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Placemaking Wales



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Placemaking Plans for Town Centres



This document has been prepared by DCFW in collaboration with Welsh Government to provide additional guidance on Placemaking Plans for town centres, particularly in relation to the Transforming Towns Programme.

August 2023

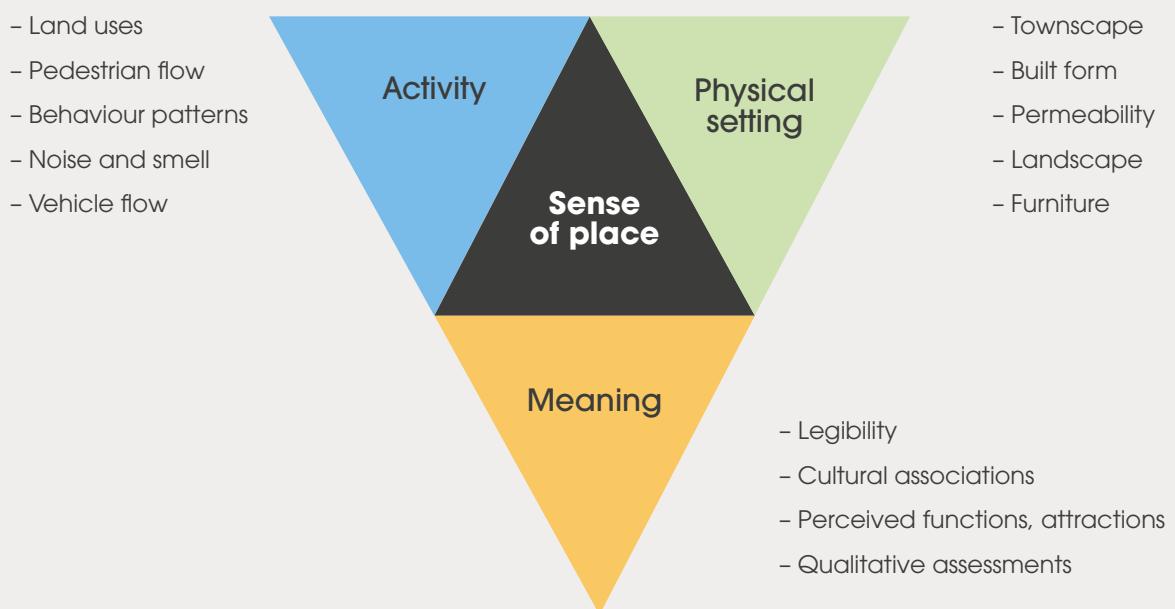


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1. What is Placemaking?

Placemaking is a way of ensuring that any change, investment or new development contributes positively to enhancing the environments in which we live, work and play. It places people at the heart of the process and results in places that are vibrant, have a clear identity and where people can develop a sense of belonging. Taking a placemaking approach to a town centre means considering the centre in the context of the region and wider settlement and taking holistic view of what needs to be done to improve it as a place.



Placemaking considers the activity and meaning associated with a place as well as its physical fabric. The aim is to help promote active and distinctive places that respond to the needs of the community and have long term sustainability.

Placemaking is as much, if not more, about the process and way of doing things as it is about the resulting development. It involves early involvement of the local community (including businesses) and bringing them along in the process.

DCFW and the Placemaking Wales Partnership co-produced the Placemaking Wales Charter and general Placemaking Guidance that should inform Placemaking Plans. The charter sets out six principles to inform strategic thinking about placemaking. The six principles are:

- People and community
- Location
- Movement
- Mix of uses
- Public realm
- Identity

See Appendix 1 for the full text accompanying each of the principles.

2. Placemaking and town centres

Town centres are important places that are currently facing multiple challenges. Thriving town centres contribute to thriving communities and their well-being as well as the economy. They make use of existing buildings (often historic/heritage assets) and infrastructure. They require high levels of footfall through people living, working, shopping, socialising, studying, meeting their basic needs and spending leisure time in them.

Vibrant and distinctive town centres support local businesses and supply chains helping to retain wealth and prosperity in the local area to support the local economy.

Town centres can help to reduce car-centric living which is unsustainable, is less equitable, promotes isolation and diminishes environmental quality. Town centres should be easily accessible by public transport, walking and cycling and have a higher density of people living within a 15-minute walk of the centre.





Placemaking for town centres should consider:

- What are the needs of the community within the wider settlement and how can the town centre help to meet these needs?
- What is distinctive about the town and how is this valued and reflected in the offer and experience of the town centre.
- What stresses and shocks is the town centre facing?
- What activities can the town centre support that will help attract people to use it? This can include events and temporary uses.
- Who is interested in investing in the town centre and what support do they need to do so? Alternatively what needs to be done to make the town centre a more attractive investment proposition?
- What community groups or existing businesses could be involved/ do more in the town centre and what support do they need?
- What is the role of the town centre now and in the future?
- Who lives in the town centre now and could more people live there in the future?
- What climate adaptation challenges does the town face?
- Can people access and move around the town centre easily and safely via a choice of modes?
- What digital elements could support the physical aspects of the town centre?
- What could be a catalyst for change in the town centre?
- What public sector land or buildings are available that could be used drivers for change?
- What are other key partners doing already? Who could you work with on the placemaking plan?

3. Why prepare a Placemaking Plan?

Placemaking Plans are a requirement of the Transforming Towns funding programme with the aim of ensuring that a strategic and coordinated approach is taken to investment by Welsh Government in town centres. However, Placemaking Plans shouldn't just be focused on Welsh Government or other public sector funding, they should consider all funding, private and third sector investment opportunities and the long-term future of the town.

The Placemaking Plan should come as a result of a process that involves understanding the place and its people, identifying opportunities for positive change and providing strategic coordination across sectors and disciplines. The process should help to align various internal and external funding streams, engage with a wide range of stakeholders and get creative input into shaping the future of the town.

The aim is not to produce a lengthy, glossy document but to record a process and summarise the key findings that will lead to future action. The plan should be very clear about who should do what next and what the expected outcomes will be. The document should be accessible to all user groups and stakeholders and include production in Welsh.





The plan should align with planning policy as well as other key plans or strategies that are in place or under development such as economic, community, transport.

Placemaking Plans are different to Place Plans. Place Plans are prepared by the community, working with the local planning authority, to help plan for the future of an area or development site are aligned with the LDP and formally adopted as supplementary planning guidance (SPG). Where a Place Plan already exists or is underway, a Placemaking plan should take account of this and integrate the findings of the Place Plan rather than repeat any work that has already been undertaken. In some cases a Placemaking Plan may not be needed if the Place Plan covers all of the relevant aspects.

In addition to the general aim of supporting thriving town centres, consideration should also be given to wider benefits and outcomes that the placemaking process could achieve. This may include:

- Health and wellbeing of the community
- Circular economy
- Decarbonisation
- Climate response and adaptation
- Education
- Reducing inequality
- Welsh language
- Affordable housing

4. What is a Placemaking Plan?

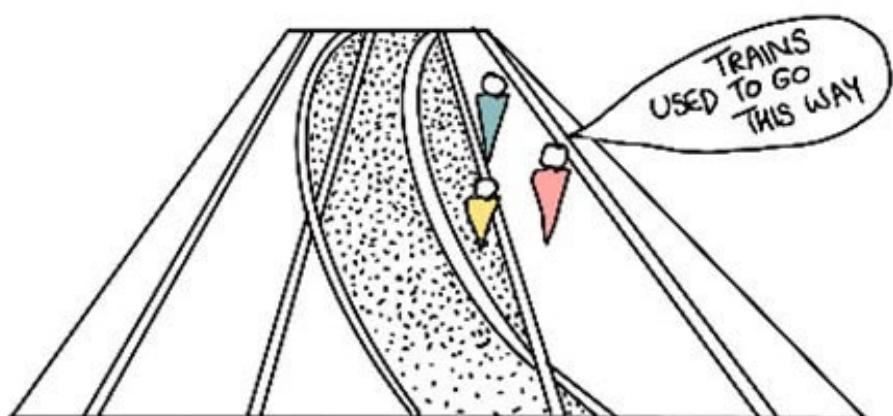
Placemaking Plan is...	Placemaking plan is not...
Holistic – consider all aspects of a place	Just about retail, public realm or one issue
Sets a common vision that all can work to	Just focused on Transforming Towns funding
Identifies what is unique about a place	The same for every town
Puts people and community first	Just about buildings/paving
Developed with the people of the place	Generic or remotely developed ideas
Covers delivery and governance	Project ideas with no delivery plan
Addresses the <i>needs</i> of the place	A wish list
Identifies real opportunities	A 'could do' list
A flexible, living document	A static document on a shelf
A step towards a more distinctive identity for the town	Place branding

The plan should include a summary document that is easy to read and find relevant material. Not all of the background material needs to be in the plan but a summary of the process and key findings should be extracted. Some commercially sensitive information may be appropriate in a separate document.

There may be multiple audiences for a Placemaking Plan such as funders, investors, other departments within the local authority and the public. Consideration should be given to what material is produced and for whom. The document should have the ability to adapt and be updated over time as things change.

5. Process

The process of developing a Placemaking Plan will vary from town to town depending on local need, conditions, information that already exists, the make-up of the local authority regeneration team and the aim of the process. Early thinking about the process should inform the content of the plan. The process of producing the plan, and the potential for this to act as a consensus building process about the direction of travel should not be underestimated.



The following aspects should be considered in determining the process for each town centre:

- Audit of what you already have in terms of information and expertise to identify gaps.
- Understanding and coordination of investment across the local authority e.g. housing, education, health, transport.
- Data collection that will help to measure change over time e.g. footfall, vacancies, dwell time, spend, transport mode.
- Early and ongoing public engagement to collect information that will help to understand the place and prioritise potential interventions.

- Events/meanwhile uses and popups to help test ideas and engage the community.
- Stakeholder engagement with businesses, community groups, landowners, other public bodies and third sector organisations to identify needs, opportunities and potential partners to deliver projects.
- Time spent in the place to understand how it works and where the issues are.
- Filling the gaps in information with specific studies that may include:
 - Socio-economic and market trends.
 - Current cultural provision.
 - Transport and movement.
 - Urban design analysis.
 - Building condition.
 - Digital position.

Where additional external resources are sought to help complete the Placemaking Plan, a clear brief should set out what is required. Some further guidance on brief writing is provided in **Appendix 2**.

The analysis process could be structured according to the six placemaking principles in the charter. **Appendix 3** provides further information on this.

6. Content and structure

The content of a Placemaking Plan will vary depending on the process and aims. The following provides an overview of what may be covered in the resulting plan but should be tailored to specific circumstances. The final document does not need to include all the information collected through the process but should instead provide a summary of the key points and how this has influenced the plan.

Introduction

- The intentions of the Placemaking Plan – the aim of the document.
- How and when it was prepared, the period it is anticipated to cover, the geographical area of focus.
- Who the audience is and what the key messages are for them – i.e. general public, potential investors, community groups, specific funding streams, wider local authority.

Context

- Relationship with other towns in the area/region.
- National, regional, local trends.
- Policy context, current strategies, significant ongoing or upcoming projects.
- Key projects beyond the town centre but that relate to it.



Understanding the place (see also analysis guidance in Appendix 3)

- What is already happening/underway?
- Summary of key data
- Summary of findings about the activity – people, community, businesses – of the place
- Summary of findings about the form and fabric of the place
- Summary of findings about the meaning of the place
- Some key questions:
 - What are the future risks e.g. more out of town development, future flooding etc.?
 - What would happen if you did nothing?
 - What is unique to this place? What issues are common to other places?
 - What is the town for? Who does it serve, what role does it play?
 - What can people do in the town and what can't they do?
 - What are the most urgent needs?
 - Who wants to do something?

Experiments and temporary interventions

- Summary of events, interventions and experiments undertaken as part of the placemaking plan process and the findings from this.
- What did you do and what did you learn?

Summary of need and opportunity

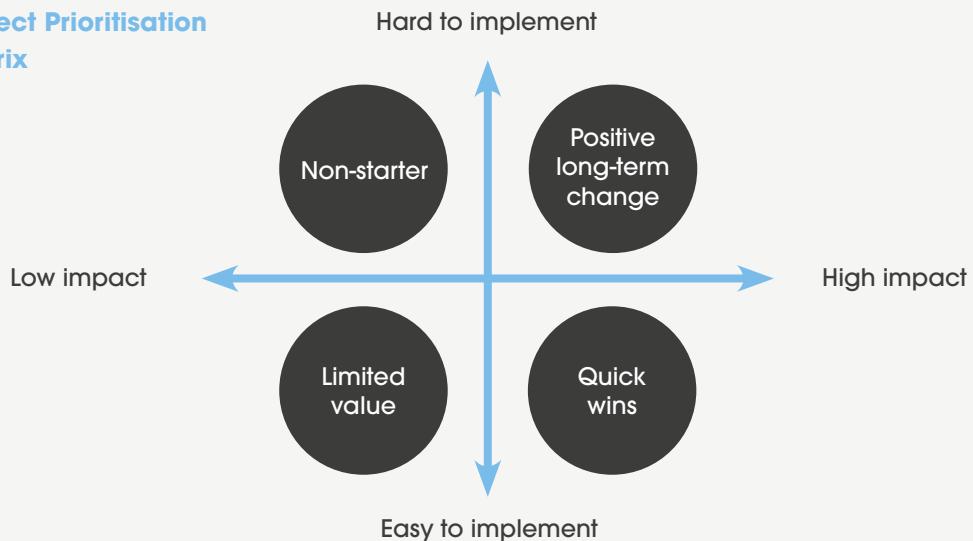
- Distil the analysis into a summary of the key needs of the place and the real opportunities to positively change the place.
- Need = fundamental issues facing the people of the place
- Opportunity = real prospects for change e.g. a business looking to invest, a funding opportunity, a community group looking to take on a new project/expand, experiments that have worked and could be expanded/rolled out.



Vision, strategy & targeted objectives

- A collective vision for the plan period developed in conjunction with the community and stakeholders. The vision must be specific to the place, its needs and opportunities and the timescale of the plan.
- A summary of options considered for how to approach a strategy for the town and the chosen approach.
- A small number of specific objectives that will guide decision making and investment in the town over the plan period to help realise the vision. Any proposed interventions or initiatives should be assessed against these to test their fit.
- Use the six placemaking principles to structure/guide the strategy.

Project Prioritisation Matrix



Using a matrix that plots how easy a project is to deliver against the level of anticipated impact can be a helpful way to prioritise projects.

Non-starter – these projects will take significant resources to implement but do little to address the identified needs or add value to the town.

Limited value – these are easy to implement but do little to address the issues. They can be a distraction from more meaningful interventions.

Quick wins – these make a quick difference to the place and are a good place to start while other projects are developed.

Positive long-term change – these take time and resources to implement but will be worth it for the value that they bring.

A combination of quick wins and positive long-term change is often a good basis for a strategy within the plan.

Implementation

- Identification of interventions, initiatives and projects that can be implemented within the plan period and contribute to the objectives and vision. Specialist input on key projects where needed e.g. market/economics, urban design, architecture, digital. Illustrated to an indicative level.
- Potential interventions should include events, changes to governance/organisation, planning, fiscal, economic, cultural, related to maintenance etc as well as physical projects.
- The interventions and projects must be sequenced so it is clear what should be done first and what actions should follow. Is there one thing that is important to get right first? What could be a quick win?
- Illustrate key projects on a plan to show how they relate to one another but recognise that many interventions may be non-spatially specific.
- All projects should identify – prerequisites (i.e. what should come before), lead partners, essential deliverables, cost estimate, funding opportunities, the role of the local authority, timescales and next steps.
- The plan should identify the anticipated benefits of implementing the proposals and how they address the needs identified.
- Should any policy be influenced/changed such as future LDP reviews? Is further guidance needed such as a design code?
- Action plan outlining who should do what next.

Test and refine

- How will progress be monitored? What resources are needed to do so? What will be measured to track progress?
- How and when will the vision and objectives be reviewed? E.g. every 6 months
- What further experiments are needed?
- What has worked well and should be continued/expanded?
- What hasn't worked as expected and should be adapted?

Appendix 1

Placemaking Wales Charter

The Placemaking Wales Charter has been developed in collaboration with the Placemaking Wales Partnership, which is made up of stakeholders representing a wide range of interests. The Charter reflects the collective and individual commitment of these organisations to support the development of high-quality places across Wales for the benefit of communities.

In signing the Placemaking Wales Charter I/my organisation agree to support placemaking in all relevant areas of my/our work and promote the following principles in the planning, design and management of new and existing places:

People and community	The local community are involved in the development of proposals. The needs, aspirations, health and well-being of all people are considered at the outset. Proposals are shaped to help to meet these needs as well as create, integrate, protect and/or enhance a sense of community and promote equality.
Location	Places grow and develop in a way that uses land efficiently, supports and enhances existing places and is well connected. The location of housing, employment, leisure and other facilities are planned to help reduce the need to travel.
Movement	Walking, cycling and public transport are prioritised to provide a choice of transport modes and avoid dependence on private vehicles. Well designed and safe active travel routes connect to the wider active travel and public transport network, and public transport stations and stops are positively integrated.
Mix of uses	Places have a range of purposes which provide opportunities for community development, local business growth and access to jobs, services and facilities via walking, cycling or public transport. Development density and a mix of uses and tenures helps to support a diverse community and vibrant public realm.
Public realm	Streets and public spaces are well defined, welcoming, safe and inclusive with a distinct identity. They are designed to be robust and adaptable with landscape, green infrastructure and sustainable drainage well integrated. They are well connected to existing places and promote opportunities for social interaction and a range of activities for all people.
Identity	The positive, distinctive qualities of existing places are valued and respected. The unique features and opportunities of a location, including heritage, culture, language, built and natural physical attributes, are identified and responded to.

Appendix 2

Brief Writing

The following note has been prepared to assist in the development of a brief for the production of Placemaking Plans for town centres. This guidance is general and it is acknowledged that each town is different and circumstances will be different across different authorities so it needs to be applied in a way that fits.

In some cases you may be seeking a team of consultants to undertake the majority of the work on a Placemaking Plan, in others you may be looking for specific input to the process with more in-house coordination and production of the plan. In either case it is important to first map out your process, what information you already have and where you need specific additional knowledge, expertise or capacity. See accompanying guidance on the content of Placemaking Plans as you consider what you are aiming to produce and what the process will be. The process is as important as the finished product.

The following topics should be considered in the development of the brief:

Background

Provide the background and context to the Placemaking Plans. It is helpful to provide a summary of the information you have about the town as well as the policy and strategy context. Set out what you already know and what questions you were trying to fill in with the development of the plan. It is important that the Placemaking Plan moves you on from the plans that are already in place rather than repeating or replicating them. While all the existing information does not need to be provided at the brief stage, it would be useful for bidding teams to understand what is available and what information will need to be collected through the plan development process.

Identify required inputs

Be as specific as possible about what skills, knowledge and capacity you already have and what external input you need. Engage internally across departments including health, education, transport, highways, housing, parks to help uncover and coordinate existing plans and proposals and align activity with the plan.

Stages

Breaking the commission into phases may be helpful to ensure that all aspects of the development of the plan are covered and the bidding teams know what is expected of them.

The first phase will be the analysis made up of desk top analysis, observation, and feedback from engagement. If you know what specific data and information you would like the appointed team to collect then state it, but if not be clear that a thorough analysis and understanding of the key issues in the town is required. The analysis should seek to understand the relationship between towns in the county/region as well as the aspects that make them unique. Another aspect of analysis that you may wish to ensure is covered is an overview of the history of the towns, how they have been shaped over time, and what this might suggest for the future of the townscape. A review of movement by various modes and travel distances will also be important. The analysis process should result in a summary of key needs and opportunities for the town (see plan contents guidance as well).

Subsequent phases following the analysis would include scenario testing, development of a common vision, project identification and implementation/action plan.

Involvement

Involvement of the community and stakeholders is an essential aspect of the process. An initial mapping of stakeholders and a clear process of engagement should be required. The early phases of involvement should help to build an understanding of the place, seek to identify potential partners for the delivery of the plan and uncover any opportunities that may be underlying within the place, prior to any consultation on proposals that result from the plan itself.

Digital engagement can be used to support face-to-face engagement. A method and resources for processing the information collected should be included in the brief.

Topic considerations

In some cases, it may be appropriate to set out the range of aspects that might need to be considered in the plan. For example, you may wish the placemaking team to consider property development opportunities, business support, building improvements, events, public realm works, digital technology and/or transport interventions. This would then inform the mix of skills and experience that the consultant team should bring in response to the brief. However, it is important not to be too prescriptive at this stage, because the requirements of the Placemaking Plan in response to the analysis are not yet known and will be developed through the process of preparing the plan. There should be scope for an iterative process.

Outputs

Be as clear as possible about what outputs you would like from the process. This may include the following: a summary of the analysis of the town centre in the context of the whole settlements, a summary of the testing of options and ideas, a common vision for the future of the town, and a sequenced and prioritised list of projects and interventions that will help realise the vision over the short medium and long term. For these projects and interventions key information regarding who will lead the project, where funding may be obtained, what partners will be involved, the relationship with other projects and interventions, and outline of costs.

For key projects that the local authority may be able to progress, it might be appropriate to request the preparation of briefs for the development of the projects to take them on to the next stage. It should be clear that the vision and identified projects are not only confined to those that may be eligible for public sector funding but should include those that might be delivered by the private sector, housing associations, third sector organisations or more broadly by the local authority.

Consider and state what format you would like the final plan to be in. It may be one or several documents aimed at different audiences. There may also be a need or desire for web-based resources.

Team structure

Set out how the consultant team will work with the local authority, including the main point of contact and other key individuals. Will you have regular update meetings? How much input will the local authority have into the production of the plan? What is the sign off process for moving from one stage to the next? What will the local authority do with the plan once it has been produced? Who takes ownership of the Placemaking Plan?

Request a team structure from the bidding teams, including overall team lead and day-to-day point of contact. It is likely that a range of expertise will be needed to complete the plan so be clear whether you will be appointing inputs separately or seeking a lead consultant to put together their own team. If it is the latter, it is important to understand how they have worked together in the past and how they will coordinate and communicate as a team and with you as the client. Be sure that those individuals identified in the submission will be working on the project.

Budget

State the budget/range for the production of the plan. If you are commissioning work for more than one town centre, be clear if they be commissioned together or separately. Be clear about what should be included in the budget.

Programme

State any required deadlines and the suggested overall programme but leave scope for feedback and input from the bidders. The programme should allow for efficient use of time with milestones and interim meetings clearly identified. However, it shouldn't be rushed and should allow sufficient time for analysis, engagement and creative responses to the challenges identified.

Bid process assessment

Set out what is required in response to the brief, including page/word limits, so it is easier to compare like for like responses.

The scoring process for the consideration of submissions should ensure that greater emphasis is placed on quality over cost.

Be clear

A good brief will be specific, stating clearly what you do and do not want - be open about what is and isn't needed. It should be clear, concise, and precise. The brief should be proportionate in length and level of detail, reflecting the project scale/budget and significance. The order of information presented in the brief should be considered - e.g. work from the strategic down to the detail, keep information required from the commission separate from requirements of the tender process and align the order of required activities with the order of the process.

Manage expectations

A bad brief will produce a set of requirements that are unrealistic for the project's budget. The client team should have a clear idea of what is essential and ensure the budget is sufficient to cover this.

Appendix 3

Analysis

1	Understand	Aim
People and community (engagement/involvement should be threaded through the whole process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Demographics — Economic profile — Population needs — Social networks — Day/evening use — Community activity — Street life — Latent demand for space, facilities, support — Crime statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Diverse — Stewardship/involvement — Neighbourly — Friendly — Welcoming — Meeting people's needs — Places to interact

2	Understand	Aim
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Regional context — Relationship with other towns — Unique geographic features e.g. topography, water bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Clear role within region — Celebrate unique features of location

3	Understand	Aim
Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — A 15-minute pedestrian catchment — Active travel — Public transport — Traffic data — Roads — Mode splits — Parking – amount, usage — Shared mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Walkable — Connected — Legible — Accessible — Convenient

4	Understand	Aim
Mix of uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Local business ownership — Land use patterns (including spaces above shops) — Property ownership — Property values — Day time/evening uses — Economy — Vacancies — Events — Density of development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Active — Useful — Sustainable — Fun — Indigenous — Special

5	Understand	Aim
Public Realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Microclimate — Building condition — Quality and use of public spaces — Cleanliness — Wayfinding — Footfall — Green/open space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Active — Safe — Clean — Green — Walkable — Sittable — Attractive — Distinctive — Biodiverse

6	Understand	Aim
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — History — Stories — Language — Communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Distinctive — Respectful — Inclusive — Meaningful





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