

Business in the

Future High Streets

Community

Businesses going local



Foreword by Alex Gourlay

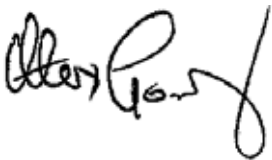
Chief Executive of the Health & Beauty Division, Alliance Boots

I am delighted to be leading this initiative on behalf of Boots UK. High Streets are at the heart of communities and a weathervane of local economic prosperity. There has never been a more important time for government and business to take an active interest in how local high streets are run and managed. More than a third of consumer spending goes through shops, a big contribution to UK plc. At the same time the pipeline of new developments has reduced to a trickle with the difficult financial times we now find ourselves in – good reason why we should manage our existing assets wisely and well.

The local dimension of doing business is becoming increasingly important. Government has made localism and community empowerment a focal point of policy-making and as large businesses we have to ask ourselves what our role is in this new context.

Over the last year a group of business members of Business in the Community has been looking at how large corporates can also “act local”. During this time twelve businesses have taken part, either by surveying their store managers or by coming to one of the roundtables run on the subject. Boots UK, along with Starbucks, The Cooperative, McDonalds and Asda have particularly dedicated time and resource to this work.

I hope that this contribution to the high streets agenda inspires you, like us at Boots UK, to become a better neighbour thereby creating high streets which are better places to live, work and trade in.



Alex Gourlay



Why focus on the local?

The economic pressures in the High Street

High Streets are under pressure. Nationally, empty units have increased yet again this year rising to 14.5% compared with 12% in the previous year and in some towns the figure is as high as 30%. Clearly there is a need for job creation and stimulation of local economies.

In spite of the current challenges, there are some successful town and city centres which are sustaining growth in difficult economic times. These places have strong business-led partnerships and locally active store managers. This study highlights some excellent examples of both.

Business benefits of local involvement

From our survey results it is clear that both business and local partnerships need to appreciate more about the benefits of local business involvement to be motivated to work better together. Of the Store Managers not involved locally, 55% of them say they are not involved "because the business has other priorities". From this we can assume that in some town centres the business case for involvement is not articulated and therefore not adequately understood.

From the case studies we can see however that those Managers who do engage at local level are realising significant business benefits:

- A more focussed approach to public realm investment
- More effective marketing and promotion of town centres
- Improved stewardship of town centres
- Staff retention and a pride in working for that brand
- Reduction in crime against the store
- Enhanced local reputation amongst customers and the wider community
- Better relationships with the council and local public bodies which make it easier to broach those difficult conversations around licensing and planning when necessary.

Business's contribution to civic leadership

All town centre tenants are different and will translate their brand differently at local level. However the common thread running through all the case

studies in this publication is strong leadership and vision from the top. Increasingly, business leaders are recognising their responsibilities and are committing themselves to improving their local community impact. The reality however is that some still struggle to translate national commitments into positive impact in local communities.

There is also a strong role for local authorities and central government in making sure that best practice is shared amongst partnerships and that the quality of training for Town Centre Managers, who are often still local authority employees, is consistently high.

It's not just about retail

Finally, this study is not just about retail. Our towns and cities are becoming hubs for leisure, banking, learning and civic affairs as well. If we are to have successful local economies then all stakeholder groups need to play their active part in making this happen. The term "Store Manager" in this study is used for brevity but should also be understood to encompass local managers in other sectors.

“ We have always recognised the positive impact we can have on the high street – as an employer and as part of the community. Our store managers are critical to making this happen, and so we really welcome this research which highlights the significance of the store manager and how much they can achieve for local communities. ”

Darcy Wilson-Rymer, Managing Director, UK and Ireland, Starbucks

Surveys

We conducted two surveys as part of this study. The first was a quantitative survey completed in August 2010 with the kind assistance of the Association of Town Centre Management. In this survey Town Centre Partnerships all over the country were asked about their experience of engaging corporates in the life of the town and what barriers they felt stood in their way.

Secondly we conducted a smaller survey of Store and Branch Managers from well known high street retailers and tenants. This asked them about their involvement in the town centre and what benefits and barriers they encountered.

It is important to note that the questions were mainly focussed around Town Centre Partnerships. We recognise however that many retailers get involved in activities which do not involve the Town Centre Partnership and we also acknowledge that some Town Centre Partnerships may be poor at engaging business in the local agenda.

Town Centre Managers Survey Results

- Well known brands are an important part of our high streets – 88% of Town Centre Partnerships said that there were more than 10 corporate brands located in their town centre
- Attendance by these brands at Town Centre Partnership meetings is patchy – 15.3% of the Town Centre Partnerships said that none of these Store Managers ever come to meetings. The top answer was 43.5% who said that 1 or 2 of them come regularly.
- Town Centre Managers often struggle to engage Store Managers – 55.6% of TCMs said that Store Managers were difficult or even impossible to get to see
- It's often not about money. When asked about the value of having well known brands in the area, Town Centre Partnerships didn't put cash at the top of their wish list. Instead they selected "Employing local people" as the top answer, followed by "Getting involved in civic life". When asked what more they would like brands to do, 64.5% said that "Giving of their time & skills" or "Playing an active part in town centre events" were the most important.
- 38% of Town Centre Managers said they knew of an outstanding example of a Store Manager who had worked well locally either now or in the past.

WHAT IS A TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP?

There are hundreds of Town Centre Partnerships up and down the country which rely on differing ratios of public and private sector funding to sustain them. They focus on improvements to the town centre to increase footfall. They differ in the number of staff they have and the quality of the delivery.

Store and Branch Managers Survey Results

- Store and Branch Managers are often unfamiliar with the local community they serve. 53% of Store and Branch Managers questioned had been running their current store for less than 2 years although 60% of those questioned had been in management for over 5 years
- 62% of Managers live over 10 miles away from where they work. One Manager commented that he lived over 60 miles away.
- 44% of Managers said they were not involved in the Town Centre Partnership, however 60% said they donated gifts in kind to local community groups; 57% said they did volunteering with schools and around 50% had developed a partnership with a local community group.
- Of those who were not involved 55% said they were not involved "because the business has other priorities". 35% cited "other" as a reason for not being involved. On further analysis the distance travelled to work was the main reason within the "other category" why Store Managers felt they could not be locally involved.
- Asking this same group about what would motivate them to be involved – 43% said they would need to see how business benefits for the store could be achieved through their involvement. 33% said they would need greater guidance and support to enable them to get involved locally.
- Those who were involved were asked about what business benefits they had derived from their involvement. The top answer was 44% who thought that their local reputation had been enhanced. 41% considered that as a result they had built better relationships with the council and other local public bodies.

WHAT IS A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT?

There are 111 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the country. They are financed from a levy on local business rates subject to a local business ballot. They are mainly but not exclusively located in town centres.

“ As a business driven by our values and principles, we are acutely aware of what matters to the communities in which we trade. We lead on various community safety initiatives, inspiring young people and promoting sustainability. But more can always be done so that's why we wholeheartedly support this guide. ”

Peter Marks, Chief Executive, The Co-operative Group

What does a good Town Centre Manager look like?

Both business and the local public sector need to improve their working relationships to create good town centres.

The best Business Improvement District/ Town Centre Managers:

- Put businesses in the driving seat
- Are imaginative about how they engage local business leaders
- Can clearly articulate the business benefits of being involved

The best Store and Branch Managers:

- Are proactive
- Make it a priority to engage with the community outside their front doors
- Are willing to work collaboratively with other businesses and community partners

So that you can recognise “good” when you see it we include here a number of case studies of good Town Centre Partnership Managers and good Store Managers who have a track record of success.

Ged Gibbons, Liverpool



- Business Improvement District with significant income
- Visible, outgoing Town Centre Manager
- Waiting list of businesses wanting to be on the Operating Board

Ged Gibbons is CEO of Liverpool City Central Business Improvement District (BID) and manages a staff of eight across the functions of Marketing, Events and Communications. He has an annual turnover of £1.15 million from 631

members. Unusually the local authority commits to paying the staff salaries of the City Central BID staff. Ged is accountable to a 5-strong non Executive Board of Directors made up of senior local business leaders and the Senior Cabinet Member for Regeneration from the local authority.

“It is all about adding value. When the retailers see me delivering results it is easy to get them engaged.” Ged spends at least 50% of his time out and about in the city centre. City Central BID is in the driving seat when it comes to defining the strategy of the city centre – they are making decisions about its future. As a result there is a waiting list of businesses who want to join.

Looking to the future, Ged worries about the cuts to local council services. In spite of the private

sector funding the partnership receives, they still rely heavily on services provided by the local authority. “25% cuts in council staff will inevitably impact on us in maintaining a high quality city centre environment.”

Emma Thornton, Cambridge



- Significantly increased funding from the private sector through voluntary contributions
- Has gathered evidence of strong business benefits
- Scrupulous in maintaining a partnership that includes all sections of the community

In April 2009 Emma led the city in creating an independent, business-led partnership called “Love Cambridge”. Today this is a voluntary partnership with 75% of its funds being raised from the private sector. This represents a 50% increase in the funding coming from business and demonstrates the confidence which businesses have in the partnership now they are in a leadership role.

The board is made up of 14 different town centre stakeholder groups. This includes a representative from the four shopping centres, a representative from the independent retail sector and the Managing Director from John Lewis who represents the national brands on the partnership.

Recognising the importance of demonstrating the value of the Partnership to the business community, Emma is looking to track qualitative research through annual customer perception surveys.

One of the benefits has been a reduction in retail crime. As a result of Cambac (Cambridge Business Against Crime), shoplifting has halved in the central area of the city centre in the period from Jan-Mar 2011 compared to the same time in 2009.

Over the next 12-months Cambridge will be consulting on becoming a Business Improvement District. There is a risk that the current model of ten core funders may not be sustainable in the long-term when it is obvious that a wider number of town centre tenants are benefiting from the progress being made.

Bill Moss, Maidstone



- **Business-led, voluntary scheme with well articulated business benefits**
- **Emphasis on creating good publicity for the town**
- **Empowering smaller retail quarters to take responsibility for and improve their own area**

Bill Moss has been the Town Centre Manager for Maidstone since 2002.

The Town Centre Partnership operates as a not for profit, membership organisation with three financial bands of membership – Gold, Silver and Bronze. The partnership is entirely private sector funded and led. Both financial and in-kind support is provided by the Mall shopping centre who, as well as chairing the partnership, also provide a suite of offices for the Town Centre team to operate from.

Bill spends a significant proportion of his time every day out in the

town centre talking to retailers. When a new store manager arrives in the town, Bill will try and develop a relationship with them. If visits, calls and emails are all unresponsive, only then will he give up, "I'll just wait for them to go, and try again with the new manager who replaces them."

Bill also focuses on generating positive local publicity for the town centre through local newspapers and radio. His good relationship with the Kent Messenger Group meant that during July 2010 there were 27 pages of newspaper advertising and editorial on town centre independent traders, which gave the businesses heavily discounted advertising rates.

The Town Centre Partnership cannot do everything so Bill encourages traders in discrete areas of Maidstone to collaborate to improve their specific area. "It's about identifying one person who will lead something in an area and then giving them a bit of time, encouragement and advice to make it happen" says Bill.

Jenny Inglis, Birmingham



- **Multiple Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the City Centre**
- **Different methods of business engagement for different districts**
- **Focus on footfall and sales as measures of success**

Jenny Inglis played a crucial role in City Centre Management in Birmingham for 16 years and before that in Solihull.

Birmingham is a well developed city centre with four successful business-led BIDs. Each BID meets every two months. They insist on seniority on their Boards and do not accept substitutes. The Boards have complete authority over how the money is spent and at their meetings focus on strategic decision-making rather than the detail of running the area.

The revenue from the BIDs has meant that Birmingham now has a network of footfall cameras, the information from which is sent to all BID members on a weekly basis. Star Birmingham Live was a fashion show organised by the BID to increase footfall. Some traders increased their fashion sales by 100%. One major retailer sold out of one dress featured both in store and online.

The Colmore BID is established in the professional district of Birmingham where business people work regular hours, not shifts. Consequently networking events like a recent photographic exhibition organised by the BID was attended by over 300 people. In a retail context, Jenny found that face to face contact is by far the most successful way of engaging businesses.

What does a good Store Manager look like?

Andrew Simms, Boots, Maidstone



- Has seen the advantages of businesses working collaboratively
- Gives his business influence locally which he wouldn't otherwise have
- Realises the benefits of marketing the town as a brand

Andrew has been active in Maidstone Town Centre Partnership since he came to Maidstone as a Store Manager in 2000. Prior to this he had been involved in other Town Centre Partnerships and seen the value. He is now a Director of the Town Centre Partnership, chairs the monthly Business Forum and chairs the Marketing Group.

Andrew says that it is difficult to quantify what his involvement means to the bottom line of his business however he believes it does help him manage a better performing store. "It provides Boots with influence locally. Businesses don't have a vote but being active in the Town Centre Partnership means you do have a say over things like investment, events and the strategy for the town."

He talks about the strength of collaboration, "There are a lot of areas for retailers in particular, where we don't need to compete. Core trading hours is one area which we all decide together. Similarly how we market the

town is relevant to us all and we can achieve greater impact if we act together when it comes to marketing."

Julie Ridley, Marks & Spencer, Liverpool



- Strong involvement in spite of travel distance to work
- Has realised clear business benefits from involvement
- Good understanding of the link between a successful store and a successful place

Julie became Manager of the Liverpool Marks & Spencer store in 2008 just as the store was about to undergo a major refurbishment and expansion programme. She sits on the board of the Liverpool BID which meets quarterly. "As a Store Manager it's important to be involved where things are happening," says Julie. "We are only successful if the town or city where we are located is successful. The ability to influence things is vital."

Julie is also involved with the World of Work programme at Liverpool John Moores University which aims to give undergraduates workplace skills. This means Julie provides work placements, gives talks at the University and hosted the first graduation ceremony of the programme in her store. "The benefit for us is that we get to meet young students who might be interested in a career in retail."

Julie lives in Preston and therefore has a long commute to and from work. However this does not stop her from being involved. "It comes down to a personal drive and personal desire to do things. As part of my personal development I also get a lot out of working with other local business leaders who have experience of different industries."

Gerald Thompson, McDonalds Franchise Owner of five stores in North West



- 20 year commitment to a store leads to strong incentive to be involved locally
- Manager chose a community issue with strong relevance to his business
- Manager is clear about the single focus of his stores' community activity resulting in a thorough understanding of the issue of disaffected youth

Gerald took on his first McDonalds franchise in Rochdale 12 years ago. He now has five franchises in the area employing 450 staff. Although the majority of his customers are families, he soon realised that many of the issues which his stores experienced could be attributed to disengaged young people. He got to know the young people and ran a late night basketball session for them on Fridays which was attended by 20 young people.

Gerald goes along to town centre management meetings where he meets other businesses but he feels that, to be successful, he also needs to meet residents and to get involved in community life. "I'm in this business for the long-

term. Customers' expectations these days are that if you want to operate in a community you need to be part of that community."

He is now a volunteer Board member of the Independent Monitoring Board of the local prison which serves the area and he visits the prison two or three times a week as an independent observer. This has given him a greater understanding of the problems that some young people have.

Gerald sponsors local sports teams as part of his stores' commitment to the community but is also keen for his staff to be actively involved so that they can also get to know their local community. "Many of the staff are local but the Managers can live 10-15 miles away so it's particularly important for them to participate."

Gerald's work in the community was cited as a key factor in him being awarded Franchisee of the Year 2010 by the British Franchising Association.

Rachel Christy, Starbucks, Brighton



- Community involvement strong part of day to day running of the store
- Recognition that "customers" and "the community" are not distinct entities
- Strong encouragement and guidelines provided by Head Office

Rachel manages 10 Starbucks stores in Brighton and the surrounding area. She also has



Starbucks customers voted on which local community project to support"

additional responsibilities as Community Advocate for Starbucks in London and the South East region, a job she really enjoys, "I feel privileged to work and live here. I've made great community connections through working for Starbucks, I meet so many interesting people."

Starbucks encourages every Store Manager to make contacts and establish activities in the community where they trade within guidelines set by Starbucks at national level. Rachel makes sure that community activity is always on the agenda at team meetings and in one to one meetings with partners (colleagues).

Recent activities include volunteering at a Carers Allotment, a local Special School and a local children's charity. These community partners were chosen by a community panel brought together by Starbucks in Brighton with customers in store voting on which community partner should have the largest share of money and time that the Starbucks staff had to offer.

Rachel knows that the strong level of community involvement brings clear business benefits. "It helps with store manager stability because it makes the job more interesting for them. It also means that we provide a better customer service because a lot of the community projects we get involved with are introduced to us by our customers."

Mark Davies, Hotel du Vin, Malmaison Hotels, Birmingham



- Initial sceptic converted into advocate
- Involved in significant projects which will have positive impact on the business
- Importance of local senior business leader involvement

The Hotel du Vin is one of 24 hotels run nationally by Malmaison and is located in the Colmore Business Improvement District (BID) of Birmingham. General Manager, Mark Davies was initially unconvinced about the benefits of involvement, "1% increase on your rates sounds a lot and I was sceptical that businesses working with the council could get things done". However Mark quickly saw that there were some great projects that he and his business could be involved with. He is now a member of the BID board.

Mark has been involved with plans to pedestrianise part of the road and is taking part in planning for the Food Festival in the summer. "It gives you good insight, seeing what happens in detail. The more you know, the less sceptical you are."

The other businesses he works with on the BID are also customers of the hotel and therefore it also makes perfect business sense for him to be involved. He also enjoys the mix of skills in the group. "Things that I might not be good at, others might excel in. It's also significant that other senior business leaders are dedicating their time. Big brands lend credibility to the partnership and its work."

Businesses already making local work

We've seen what good looks like at local level but how is this good practice encouraged and nurtured by business leaders? At Business in the Community we know the excellent work that goes on in our member companies. However the biggest challenge for them is translating the national and international to local through hundreds of stores and thousands of staff across the globe. Here are a few ideas from businesses who are already trying to make their brands more locally sensitive:



Community Engagement Guide & Training

Over 60% of McDonalds stores are owned and operated by around 164 franchisees. McDonalds franchisees sign a 20-year tenure and the average franchisee owns and operates 4.5 restaurants with many operating more. This means they are typically running businesses with an annual turnover of several million pounds and employing anything from 400 to over 1000 staff.

A fundamental belief of McDonalds is that their franchisees and business managers should give back to the communities within which they trade. This enables them to understand the needs of each individual community and identify where they can best support them. Equally important is that they are then better placed to listen to any concerns or ideas that the local community may have about the business and act swiftly. This approach has driven not only improved brand reputation but sustained business performance.

With this in mind McDonalds has now developed a Community Engagement Guide in partnership with their franchisees. The Guide

was published in Quarter 4 2010 and covers among other things:

- The business case for local community engagement
- How to do local stakeholder mapping
- Templates that assist the franchisee in starting new areas of activity

The Community Engagement Guide has been embraced by the franchisee community who are currently using it to bolster the work they already do in the areas of charity, environment, sport and education. As part of their franchising agreement, every franchisee participates in an annual business review.

Their involvement and progress in this area is evaluated at this time alongside more traditional business performance indicators. Support is provided by the regional communications team primarily to assist a franchisee in identifying the people locally who would most benefit from their support and advising on initiatives.

Cheryl Chung, Head of Communications at McDonalds UK, said "At McDonalds the narrative about the importance of community is constant. The language and actions of senior Directors in the business reinforces the key message that a successful store is one that is an integrated part of the community it serves."

“ As a business with a strong high street presence our approach has always been to get involved to help high streets stay relevant not only to the customers they serve but also to the communities they are part of. This guide offers both a timely reminder that our help is needed more than ever and also offers some great practical examples of what works well. ”

Jill McDonald, CEO McDonalds

John Lewis Partnership

Understanding Local Communities

John Lewis Partnership has become increasingly aware of the need to develop support and guidance for their local managers on stakeholder and community engagement. The view is that local managers of John Lewis and Waitrose shops represent the brands and therefore need to be equipped to engage strategically to support business growth and development plans as well as ensuring that they play an active and positive community role.

The first step was to host an event in Manchester for the John Lewis and Waitrose local teams to “meet the neighbours” and forge partnerships. The event included leaders of business and regeneration groups; community, voluntary and charity organisations; political stakeholders including local MPs and local council leaders; think tanks and policy groups; representatives from the education sector including local academies, universities and schools; and the local police force.

The next step was to share experiences at a workshop for shop managers, with sessions on:

- How best to engage with local political stakeholders and influencers
- Understanding local government structures
- What the Localism agenda means for our business

Speakers included an MP and a local authority Chief Executive. More workshops are planned for shop managers to share best practice.

Sainsbury's

Supporting Town Centre Management

Sainsbury's recognises that vibrant, successful town centres and communities are key to a vibrant successful business. Over 10 years ago Sainsbury's invested both financial and human resource into developing an evaluation framework for Town Centre Partnerships which still runs today. Sainsbury's wants to be certain that any local investment made is reaping good returns and therefore tends not to invest in Partnerships that are assessed to be ineffective.

The support package offered to Town Centre Partnerships includes:

- Providing guidance/advice and support to those developing Town Centre Management schemes and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) where needed.
- Providing voluntary funding for TCM partnerships.
- Objective evaluation of TCM schemes and all BID proposals where stores are affected – store managers are encouraged to get actively involved in TCM and BIDs, including serving as Board members of both TCM partnerships and BIDs
- Regular performance review for Town Centre Management schemes every two or three years. BID performance reviewed at renewal ballot.

Elizabeth Johnson, BID & TCM Co-ordinator at Sainsbury's says, “It makes sense for us to support good quality Town Centre Management as the benefits for the area include higher levels of footfall, reduced crime/impact of crime, and personal development opportunities for Sainsbury's colleagues.”



Training New Town Centre Managers

Boots UK has a long history of engagement with, and support for, local partnerships across the UK. One illustration of this has been the training support the company has devised and delivered to local partnership managers stretching back more than a decade. Andy Godfrey, Public Policy Manager at Alliance Boots said, “We originally developed the content of the Insight Programme as a resource to meet local needs. We are pleased that it is now considered as an important part of induction by partnerships”

Today, now working with the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM), Boots UK hosts the ‘Insight’ training programme providing newly appointed managers with guidance, mentoring and network opportunities. ‘New managers’ are able to learn from experienced managers from some of the most established and effective partnerships across the country. During the past decade more than 500 managers have benefitted from the training, which looks at the key building blocks necessary to establishing quality partnerships;

- Business Planning
- Developing Effective Structures
- Generating Funding
- Communicating Success

Martin Blackwell, Chief Executive of ATCM said “I attended the Boots TCM Insight Day about 13 years ago as a basic introduction to town centre management. I now lead the organisation! While the focus and emphasis may have changed the basic principles have not – to establish a broad based

partnership that has adequate funding to develop a vision for the centre and a clearly defined business plan to deliver it.”

ASDA

Team Connecting the National with the Local

ASDA recognises the strong role it has to play in the communities it serves across the UK, not just by providing employment to its colleagues, but also in how it operates its stores day to day and engages with the public on its store investment programme. Central to being a good neighbour is the need to be effective at engaging at local level.

To support this ASDA has a dedicated team of Property Communications Managers who act as a local link. These managers all live and work in the regions they cover across the UK. In addition to this ASDA stores also have an In-store Community Co-ordinator who works alongside the Store Manager to decide which local community projects and charities to support.

A recent example of this in action can be seen at the ASDA store in Handsworth, Sheffield. The Handsworth Community Forum is very active promoting all areas of resident and business interests. The Forum was keen to engage with ASDA on a range of issues involving its store operations and plans to modify the car park. ASDA colleagues met the Community Forum at an early stage to discuss the retailer’s development plans and its day to day operations. During the meeting it became clear there were operational issues which caused some frustration to residents and needed to be tackled. The ASDA team tackled these issues with a comprehensive programme that included a trolley sweep of the area in conjunction

with the Forum and set up a trolley ‘hotline’ so direct contact could be made with the store. In addition to this, the Store Manager attended monthly meetings with the Forum and engaged colleagues on a clean-up of the woods and sponsored the “In Bloom” programme.

The co-operative

Tackling Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Through Partnership

The Co-operative Group employs a team of Loss Prevention Managers who have the dual purpose of helping protect staff and enhancing the communities within which they trade.

As part of a nationwide programme of tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, The Co-operative formed a partnership with the Greater Manchester Police after a marked increase in armed robberies & burglaries across a number of businesses in the Stockport area. Peter Cooper, Regional Loss Prevention Manager and colleagues agreed a range of partnership activity with the police that would support the community and their stores as well as neighbouring businesses.

Local Co-operative store managers arranged for police surgeries in twelve different stores and involved store colleagues who had been involved in incidents. The first surgery was held in the Marple Food store. All stores involved in the initiative remained incident free and the police committed to making regular visits to these and other vulnerable businesses in the local area.

The partnership convinced the local council to provide additional lighting outside vulnerable stores and a targeted camera that allows the council and the police to maintain community safety. The

store also provides the local PC Edward Palmer and PCSO Johnny Ackerley with images from the store’s CCTV, enabling them to build evidence against shoplifters.

This is one of a range of initiatives undertaken by The Co-operative Group through building mutually beneficial local relationships. From providing store space for local police to making them cups of tea whilst on duty, store managers aim to make their store an active member of the local community.

Challenge for Business Leaders

This study represents the beginning of the journey towards better local engagement, it does not provide all the answers. Throughout the research we have come across a number of different ways in which town centre tenants are responding to the localism agenda. This is not a matter of one size fits all. A John Lewis store's response is likely to be different to how McDonalds approaches the issue. The two brands have different core opening hours, different products to sell and different sized units.

However what all the brands do have in common is a need to make sure that the customers' experience of their local store mirrors the expectations set by senior business leaders of that brand. Local engagement should be an essential part of running a store, not just something which great stores do.

So the following checklist is designed as a challenge for business leaders. How is your brand doing locally? Just asking the following questions internally will have a positive impact on the way you do business at local level. It is this kind of leadership from the top that makes a huge difference to how the brand is perceived by customers in their communities.

Review how you're doing now

1. Have you done an audit of what your store and branches are already doing at local level?
2. Are your Local Managers empowered by HQ to make local decisions about which organisations to engage with? Have they researched what local partnerships exist and made a reasoned judgement as to their value?
3. Is reference made to local engagement in the Local Manager's appraisal?
4. Are your Local Managers able to articulate how their store/branch contributes to their local community?

Put in place the training

5. Do you have local community engagement guidance/a diagnostic for your Managers to use?
6. Do you train Local Managers in how to engage locally? What is your internal resource to deliver this kind of training?
7. What internal support structures are in place to assist Local Managers to engage in the local community? Do you have the internal expertise?

Make continual improvements

8. Is there a feedback mechanism for Local Managers to let you know what's happening on the frontline?
9. Encourage Local Managers to seek out local brokers or connectors to develop their local knowledge and contacts.
10. Given that the research indicates that a lot of Local Managers live far away from their store, consider having a named person working in the Store, who might live locally and who is responsible for community liaison.

Messages to Government

Local communities are only successful where public and private sectors both improve their performance. Improving business impact at local level therefore needs excellent support from local and national government. To achieve this outcome, we ask Government to take note of the following recommendations:

We ask National Government to...

- **Recognise the importance of business-led local partnerships in delivering healthy local economies** – National Government needs to help the newly-formed Local Enterprise Partnerships work with the range of local partnerships in their area and draw out best practice.
- **Ensure quality and consistency in local partnerships** – business requires reassurance that local partnerships are receiving the support and guidance required from Government to develop and strengthen their effectiveness. When local business managers ask to get involved, it's essential that they find a high quality partnership in place which delivers.
- **Share and champion best practice amongst partnerships.** Celebrate the best and tell others about their success.

We ask Local and National Government to...

- **Think about what partnerships are delivering, could they deliver more?** Businesses are keen to work with residents (i.e. customers) as well as other businesses, Town Centre Partnerships have the potential to broker business community relationships and should be encouraged to do so.

We ask Local Government to...

- **Trust business to lead local partnerships,** they are the best business brains you have in the town centre and have a vested interest in making sure the town is successful. The best local partnerships we have spoken to in the course of this research were business-led.

Conclusion

It is a challenge for large businesses to work with increasingly localised decision-making. Businesses are trying to manage hundreds of branches and stores efficiently and often struggle to respond to multiple and unique needs from an increasingly empowered local community. We have however seen some excellent examples in this study about how some brands are tackling this.

Progress at local level can only be made if both business and local government make an effort to engage with each other. This means a clarity about the business benefits and a focus on delivery and results.

A good store manager needs to look outside their front door. They need to get involved in the key local issues which are impacting on their business. Only then will businesses have the ability to respond effectively to the economic challenges threatening the viability and vitality of our town centres.

We do however recognise that for this to happen store managers need support and encouragement from the very top of their organisations. We ask senior business leaders to become champions of the local.

“ On behalf of the Business Action on Economic Renewal Leadership Team at Business in the Community I would like to thank Boots, Asda, Starbucks, McDonalds and The Co-operative for championing this piece of work on high streets. It is the corporate responsibility of the retail, leisure and financial services industries to make sure that they are adding something to the vibrancy of the high street not just by their presence but by their actions. ”

Charlie Mayfield

Thanks to the businesses who have driven this work through the High Streets Steering Group



The **co-operative**

ASDA



Thanks to the British Retail Consortium and BCSC for their support and cooperation

BRITISH **RETAIL** CONSORTIUM
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stands for Responsible Business

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