

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS**

**EXECUTIVE**

Date: 20 September 2019

Subject: The changing High Street – an opportunity for placemaking and local leadership



Report of: David Covill, Director South East England Councils

**Recommendation:**

The Executive is asked to participate in a workshop regarding the future of the High Street and consider how South East England Councils should take this work forward to benefit all member authorities

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**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The challenges facing High Streets are well known. The steady decline in retail has hit many places hard and more recent, and perhaps unexpected, changes in the leisure sector (notably food & beverage) have had an impact. The type of redevelopments that many places achieved or aspired to are less likely to happen in future outside major cities. At the same time, many High Streets in the South East remain vibrant centres of the community where people live, shop, work, study and enjoy themselves. An evolutionary approach to placemaking is in any case more appropriate to many High Streets than wholesale redevelopment.
- 1.2 A dilemma facing local authorities and partners in the private and public sector is how far to go to maintain the status quo or at least manage decline, when a fresh approach may be best. A 'fresh' approach may involve looking back before the expansion of retail in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which displaced employment and residential space. It may require changes in long-standing policy (for example to actively reduce retail space), direct intervention or investment in social infrastructure such as schools or health to sustain communities. Many local authorities in the South East are finding new ways to work with the private and public sectors recognising the opportunities and the risks.
- 1.3 Every High Street is different but there are trends, techniques and opportunities which are applicable to most High Streets in the South East from large town and city centres through to medium sized villages and neighbourhood centres. Local leadership is essential. Whilst there are actions that South East England Councils may wish the Government to take, the greatest impact will be made locally. A broad approach is also required to ensure that the future of the High Street is not seen as the preserve of the planning authority or the planning department when all tiers of government and many council services have an important role in placemaking. A High Street should have a reputation as a pleasant, safe and sustainable centre of the community.
- 1.4 The Executive on 20 September is an opportunity for Members to consider a range of matters relating to the High Street, to learn from the experience of others and consider the skills required in a changed environment. Members will also be asked to contribute ideas on how South East England Councils should take this work forward to benefit all member authorities

- 1.5 Simon Hope and Kevin White from Montague Evans will facilitate the session. Montagu Evans is a leading real estate advisory focussed solely on the UK. A particular focus of the business is in the field of high streets and town centres and they have a large team which works closely with councils to help them navigate and shape their urban areas, linking them with the private sector to encourage collaboration to help deliver sustainable communities and local economies.
- 1.6 Simon and Kevin are both partners in the town centre advisory team and predominantly advise local authorities, helping them set objectives, build strategies and deliver through partnership with the private sector, direct development, or facilitation. Simon and Kevin are involved with a number of knowledge sharing platforms for members and officers such as CIPFA, the LGA, and London First.

**David Covill**  
**Director**