



North West Business
Leadership Team

The business case for place



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Introduction

The North West Business Leadership Team, working with UK2070, has been reflecting on the role that business has in helping shape towns, cities and other places, especially those regarded as 'left behind'.

It is important to recognise that business forms only one of the groups that make up local communities, but is often an overlooked group in discussions around place. The aim of this paper is to give a business perspective and a rationale for business to get involved.

Through our collective experience, we want to make a case for greater involvement for, and by, business in place. We illustrate this using a series of examples and case studies for how getting involved in discussions about investing and improving places can be good for business and for place.

It is set in three parts –

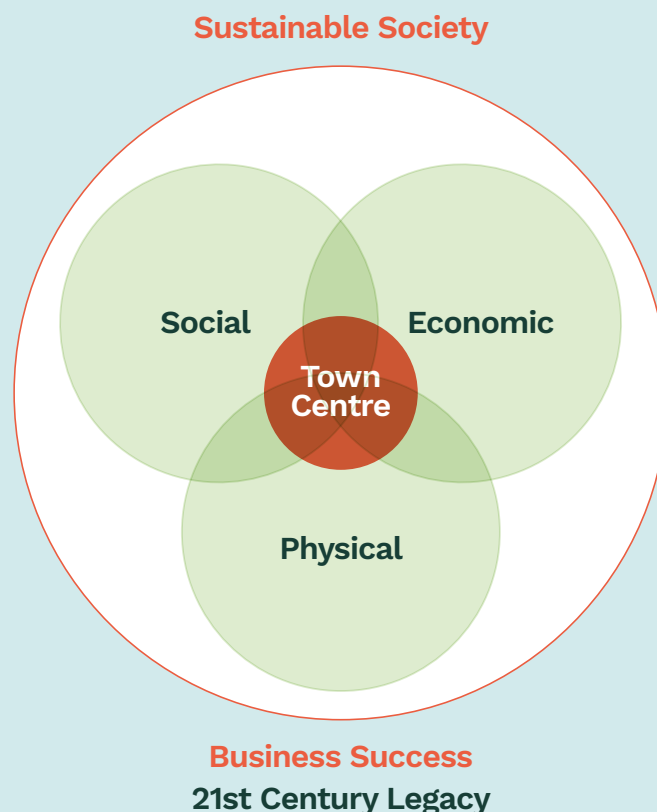
1. Why is engagement in conversations related to place of value to business?
2. How can business help?
3. Showing it in practice through case studies.

At a time when our public sector partners are faced with reduced resource and institutional capacity, we consider how the private sector can help through genuine partnerships and collaboration in place.

Whilst many of the cited examples may refer to towns, this toolkit is intended to look at core principles that can be applied regardless of locality.

Place – where it all happens...

Issues around place, growth, skills and people are interconnected (social, economic, physical). This is illustrated in the diagram below.





Understanding barriers and looking beyond them

Why many companies don't engage in these types of conversations is a question worth considering, especially by those looking to draw them in to place-based initiatives. Is it because they are concerned that they are just 'talking shops' or that they will end up tied up in procedure and red tape? Is it because businesses tend to focus on delivery and find some of the upfront 'forming and storming' too abstract? Do they just not have the time or do businesses not see the point or perceive a risk of wasting their own resource?

Is it not important for companies to find some time? Places provide the employees that those companies need to thrive and grow, so is there not value in engaging with schools, colleges, and other training providers to talk about the skills and attributes the company is looking for in future workers?

Sometimes these conversations provide opportunities to be in 'listening mode' – are there things that business do that are viewed as disruptive or undesirable that could be addressed with minimal effort/investment?



Benefits of business involvement

Anecdotal feedback on the 100+ initial bids to the Towns Fund suggests that the best submissions were those that were able to demonstrate meaningful engagement with, and leadership by, business.

Learning from Towns Funds Boards has shown that there are several ways in which private sector board members and local authority officials are working alongside one another to leverage the expertise and perspectives of both. For example, board members taking a communications lead in some towns have been working directly with the council communications team to broaden their understanding of how messages are landing. Others have taken advantage of the specific skill set of people around the table to troubleshoot problems arising.

Evaluation of projects supported through another initiative, the Regional Growth Fund, highlighted the value of having capable project leaders and strong co-operative partnerships. This was particularly important when looking to address challenges faced during project development and delivery.

There is often an expectation that business can lead, playing a 'pivotal role' in regeneration. However, in many 'lagging areas,' part of the economic challenge is a lack of established anchor businesses with the time, resources and expertise to get involved.





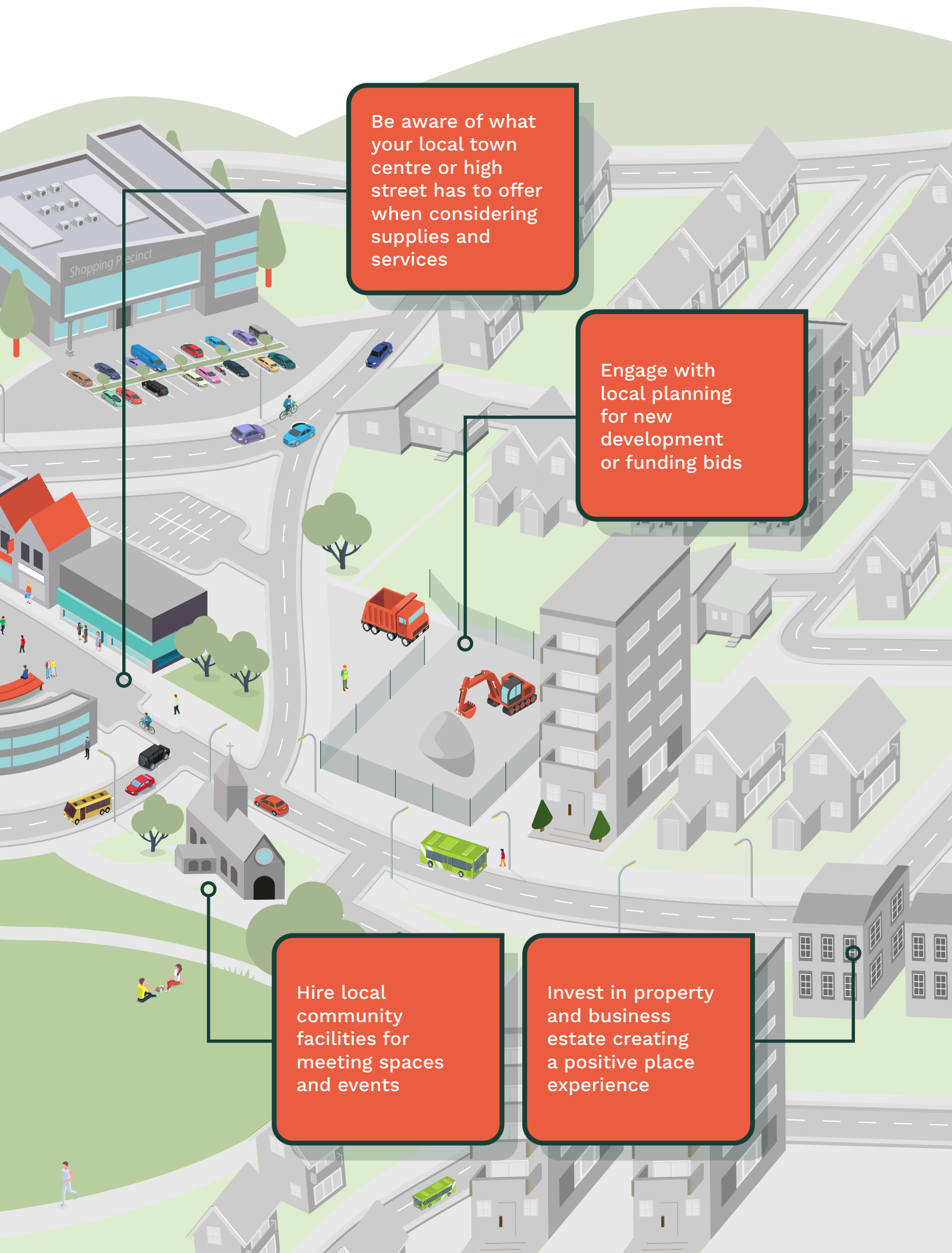


Contributing to place making

Lead by example in fitting energy-saving technologies, eg. solar panels or heat networks

Actively engage with local schools and colleges - your future workforce

Engage with and support local business networks as a way of growing your business and theirs



Be aware of what your local town centre or high street has to offer when considering supplies and services

Engage with local planning for new development or funding bids

Hire local community facilities for meeting spaces and events

Invest in property and business estate creating a positive place experience

Case studies



Assura, through its Community Foundation has so far given out around

£1.4m

in grants to community health projects across the country. One of the most significant of these is being a founder patron to the new **£6.4m Warrington Youth Zone** which opened in July this year.



Northern Trains, as well as being the UK's second largest train operator, with nearly 2,500 local and regional services a day, also manages a portfolio of 467 stations across the North of England (239 of these in the North West).

In December 2022 Northern launched its 'Destination Stations: Stations as a Place' Strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to create station facilities that are not just for rail users. Their aim is to bring 'destination' commercial tenants to Northern stations as well as creating facilities for use by the community, investing in station facilities for social benefit. Bringing additional activity to stations will also enhance safety and security for rail users at different times of the day.



The programme is being trialled at six stations including Bolton and St Helens Central in the North West.



Image supplied by BAE

The plan includes the creation of a

£10.4m

Barrow Learning Quarter, consisting of a new university campus and the establishment of a number of Community Resilience Hubs



As a key stakeholder in Barrow's 'Town Deal' partnership, **BAE Systems** have worked with a number of local partners to develop a town investment plan, which resulted in a successful application for £25m of government funding to improve the local area. The plan includes the creation of a £10.4m Barrow Learning Quarter, consisting of a new university campus and the establishment of a number of Community Resilience Hubs. These two projects will bring significant benefits to Barrow-in-Furness in the most disadvantaged areas of the town and will benefit from £1 million in support from BAE Systems in total over the next three years. As part of this plan the company completed the purchase of a number of properties within Barrow-in-Furness town centre in January 2023. All of the properties, located in Portland Walk, are former retail outlets which require extensive refurbishment and renovation to convert them into a modern multi-use facility.



Bruntwood and Bury Council formed a new Joint Venture in 2022, together buying the Mill Gate Shopping Centre. Bruntwood were chosen as their long term investment approach supported the Council's strategic priorities for Bury. The role Bruntwood plays goes well beyond the physical development and operation of a shopping centre, and they are using their commercial and partnership experience to help rejuvenate the town centre.

An advisory board, which Bruntwood's Director for Towns chairs, has been set up and tasked with creating a Place Plan that will bring businesses, communities and the public sector together around shared aims and coordinate the investment that is going into the town over the next five years. These aims focus on generating the best community impact (or social value in the jargon) including opportunities for local people to access good quality jobs, improve their skills, access public services, great amenities, cultural, health and education facilities, as well of course of improving the retail, leisure, workspace and housing available in the town centre.

For more information about how business can reinvigorate our town centres, please visit the links below:

www.bmmagazine.co.uk/in-business/business-can-engage-local-community/

www.britishcouncil.org/education/skills-employability/what-we-do/vocational-education-exchange-online-magazine/working-with-employers/why-business-must-engage-with-education

www.hikeup.com/gb/blog/6-ways-small-businesses-can-engage-with-local-community/

www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/small-business-big-heart-communities-report.html

Acknowledgements

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