportunity to capitalise on increased spend and new energy/enthusiasm for Town Centre	More research required to build insight into the needs of new and existing residents to map opportunities	Create a needs assessment and strategy for each user group	Integrate into Place Plan and develop new affordable residential e.g. above shops	£-£££
d. Young People	Issues with anti social behaviour and lack of youth activities 'things to do'	Work is required to understand whether young people are being 'antisocial' or just have nothing to do or a place to go. To do this they need to be engaged with	Establish a Youth Forum	Ensure some actions are implemented to build engagement and consider allocating budget responsibility to forum to raise prominence	Current members to actively develop new members to replace them as they grow and leave	££
e. Sharing and accessing information	Limited data available to new and existing business and stakeholders	Performance data is needed to measure success of interventions, events and also trends within the town to inform future decision making	Map the current baseline for visitor numbers, etc post pandemic. Create a portal to share data e.g. footfall and visitor numbers to encourage sharing of activity and commits to drive activity and performance	Develop Town Teams capacity to manage this function	Actively use to support future decision making	£
3. Activation: Animating and Enlivening Ramsgate						
a. Spaces Underutilised	'The Cross' is the historic centre of Ramsgate yet there is no activity taking place here	Coordinating a plan to make events spaces more usable and promote increased activation. Support with coordinated trading hours, promotion and programming	Assess public and event spaces to develop a proposal for the creation of more effective event spaces	Plan and source funding for longer term interventions	Embed and develop annual events calendar	£-££
b. Sense of Place	There is no 'sense of place'	There is no 'sense of place' from the train station to the harbour	Identify initial key spots e.g. upper frontage of Harbour Street Fish and Chip Shop to lunch a 'Blank Canvas' program designating initial sites for public ideas/local artists	Work with local artists to animate the route from the railway station to the town centre and harbour	Develop Town wide scheme to animate and enliven	££-£££
c. Co-ordinated Programming	Lack of activity and co-ordination of events and programming	Establish and develop the Cultural Consortium to address the re-animation and enlivenment of the Town Centre	Continue the work of the Cultural Consortium to review the current events programme and collate existing activity and develop new that can be promoted as a consistent offer	Develop and resource an events strategy and calendar to link across the town. Engage with businesses and event organisers to develop a partnership approach for a longer-term events plan	Establish a new funding model e.g. Cultural Venture Fund to create a sustainable long term programme	£-££
d. Play	Limited opportunities to interact with heritage assets and have fun	Ramsgate has many interesting and quirky elements; the tunnels, the stairs from the beach, the lifts, etc that could be restored and programmed to add fun elements to a visit	Short term plan to use current infrastructure to make 'the everyday' more interesting	Develop and fund programme of interventions and improvements e.g. restore lifts	Develop reputation for play and fun	£-£££
e. Core Trading Hours	Majority of Town Centre closes at 17:30 and limited evening offer	Evening offer requires new uses such as cultural venues to support it e.g. a cultural hub to support existing venues	Identify new uses and reasons to stay/visit e.g. cultural hub	Fund and deliver interventions	Trial extended opening hours and monitor, consider business support available to help traders and operators establish the offer and cover staffing	£-££

4. Offer and Trading: Creating the Conditions to Support Ramsgate's Independents and Creatives		5. Meeting Places and Public Spaces: Bringing to Life the Towns Cultural, Natural and Heritage Assets		
a. Vacant Units	<p>The retail mix and lettings are changing organically due to market demand. To create a coherent offer the tenant mix and adjacencies should be actively influenced</p> <p>Meantime-activity to try, test and experiment with new uses to develop evidence base and future uses</p> <p>The retail offer is poor and diminishing further. With less reliance on retail, consideration needs to be given to understanding other offers that the town needs/could support (closed during Covid-19 pandemic)</p> <p>There is a limited night time economy with little open past 18:00</p> <p>Many new businesses are 'lockdown' start ups and lack skills and experience</p> <p>Shortage of Heritage skills</p>	<p>Continue to maintain (via the Town Council) the empty premises data to map current and likely future vacant units. Identify solutions for key vacant units</p> <p>Identify units which could be used for pop-up and other meantime / temporary use (see appendix for examples)</p> <p>Identify units where activities for young people could be provided</p> <p>Identify units where activities could take place to reduce the town's deprivation and health indices - subsidised</p> <p>Assess demand and map out potential locations to introduce entry level spaces for new businesses and start-ups e.g. Pop-up stores, shop in shops and shared retail spaces</p> <p>Carry out a full and detailed market review and feasibility study to establish concept/solution</p> <p>Commission and complete a NTE study</p> <p>Survey skills gaps and promote a peer-to-peer learning network between cultural organisations</p> <p>A feasibility study on the opportunities available to create a local training programme in heritage skills</p>	<p>Actively asset manage Town Centre to maintain quality of offer and create new co-working/making/retailing offers</p> <p>Evaluate meantime activities and establish how, based on their success, these activities can be developed/ supported to remain in the town. Identify opportunities such as new funding scheme or retail friendly loans to support new openings</p> <p>Create new enterprise spaces and a programme of support</p> <p>Post market review, agree an action plan to deliver longer term plan</p> <p>Develop cross-sector partnerships (potentially linked to Town Team) and invest in infrastructure and connectivity improvements, consider Purple Flag status</p> <p>Develop skills and business support programme</p> <p>Partner with a training provider if this programme is viable</p>	<p>£ - £££</p> <p>££-£££</p> <p>£-££</p> <p>£-££</p> <p>£££</p> <p>£-££</p>
b. Retail Offer/ Shortage of Creative and Enterprise Space	<p>Coordinating a plan to create more space for small businesses and enterprises to set up within the region and support with coordinated trading hours, promotion and programming</p> <p>Reintroduce a market to the town centre</p> <p>A successful heritage and cultural offer needs to be underpinned by a quality Night Time Economy (NTE)</p> <p>Increase skills locally (and support job creation)</p> <p>The ongoing maintenance of Ramsgate's Heritage assets requires the necessary skills - the growing creative sector represents an opportunity to develop these within this sector</p>	<p>Identify and attract operator to deliver in Celadine Hall in line with funded refurbishment</p>	<p>Use to develop new businesses, organisations and activities</p>	<p>£-££</p>
e. Develop Night Time Economy (linked to 3e core hours)	<p>Town Centre lacks space for creative, cultural and community activity or a focal point to bring people together</p>	<p>Identify and attract operator to deliver in Celadine Hall in line with funded refurbishment</p>	<p>Use to develop new businesses, organisations and activities</p>	<p>£-££</p>
e. Skill Gaps	<p>At present there are no focal points for visitors, organisations or residents. The creation of cultural hub e.g. Celadine Hall would act as a central point from which to coordinate wayfinding, programming and enterprise</p>	<p>Identify and attract operator to deliver in Celadine Hall in line with funded refurbishment</p>	<p>Use to develop new businesses, organisations and activities</p>	<p>£-££</p>

b. Underutilised Assets	Features and venues under-utilised in Town e.g. waterfront performance space	Identify all assets within the Town Centre and develop a plan to use them more to support activity that attracts visitors and improves the liveability for residents	Drive activity in the short term through Cultural Consortium Map plans for events, heritage, green and heritage assess across the Town as part of Place Plan Make quick win improvements to/purchase infrastructure and actively promote/support use e.g. barriers and gazebos	The into longer term Place Plan, develop destination management plan and marketing and promotional strategy Implement infrastructure improvements	Coordinate with longer term vision and identify for Ramsgate	£££
6. Movement and Connectivity: Connecting Assets, People and Places						
a. Connectivity between Harbour and Town Centre	Key gateways are either in a state of disrepair or unclear e.g. Harbour Street	The Town Plan and HSHAZ have identified interventions to connect cultural and heritage assets to each other and create a consistent visitor offer	Short term development of public art and building improvements as part of HSHAZ programme	Deliver projects planned to improve visitor experience and flows between assets by improving gateways and signage	Monitor and assess visitor flows and support with environment and activity programme	£££
b. Wayfinding	Wayfinding is currently not in place for any locations around the town.	While the town centre is small, there are key assets that could be highlighted and signage would increase the link between the harbour and wider area	End to end review of signage and wayfinding across the town. Identify funding (as part of HSHAZ) to add wayfinding across the town, utilising heritage references and design	Install and updated wayfinding and signage scheme including heritage interpretation	Maintain and update as required	
c. Active Travel	The steep streetscape and location of assets such as the train station create connectivity issues	Traffic issues and retrofitting are already front of mind in Ramsgate.	End to end assessment of current journeys - identify and deliver quick wins and opportunities to promote active travel	Develop active travel plan and mobility hubs to coordinate new modes e.g. scooters, on demand buses and last mile delivery	Add electric charging points and enhance cycling, walking and public transport routes as already identified in existing frameworks	
7. Vision, Identity and Purpose: What is Ramsgate Town Centre Selling and Who is it Selling it to?						
a. Lack of Place Identity	Ramsgate Town Centre lacks an identity/identified USP. As a result little is communicated at the points of arrival and it is unclear what the town's purpose is	Agree a consistent and shared message to promote assets and the wider Town online and offline. This requires agreement on the overall vision for the future of the town as part of the Place Plan and current investment plan	Develop a place identity and co-ordinated promotion of Ramsgate to promote strengths including cultural and heritage offer	Establish place branding and expand	Secure investment for longer term public realm and infrastructure improvements	£££
b. Lack of sense of arrival			Map gateways and engage community to make short term interventions at key gateway e.g. trail from rail station	Implement MT Improvements e.g. art installations and link to Cultural Consortium		£££
c. Purpose			Consider if the town can fulfil more of a civic role with relocation of services and functions by TDC and the Town Council	Assess viability of civic hub	Deliver relocation of functions and services if deemed viable	£££
d. Communicating Offer (Online/Offline)	The current offer is promoted well online but this does not connect with the experience you get when visiting		Investigate opportunities to use play as the theme for the town and use its many quirky assets and creative industries	Develop Concept	Explore how the town can become a benchmark for restoring heritage and bringing it back into relevant new uses	££
e. Delivering Investment Plans	Following years of underinvestment the infrastructure to deliver the large scale investment and change needs to be developed	Significant investment secured from funds including Future High Streets, HSHAZ and Levelling Up	Revamp current websites and develop identity and branding to promote independent heritage and cultural offers Coordinate existing community owned Noticeboards (explore digital community owned infrastructure e.g. Bangor)	Update destination management plan + tourism strategy in line with developed offers Produce marketing and communications plan		£
			Support development of governance structures including Cultural Consortium and Town Team to support delivery and build capacity	Deliver plans and projects and use Levelling Up to develop delivery capacity and infrastructure	Implement long term governance and funding structure to maintain towns development	£££

Ramsgate Launchpad

Ramsgate is experiencing a period of significant change which will require all stakeholders to adapt and co-ordinate the delivery of the different elements involved. A narrative and framework is required to shape this process. Launchpads are one way of doing this - they bring together people, ideas and creativity to join the dots between plans and strategies, people and places. In the process shaping a concept that builds on the strengths of a place to shape its identity and purpose. An example of how this could look in Ramsgate is contained on the following page and a case study from Conwy County included in the appendix.

The Ingredients

- Communities
- Events
- Spaces
- Artists, Musicians And Performers
- Heritage
- Organisations And Partnerships
- Talent
- Creative Industries
- Ideas
- Public Spaces
- Existing Assets (Built And Natural)

THE ECOSYSTEM

Shared Resources

- Events Kit - barriers, etc
- Events Website
- Meeting Spaces
- Storage
- Promotional Toolkit

Enablers

- New Retailer Welcome
- Events Toolkit
- Cultural Programme
- Integrated Transport Plan
- Education Links/Partnerships
- Co-ordinated trading hours
- Creative industries
- Partnerships
- Rule' free zones e.g., planning
- New Indicators e.g., happiness
- Solution Factory

Ownership & Governance

- Cultural Consortium
- Town Team
- HSHAZ
- District and Town Councils
- Community Property Trust
- Anchor Institution model

Physical Infrastructure

- Shared Spaces: Live/Work/Create:
 - Co-Creating
 - Co-Retailing
 - Co-Working
 - Co-Living
- Creative and Cultural Hub
- Pop-up stores
- Performance and Rehearsal Spaces
- Fixing Cafe
- Library of Things
- Maker Spaces
- Existing Assets
- Play Infrastructure

Funding

- HSHAZ
- Cultural Venture Fund
- Funding Advice
- Bursary Scheme
- Commercial Income
- Community Shares
- GOOD Ideas Fund

RAMSGATE LAUNCHPAD





Contact Details:

ONEDAY ltd.
Kelsterton Lodge
Flint
Clwyd
CH6 5TH

W: onedayregen.com
E: info@onedayregen.com
T: 07719019970

Our Places are the backdrop to our lives

so let's make them interesting...