



Rolvenden Parish Council

ROLVENDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN, 2018

The Health of the High Street, 2017



**COMPILED BY:
NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
AND ROLVENDEN PARISH COUNCIL**

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1. Introduction

The health of Britain's High Streets is a growing concern in this age of internet shopping and out of town superstores. A government policy paper (last updated 8 May 2015), recognises there are serious challenges and states, "*our high streets need to be social places with a vibrant evening economy and to offer something that neither shopping centres nor the internet can match*". (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-high-streets-and-town-centres>).

In past times when the village was more self-sufficient, Rolvenden's "High Street" boasted a barber shop, gentleman's outfitters, telephone exchange, a shoemakers, The Sir John Falstaff Inn, a saddlery, fish shop, fish factory, various sweet shops and grocery stores, a newsagents, a drapers, the Westminster Bank agency (which came twice a week), a village fire engine shed, a track for the village cycle speedway team, a motorbike maintenance shop and a separate motorbike hire store, second hand and antique furniture stores, a printers, a restaurant, a chartered surveyors and a once weekly doctor's surgery - amongst others. These have mostly now been converted to dwellings as shopping patterns changed.

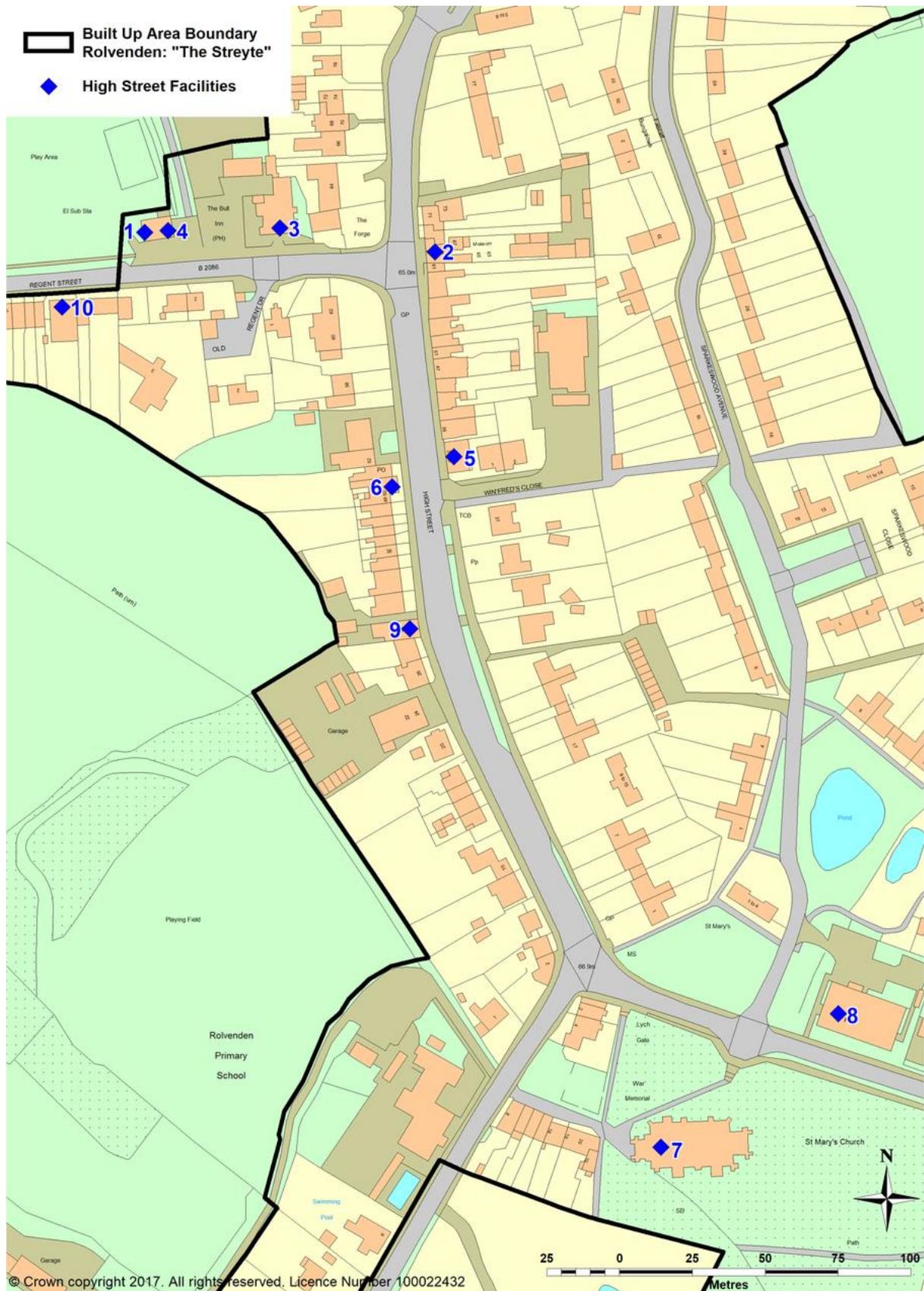
There are a number of shops (Use Class A1) and public houses (Use Class A4) clustered within the High Street and Regent Street. These are supplemented by the Rolvenden Farmers Market in St Mary the Virgin Church and the Village market in Rolvenden Village Hall (Thursday mornings).

It is recognised that there are other outlets and enterprises based in the parish but away from the High Street: e.g. The World of Water, Lily's Café, Rolvenden Cat Rescue (and on-line shop) and Cherry Garden Nursery are situated out of the village along the Hastings Road. Kent Electrical and Lighting Centre, Wealden Property Services and Windmill Garage (motorcycle maintenance) are based on Windmill Oast Industrial Estate outside of the built area.

2. Rolvenden High Street/ Regent Street Today

Current independent traders in the High Street and Regent Street and their planning Use Class classifications are:

1. The Barn Hair Studio (A1)
2. The CM Booth Motor Museum and Falstaff Antiques (A1)
3. The Bull Inn – Public House (A4)
4. Cindy's Antiques (A1)
5. Handmade Frames – picture framers (A1)
6. KM Linklaters, Grocery and Convenience Store and Post Office (A1)
7. Rolvenden Farmer's Market (NOT PERMANENT)
8. Rolvenden Village Market (NOT PERMANENT)
9. The Star - Public House (A4)
10. JD and RM Walters Antiques and Restoration (A1)

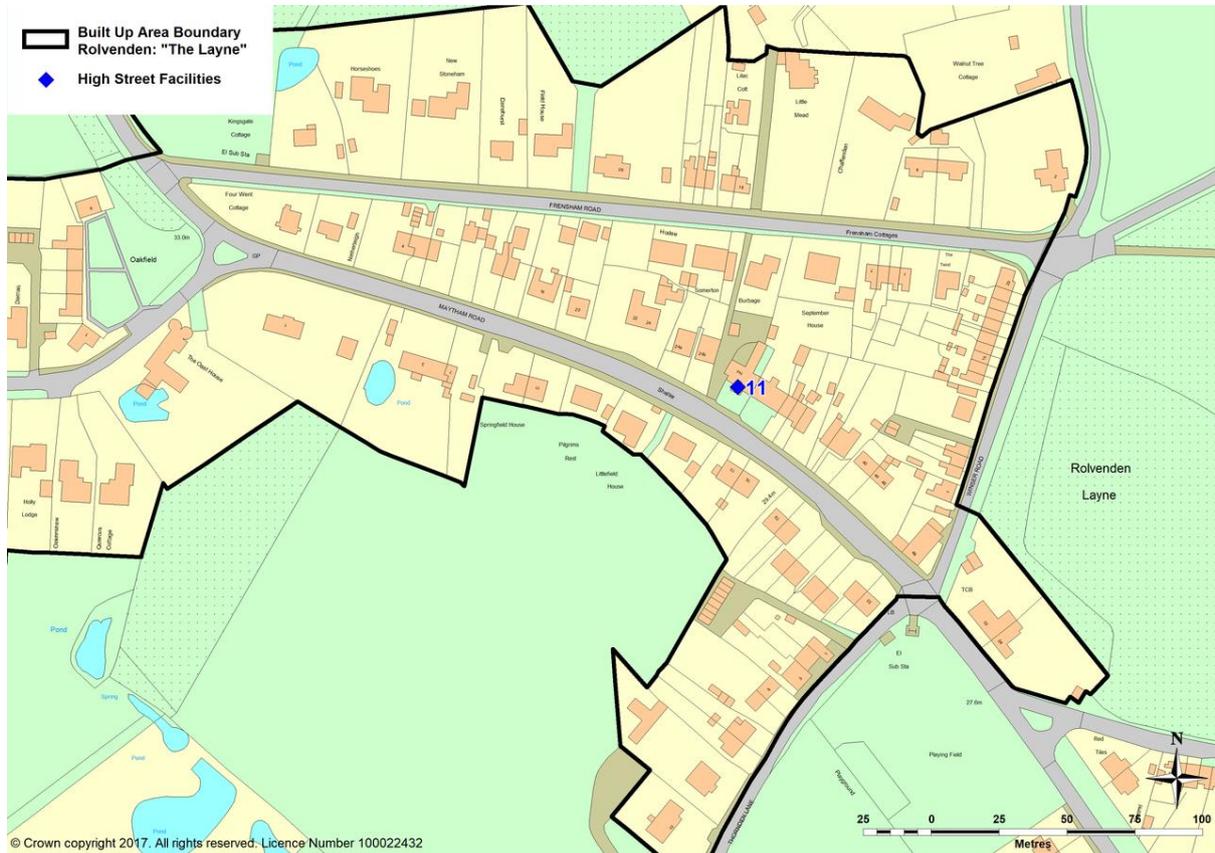


Map 1 – location of the shops and public houses in Rolvenden High Street/ Regent Street

The only independent trader remaining in Rolvenden Layne is

11. The Ewe and Lamb public house (A4).

This public house is an important asset at the heart of the local community and contributes significantly to the character of the Conservation Area.



Map 2 – location of the public house in Rolvenden Layne

Photographs of shops and public houses in Rolvenden High Street/ Regent Street



1) The Barn Hair Studio



2) The CM Booth Motor Museum/Falstaff Antiques



3) The Bull Inn



4) Cindy's Antiques



5) Handmade Frames – picture framers



6) Ken and Judith Linklater's Store and Post Office



7) Rolvenden Farmers Market in St Mary the Virgin Church (Thursday mornings)



8) The Village market in Rolvenden Village Hall (Thursday mornings)



9) The Star Public House



10) JD and RM Walters Antiques and Restoration

Photograph of the public house in Rolvenden Layne



11) The Ewe and Lamb Public House

Social Centres and Dining Facilities

Places where people may meet socially in the High Street for refreshments or dining, outside of sporting activities are: the Church; Village Hall; *The Bull* and *The Star*. *Lilly's café* and the seasonal *Coach House Tea Room* at Hole Park are some distance away. *Linklaters* provide a freshly made sandwich and hot drink takeaway service but there are no dedicated coffee shops in the centre. All three pubs provide take away food at various times during the week and a travelling fish and chip van stops in Rolvenden every Thursday. *Tomb Stone Teas* offer cream teas in the churchyard on Sunday afternoons during the summer.

The once-weekly Fish and Chip Van parks in the High Street



In Rolvenden Layne there is only currently *The Ewe and Lamb*.

Wish List

A straw poll of the type of shops that might benefit Rolvenden included a butchers and bakers but most responses suggested a 'coffee shop' in the High Street itself (more 21st Century than a traditional *Tea Room*). A neutral place to meet in an atmospheric, relaxed and sociable environment or for people of all ages to take a break alone: some ladies for example are not comfortable entering a pub by themselves even if it is just for coffee. If it was quirky and 'cool' all the better as it would attract the young of the village and passers-by alike. It would also be an ideal location to offer gifts, local crafts and souvenirs of the village / area.

3. Health Checklist

The section below entitled Guide Health Checklist contains relevant extracts from the article published by the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) (Appendix 1). Although generally applicable to larger centres, it should be helpful when planning our own future strategy. The following topics have been considered:

Diversity

The existing stores provide a limited range of complementary goods. Anyone seeking greater variety needs only take a short drive or bus ride to Tenterden, or further afield to Ashford, Hastings or Tunbridge Wells. It is unlikely there would be sufficient custom or passing trade to merit a wide range of retail outlets. The anchor store to the High Street is the convenience store/ Post Office where *Ken and Judith Linklater* provide all essentials.

Employment

The retail outlets in the High Street employ between 1- 6 people either full time or part time. *Korkers* is the biggest employer which has a positive impact on the health of the High Street and their produce may be purchased from reception as well as from *Linklater's*. With an annual production of over 13 million sausages they employ 23 people locally.

Accessibility and Car Parking

Getting to the High Street by foot or cycle is generally easy from the main built up areas. As public transport services are limited, people who live in Rolvenden Layne would normally use their car or share a lift to make the mile up the hill.

Parking is an issue dependent on the time of day and through traffic is forced to slow down and give way to oncoming vehicles past parked cars and delivery lorries. This is seen as a benefit to the village as speeding remains an issue in the High Street outside rush hours.

There is some local opinion against specific traffic calming measures; disabled parking spaces; dropped kerbs and yellow lines as they would limit much needed general parking spaces but further deter custom from the local shops.

The convenience of shopping in Rolvenden is in part associated with accessibility – including parking. People appear to be reluctant to walk very far if the intention is just to “pop in” to the local shop. There are constraints on the provision of additional parking which would be convenient for the High Street.

Another consideration for the future is ultra-low emission vehicles. The UK was one of 13 international members of the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Alliance to sign a commitment to promote cleaner motoring and slash transport emissions. It includes an agreement to make all passenger vehicle sales zero emission vehicles by 2050 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-pledges-bold-ambition-for-electric-cars>). This will mean the need for suitable and accessible space for dedicated public charging points for electric cars.



13) Illustration of dedicated parking for electric vehicles (only while charging).

Competing centres

When Tesco arrived in Tenterden in 1996 to complement the existing Waitrose it was feared that it would mean the end of small independent grocery stores in the surrounding villages. Perhaps fortuitously, *Linklaters* adopted the services of the Post Office and the newsagents around the same time and people continued to enjoy the convenience of the local store. In the case of Rolvenden the centrally located convenience store is a social and economic hub of the village.

Rate of attrition

In recent years there have been no empty shops in Rolvenden to speak of and very little change in services offered.

Crime and anti-social behaviour in the High Street

This is not an issue at present. There is an active Neighbourhood Watch scheme and there is a good relationship with the Police Community Support Officers.

Public realm

Suggestions were made to improve the appearance of the High Street during a public consultation event on 01.03.15 and included:

- Small plaques on some of the older houses to depict their important historical functions. (For example no 59 was the village saddlers complementing the Old Forge on the corner.)
- Flower beds on the High Street between trees would be welcoming and emphasize we are in The Garden of England.
- Greens and verges should be protected from parked cars. (Unsightly and damaging) and there is now protection from car parking on green spaces High Street and St Mary's Green.
- Stop parking on High Street obscuring vision from the Benenden Road junction (a safety issue).

Sir Terry Farrell, architect and urban designer, added the following observations to improve the appearance of the High Street/ Regent Street:

- Rationalise signage, remove clutter, duplicated signage and ad hoc streetscape.
- Plant larger specimen trees to create a focal point at The High Street / Maytham Road junction. Add more trees on both sides of Regent Street (Benenden Road) between The Bull PH and the Sports Field, to visually unite the Sports Field with the village core.
- Consider replacing some of the hawthorns and/or infill of different species on the east side of the High Street.
- The Village Pond and surrounding green is largely hidden. Create a set-piece village green to open up views of the pond and reflect the churchyard on the opposite of Maytham Road.
- Reduce dominance of Sparkeswood Avenue where it joins Maytham Road.
- The High Street: Possible infill opportunity on single storey corner building adjacent Branns Drive. (The picture framers – photograph 6).
- Define the village core area if possible by the introduction of a 20mph speed limit thus allowing for easier, and possibly, additional car parking.

(See also Section 2 Character Area Assessment –The Streyte)

4. Conclusions

Given the size of the settlements and the proximity of the town of Tenterden, Rolvenden has a range of shops and public houses which serve the day to day needs of the local community. Together with the Thursday markets, they also serve as attractions to visitors.

These businesses are conveniently clustered in Rolvenden High Street and Regent Street at the centre of Rolvenden and are located along the A28 and B2086 where they can also attract passing trade. The Ewe and Lamb public house in Rolvenden Layne is an important asset at the heart of Rolvenden Layne and attracts visitors.

In some cases the shops and public houses occupy listed buildings and more generally contribute significantly to the character of the Conservation Areas.

The contribution made to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the villages by the existing shops and public houses is recognised and the existing uses should wherever possible be retained. There is potential for enhancement of the public realm at the centre of Rolvenden and opportunities should be sought in connection with residential development in the Parish. If viable, small additional units such as a café should be located close to existing shops and public houses in the High Street/ Regent Street in order to retain the convenience of the existing cluster of premises; provide the opportunity for linked trips and to increase the 'dwell' time within the centre of Rolvenden.

GUIDE HEALTH CHECK LIST (ASPECTS TO CONSIDER) FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING - Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) Department for Business Innovation and Skills - A Health Check for High Streets and Town Centres - November 2010

- Leadership
 - Is there a strategic plan for the High Street and is it widely understood by local businesses and developers?
 - Who is responsible for setting, amending and delivering the strategy, and do they have a clear vision of what it is they are aiming to achieve?
 - Is the vision reactive and short-term or proactive, engaging the local authority, businesses, landlords, etc.

- Public realm
 - Is the High Street well maintained and managed?
 - Are spaces well used or do they reflect dwindling budgets and lacklustre design quality?
 - Are public facilities and signage attractive and well looked after? Do they add to or detract from the high street?
 - Has the football club been relegated or has the post office/ library/pubs/restaurants closed?
 - How are local residents actively encouraged to support the High Street?
 - Know your High Street: what do people use and what areas do they visit. What makes consumers come to an area or stay away and why do they choose to shop in neighbouring centres? How can you broaden the appeal? What additional shops might be necessary?

Trends are what's important.

- Pride and perception
 - Does your High Street make you proud? If it were someone else's high street, would you want to go back there?
 - Are there clear focal points?
 - Is signage, both for pedestrians and vehicles, attractive, practical and uncluttered?
 - Are shop fascias and paintwork dated and tatty? This reflects on the whole area.
 - Neglected public facilities (bus shelters, toilets, railings, grassy areas, trees, monuments, etc.) can fast prove damaging to the local economy. Passers-by will only stop if they need to.
 - Does the atmosphere in the high street makes customers want to come back?
 - Is it losing its value as a 'brand'?
 - Look critically at the High Street at different times of day – is it a safe, clean and tidy environment in the evening?
 - Do visitors get pleasure from what they find there?
 - Do you personally rate your High Street as poor, ok or good?

A facility-poor high street with a popular image will usually win customers away from a facility-rich one nearby with a poor image. Local residents and traders alike should take pride in their community and feel a sense of ownership.

- Diversity

- Is there a range of shops and facilities – e.g. catering, fashion, essentials, luxuries, multiples or independents represented?
- Are there competing shopping centres in the surrounding area, attractions opening or closing, major employers shutting down?
- Any changes in local residents, workers or tourists? Are they younger/older?
- Is there a wide range of services available – where can you get a coffee for example and is there somewhere relaxing to sit and enjoy it?
- Does the High Street meet consumer expectations or is something missing?
- Is there an “anchor store” – (a pull to the High Street)?
- Is there a good range of lifestyle retailers, of leisure, of fashion; a reasonable balance of independent stores v. large multiples?
- Is there a regular market?

- Tourism and the High Street.

There is a strong link between healthy high streets and tourism: according to recent surveys, 55% of domestic overnight trips include shopping as an activity and 54% of people on a city holiday/break in England say they go shopping.

- Historic buildings and spaces add value and help to differentiate a town, but are they up to contemporary standards, eg: for access?
- Is there an outlet for locally sourced produce and crafts?
- How can you attract tourists and occasional visitors? (examples might include festivals, cultural and live music events, theatre/performing arts and markets)
- Is there sufficient tourist accommodation in the area?

- Employment

- Have companies closed and jobs disappeared? If employment in the area is heavily dependent on one sector, if that sector suffers, so will the high street. A good spread of employment patterns reduces the risk.

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- Investment

- If rents or taxes rise unsustainably, new retailers stay away.
- Are banks willing to fund local development?
- Investment strategies of multiple retailers can also have a major impact (either positive or negative) on local high streets.
- Is the high street part of a Business Improvement District (BID)?
- Could public realm investment complement privately owned businesses to help create a sense of community and sense of place? Under-used facilities generate a sense of emptiness and desolation.
- Could investment partnerships be formed with public and private groups to establish common and vested interest?

- Accessibility and public transport
 - Is the public transport available appropriate to the centre/high street in terms of cost, availability, frequency and quality?
 - Are cycling and walking actively encouraged?
 - Are pavements, cluttered, dirty and uneven?
 - Are access routes perceived safe for cyclists and pedestrians, pushchairs, wheelchair users, visually impaired people and those with learning difficulties?
 - Is there adequate provision for appropriate disabled car parking spaces and access?
 - Are the facilities 9-5 or is there provision for commuters (more than 25% of the national economy is accounted for by the evening/night-time economy)?
- Car parking
 - Consider quantity, location, quality, pricing, security and management. An ageing population may be deterred if car parks are located away from the shops.
- Competing centres
 - New attractions nearby can bring in customers or can drain the customer pool.
- Churn rates
 - Are there shops available to lease and do vacant premises stay vacant for long?
 - Are new occupiers staying for shorter periods?
 - Should vacant sites always be shops?
- Crime and anti-social behaviour
 - Are litter, graffiti, groups of youths, drink and drug abuse starting to become an issue? The visibility and perception of crime can trigger a decline, even from neighbouring areas.
 - Is there an active and visible connection with the police and the local Community Safety Partnership?
 - Are there active neighbourhood watch members on or around the High Street?
- New technologies & fashions
 - Do traders keep an eye on their own competitiveness and move with the times in terms of new developments in technology, new trends and changing fashions?

Some high street shops are particularly vulnerable to internet competition, while others can use it to their advantage. Some have taken advantage of e-technology to provide opportunities for customers to select from a wider range of goods than can be physically held, while some online traders have diversified into pop-up (or occasionally more permanent) high street shops.

- Manage expectations

Think outside of history or tradition. Look forward but make sure plans are commercially viable and achievable within existing resources.

Other considerations include average spend; tourist spend; what proportion of customers' spend is in the high street, what proportion elsewhere (and why) and what proportion is on-line.

- Address the basics

Safety, cleanliness and visuals, eg: Christmas lights, flower baskets, sufficient waste (recycling?) bins and organised events/attractions. If there are underlying problems, address them first.

- Cyclical v. structural issues

Identify which problems are cyclical (i.e. need tackling with short-term measures, eg: a fall in sales due to a short-term recession) and which are more structural (eg: loss of a market, of a local industry, a change in shopping patterns away from the one big weekly shop, the impact of multi-channel shopping (in-store, website, telephone ordering, mail order, interactive television, catalogue ordering and comparison shopping sites). In tough times – ie: cyclical – the 'top-end' luxury shops and the 'bottom-end' value shops tend to do better, with the ones in the middle suffering most.

- Profit from change

Capitalise on changes in consumer profile. Is the age of your high street's users going up or down, or both? Be alert to new residential units or developments nearby.

Similarly schools and other educational establishments, events hosted by sports clubs, hotels and cultural venues can bring new and different customers onto the high street.