

Institution: Edge Hill University		
Unit of Assessment: C17 - Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Impacting the role for retail in Town Centre Regeneration: evidence from best practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2018-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Kim Cassidy	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Services (Retail) Marketing	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: December 2017
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact Research generating and evaluating exemplars of best practice in town centre regeneration undertaken by Professor Cassidy at Edge Hill University has had a significant impact on national policy and strategy alongside local town centre planning and practice. First, the research has had a <i>policy impact</i> , forming a major part of The Grimsey Review 2 (GR2) and subsequent Covid supplement . These two independent reports, which identify barriers to and recommendations for change in town centre Policy, have shaped the nature and focus of two substantial government-funding allocations designed to re-energise town centres and local economies: the GBP1,000,000,000 Future High Streets Fund and GBP3,600,000,000 Towns Fund. Second, the research has <i>influenced practice</i> by informing the decision making of town leaders and retail executives charged with shaping local, national and international regeneration strategy.		
2. Underpinning research The impacts are underpinned by research undertaken by Professor Cassidy in the Business School at Edge Hill University between 2018 and 2020. First, an evaluation of retail best practice in town centre regeneration based on data collected between January and July 2018 and March and June 2020. A case methodology, identifying and evaluating exemplars of best practice through the evolving Service-Dominant Logic (S-DL) and its service ecosystems perspective, revealed insights about successful value co-creation practice. Key findings highlighted a). Benefits for retailers of close collaboration with other sectors and businesses, (most notably tourism, leisure and health) in developing a community 'hub' solution b). The importance of aligning the retail mission with the holistic 'place' plan and c). The importance of engaging members of the community in developing innovative retail/service solutions. (Ref 1) Second, close scrutiny of activities within one particular town centre service ecosystem, also drawing on case methodology, S-DL and institutional theory. The analysis identified seven 'norms' shared by actors within the eco-system, which served to maintain and support successful regeneration activity. (Ref 2) Most critically, the normative analysis reinforced the importance of drawing collaboratively on operant resources amongst local actors within the community to shape successful strategy implementation. The data collection for this research took place between July 2016 and October 2017, with data analysis and theoretical framing continuing at Edge Hill and ultimately informing the case set featured in GR2 (Ref 3) . The findings and case studies from the research featured in chapters written by Cassidy in GR2, (Ref 3 pp. 42-55) and the Covid supplement (Ref 4 pp. 33-64) . As the sole academic author, Professor Cassidy's research directly informed recommendations included in GR2 and its Covid supplement in three key areas: 1. Highlighted the importance of mobilising <i>community engagement and collaboration for effective regeneration</i> . This emphasis on localism and community empowerment represents a significant challenge to existing policy with place making and community building 'having become an anathema to those in central and local governments who have a stranglehold over our high street' (Ref 3 p.10) . The Covid supplement also called for 'a massive shift in power away from central government to local communities' with local people being empowered to 'redesign their own high streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it' (Ref 4 p.3) . To operationalise community engagement, recommendation 1 in GR2 , called for the establishment of a Town Centre Commission with a defined remit to build a 20-year vision or strategy for each unique place (Ref 3 p.1) . 2. Identified successful retailers, who had <i>repositioned themselves within a new community 'hub'</i>		

high street solution, replacing mass consumerism with a focus that values the environment and fosters a new sense of community. For many, survival involved establishing closer relationships with health and leisure providers and stronger links with heritage and community assets. Planning use legislation was cited as a barrier to further collaboration and innovation between retailers and other types of business, generating **recommendation 18 in GR2**, a call to 'review and amend the planning use class system legislation to enable greater flexibility of building use' (**Ref 3 p.9**). The point was emphasised again in the Covid supplement, with **recommendation 21**, Planning and Use Classes, calling for Government to 'deregulate the use class system and give Local Authorities the opportunity to develop an appropriate proposition to attract people to live, work, play and visit a unique town' (**Ref 4 p.8**)

3. Generated *exemplars of best practice in town centre regeneration* and *two significant Case Studies*: Roeselare in Flanders and Stockton-on-Tees in the North East of the UK. These exemplars and case studies highlighted the importance of continuing to capture and evaluate best practice and generated **recommendation 2 in GR2**, a call for the establishment of a National Independent organisation to 'capture and share best practice'. This would be available for towns to access and would include academic research, investment models and case studies, as well as information and advice on how to build an evidence base and how to write a town plan supported by a network of experts (**Ref 3 p.8**).

3. References to the research

1. Cassidy, K. J., Grimsey, W., & Blackley, N. (2020). The contribution of physical retail to value co-creation in the town centre ecosystem; evidence from Grimsey. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 365-382 DOI: 10.1108/JPM-D-2019-0074
2. Cassidy, K., & Resnick, S. (2020). Adopting a value co-creation perspective to understand High Street regeneration. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, pp.1-24. DOI:10.1080/0965254X.2019.1642938
3. Grimsey Review 2 (GR2) 'It's time to reshape our High Streets', pp.1-63. (Case exemplars pages 42-25) <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2.pdf>.
4. Build Back Better. COVID-19 supplement for Town Centres pp.1-70. (Case Exemplars pages 33-64) <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Grimsey-Covid-19-Supplement-June-2020.pdf>

Outputs 1 and 2 are published in peer-reviewed journals of international standing in field of marketing. Outputs 3 and 4 were partly co-authored by Cassidy based on research outcomes from 1 and 2 and are recognised as major high street reviews of significant standing.

4. Details of the Impact

Context: The decline of UK high streets is arguably not a new problem. Over the past decade, an increase in online shopping, competition from out-of-town retail parks and the rise of a convenience culture has forced many retailers to close tens of thousands of stores in centres across the world. Many see this decline in physical stores as an inevitable consequence of retailers' inability to develop an effective and efficient omni-channel offer, which meets the needs of an increasingly 'digitally obsessed consumer'. Others attribute the decline more to failure in central government policy, failures to address overly bureaucratic local leadership practices, outdated planning and building regulations and an ineffective business rate scheme. Arresting this decline represents a significant challenge to Government with town centres seen to represent 'a crucial part of our communities and local economies, creating jobs, nurturing small businesses and injecting billions of pounds into our economy'. In the UK, retailers contribute to a high street that comprises some 95,000 companies with a total net worth of GBP135,000,000,000, significantly more than the education budget of GBP53,000,000,000, the defence budget of GBP24,000,000,000 and health at GBP110,000,000,000.

Pathways to Impact: The first Grimsey Review of the High Street, published as a rejoinder to the Portas Review in 2013, received extensive media and government attention. Many considered it a milestone in the journey towards policy change. In 2018, however, frustrated by the lack of progress, Bill Grimsey invited Cassidy to contribute to a second review (**GR2**) which resurfaced the problems facing town centres and stimulated an immediate policy response. The success of GR2 led to a call for the same team to examine the potential pandemic related consequences for town

centres and high streets and resulted in the publication of the Grimsey **COVID Supplement** in June 2020. Cassidy was the sole academic contributor to both reports responsible for strengthening the evidence base with robust research. Her input was 'invaluable, collating and evaluating evidence of best practice from towns around the UK and Europe, which were used to frame the recommendations' (**source 1**). Both reports have had a demonstrable impact on national policy and direction and local planning and action as outlined below.

Impact on town centre regeneration policy

GR2 was published in July 2018. In October 2018, the Government launched the **Future High Street Fund (FHSF)**, a GBP675,000,000 allocation to help local areas make their high streets and town centres fit for the future. This included funds to establish a **High Streets Task Force (HSTF)** to provide hands-on support to local areas to develop innovative strategies to help high streets evolve, connect local areas to relevant experts and share best practice. GBP55,000,000 of that fund was set aside to support the regeneration of heritage high streets, with Historic England receiving GBP40,000,000 for its High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme. The FHSF and the HSTF were formally established in response to recommendations made by the High Streets Expert panel chaired by Sir John Timpson. The High Streets Minister commissioned this panel in July 2018, immediately following the publication of GR2, to diagnose the issues facing high streets and town centres and advise on practical actions for central government. The findings and recommendations were published in the High Street Report (**source 2**) with interim findings actioned in the Autumn budget. Many of these findings and recommendations mirror those presented in GR2, linked to Cassidy's research (**Ref 1 and 2**). The FHSF is viewed as a major milestone and the start of serious and sustained Government investment in town centre regeneration. In July 2019, the Prime Minister announced a further GBP3,600,000,000 **Towns Fund (TF)** to re-energise local economies. This included an additional GBP325,000,000 for the Future High Streets Fund, bringing the total to GBP1,000,000,000.

As well as highlighting the urgent need for investment, the evidence shows that GR2 and the COVID supplement have been instrumental in shaping both the *remit and structure of the HSTF* and *the nature of the funding criteria* for both the FHSF and the TF. The executive summary in the High Street Report explicitly acknowledges the contribution of the evidence in 'Bill Grimsey's reviews of high streets and town centres' (**source 2 p.7**) and specific recommendations in GR2 can be linked directly to the panel's recommendations.

The *remit* outlined for HSTF mirrors **recommendation 2 in GR2**, calling for the establishment of a National Independent organisation to 'capture and share best practice', which should be available for towns to access. The High Street report cites 'GR2' 'as an example that the Department (HCLG) should examine before setting up the Task Force' (**source 2 p.9**). The HCLG select committee report on High streets and town centres in 2030, which also informed the High Street report recommendations, reinforces the direct link between recommendation 2 in GR2 and the HSTF. The report acknowledges the recommendation from GR2 for 'a central data hub that we can populate with statistics and best practice for people to access' and acknowledges a direct link to the creation of the HSTF as part of the FHSF (**source 3 p.58**). It is clear that the research continues to influence the work of the HSTF. In May 2020, Cassidy was invited to join the Professional, Research and Data Group (PRDG), a subgroup of the Task Force, to work to understand the evidence base for high streets and their transformation, helping to inform action and policy. The Chair of the HSTF also recently described the COVID supplement as 'insightful and inspiring' and 'not a surprise given the quality of the team behind it'. GR2 and the COVID supplement are both cited as key resources on the HSTF website. In a personal response to the COVID supplement sent to Bill Grimsey in August 2020, the Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government concludes with personal thanks for 'offering insights shared as the High Streets Task Force has developed since Budget 2018' (**source 4**).

As well as pointing to the need for a Task Force, the recommendations in GR2 also shaped the nature of the *funding criteria* for both the FHSF and the TF. A key finding from GR2 was that successful regeneration would depend on strong local leadership, which could 'bring together all stakeholders, including the community, to develop and implement a plan for location' (**Ref 3 p.6**). To operationalise community engagement, **recommendation 1 in GR2** called for the establishment of a Town Centre Commission with a defined remit to build a 20-year vision or strategy for each unique place. The High Street Report picked up on the need for funding applications to give greater powers to council leaders and to communities. 'Bids should

demonstrate the involvement of the wider community in articulating a shared vision... empowering local people, organisations, businesses, and institutions to be active contributors and partners' (**source 2 p.12**). The criteria for applications for funding for the TF made this even more explicit, with the requirement for Councils to establish Town Deals Boards to develop and drive investment plans. The board should reflect the diversity of the town and surrounding area and include members of all tiers of local government for the geography of the town, the MP(s) representing the town, the Local Enterprise Partnership, local businesses and investors and community/local voluntary community sector representatives.

Recommendations from GR2 have also stimulated legislative change. To enable innovation and greater collaboration between different types of business, the best practice exemplars highlighted the need for urgent changes to the archaic class use system. **Recommendation 18 in GR2**, called for a review and amendment of 'the planning use class system legislation to enable greater flexibility of building use'. **Recommendation 21 in the COVID supplement** reemphasised this, calling for Government to 'deregulate the use class system and give Local Authorities the opportunity to develop an appropriate proposition to attract people to live, work, play and visit a unique town'. In his response to the COVID supplement, (**source 4**) the Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government explicitly acknowledged the Government response to this with reference to new regulations, which came into force on September 1st, 2020. He explained that 'the Government has introduced regulations to reform and simplify the Use Classes Order to make it easier for high street users to change use without the need for a planning application. This will create a new broad category of 'commercial, business and service' uses, which will allow commercial, retail and leisure uses greater freedom to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to the needs of their local communities' (**source 4**).

It is clear that research from GR2 and the COVID supplement continues to shape policy. The COVID supplement, for example, has formed the basis for oral evidence given by Grimsey to the HCLG select committee hearing 'Supporting our high streets after Covid-19, HC 624002112020.

Informing town centre regeneration strategies

All 343 Councils in the UK are eligible to apply for the FHSF, with 300 submitting bids to date. 100 places have been targeted to submit detailed proposals for the TF. Since 2018, Cassidy has been actively sharing her research findings with council leaders submitting applications for these two income streams. Inputs based on Cassidy's guidance have focused on the nature and significance of community participation and guidance on the potential for innovative collaborations within the community 'hub' solution, both key outputs from the research. These inputs have taken the form of keynote presentations (e.g. to DCN leaders on a Local Government Authority High Street Leadership programme), and consultations with specific councils (including Warrington, Stockton, Coventry, Mansfield, Wolverhampton and West Lancashire). In January 2020, Cassidy was chair, convenor and keynote speaker at a Town Deals workshop for senior executives from a selection of the 100 towns eligible for TD funds in Nottinghamshire. The aim of the workshop was to offer support for towns submitting funding applications, to work on strategic aims, consider examples of good practice and co-operate across councils to share ideas. As of December 2020, Warrington, West Lancashire, Mansfield, Stockton, Sutton in Ashfield, Nottingham City, and Buxton have all been successful in securing funding allocations. Stockton Council received GBP16,543,812 from FHSF to support a radical transformation of Stockton-on-Tees town centre. This was a case developed by Cassidy, featured in GR2, involving the creation of a community 'hub' solution focused on leisure, events and recreation rather than retail. West Lancashire Borough Council have recently secured a substantial GBP755,000 match fund from Historic England to deliver the High Street Heritage Action Zone programme in Ormskirk. Cassidy's research has 'helped shape the content of funding applications by highlighting strategies to effectively engage business community stakeholders and offering insights about ways in which retailers might work with assets to develop more community focused town centres' (**source 5**). Most critically, 'it has shaped how high streets, and the business and communities that engage with them, need to evolve and adapt to new market demand to overcome the challenges faced by our UK high streets today' (**source 5**). Cassidy has recently been working with Sefton Borough Council, offering advice on their ambitious GBP50,000,000 plan submitted to the TF to transform Southport. The plan emphasises community participation in the development of an effective place proposition and enhances the leisure and health aspects of the town, rather than focusing solely on retail. Cassidy's research contribution, advice and insights are seen to 'have had a positive effect on the final submission'

(source 6). There is further evidence that the research from GR2 and the COVID supplement is impacting Council decision making. Oxfordshire County Council, for example, have included a recommendation for Grimsey style Town Commissions in their post-Covid Economic Recovery Plan. Others are actively promoting the Grimsey reviews in the place making toolkits that provide for Districts. **(source 7 p.7)**

- *Influencing town centre strategy beyond the UK*

A further key output from Cassidy's research has been the development of a major case study of best practice in collaboration with the Head of Economic Development from the town of Roeselare in Flanders. The case featured in both GR2 and the COVID supplement. Recommendations from Cassidy's work have also fed into the town of Roeselare city centre plan, emphasising collaboration between retailers and existing leisure and heritage services in a community hub solution. As the Head of Economic Development states, 'the evaluation and feedback we got was crucial in the development of the second city centre plan. Aside from the plan, Cassidy also helped local retailers think about their businesses and how to work more closely with other sectors e.g. Horeca. So our cooperation not only had a theoretical outcome but was also very practical for several local businesses and retailers' **(source 8)**. Cassidy was also involved in facilitating a study tour of Roeselare (June 28th – 29th 2019) for members of the District Council Network. All 30 members attending the tour were in the process of submitting a bid for the FHSF, which required them to submit an outline vision for one of their local high streets.

- *Connecting retail and heritage assets*

A key strand of Cassidy's research highlighted ways in which traditional retailers might collaborate with heritage assets to reinforce a distinctive place proposition. These insights have had an impact on retailers and strategy makers in the town of Southwell in Nottinghamshire. Following a scoping visit in 2019, Cassidy facilitated a workshop for 40 local retail businesses operating in Southwell, (members of the Shop Southwell Independent traders association) and representatives of Southwell Minster (February 2020). The workshop featured the exemplars of retail best practice from the research in an effort to revitalise the businesses in Southwell high street and enable them to make a stronger connection between the town and the minster, a key heritage asset. Since February 2020, 'thanks to Professor Cassidy, many of her recommendations are ones I have been able to adapt, share with colleagues at Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC) and put into practice with the group to help them though so difficult a time' **(source 9)**. These include supporting retailers, via the NSDC High Street Diversification Fund, with grants towards creating or improving their transactional capability and developing a stylish and instantly recognisable 'look' and image for the Shop Southwell group' **(source 9)**. Cassidy's recommendation has led to 'continuing liaison with the Minster to encourage visitors to both explore our famous attraction and unique independent shops with the aim of making Southwell a true retail destination' **(source 9)**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. **Testimonial**, Bill Grimsey (Author GR2 and COVID supplement)
2. **The High Street Report** (Timpson)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766844/The_High_Street_Report.pdf
3. House of Commons, Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee **report High streets and town centres in 2030** Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/1010/1010.pdf>
4. **Letter from Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government** Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to Bill Grimsey responding to recommendations in COVID supplement.
5. **Testimonial** former Principal Economic Regeneration Officer (Growth and Development) for West Lancashire and currently Economic Development Lead with Wirral Borough Council
6. **Testimonial** Executive Director Sefton Council
7. **Cornwall Council** Place Shaping Community Toolkit
8. **Testimonial** Head of Department of Economics in the city of Roeselare, Belgium
9. **Testimonial** Tourism officer, Newark and Sherwood District Council