

TRADER TOOLKIT

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TRADER GROUPS - WORKING TOGETHER FOR YOUR CENTRE

In common with many small and medium sized town centres across the country, Wirral's town centres have experienced a decline in their fortunes over the last few years, the recession, the rise of internet shopping and change in shopping habits all contributing to this downturn.

It is clear that our centres need to change and adapt. Traders groups can be a proactive way of joining forces, working together to improve your local centre and to reverse this decline. The council will work with traders, providing advice, guidance and support to help in encouraging people back to your local centre.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WORKING TOGETHER?

- Working together will allow you to support other businesses in your local centre and help sustain and grow local businesses.
- It will create a knowledge and skills network to help expand and develop your business in the future, drawing on experience and advice from other local traders, to help tackle the issues affecting your area.
- Coming together as a group will give you more opportunities to access and create promotional material and resources.
- Working together with other shops and traders in joint promotions and events such as late night shopping
- Jointly research what customers in your area want
- More effective day to day management of the issues affecting your centre
- Easier access to funding opportunities which may become available for town and local centres
- Provide a point of contact for council officers and others regarding issues relating to your centre

HOW TO SET UP A TRADERS GROUP

Just follow these simple steps to help create your own trader group:

- 1. Canvas interest and support - speak to other traders in your area promote the idea of working together spread the word, create a leaflet, send an email, put up a poster in the centre and encourage traders to come along to an initial meeting**
- 2. Gather traders together after work somewhere central to have an initial chat about becoming a trader group for your retail area, or set up an online forum (such as a facebook group), and encourage local traders to contribute.**
- 3. Let the Council know you are holding a meeting and someone will be able to attend to explain the benefits to you and help you to decide whether it is something you want to carry on with.**
- 4. The extent to which groups become formalised (into a Traders Association for example) will depend on individual circumstances. Operating a Membership scheme or setting up a limited company or community interest company may be appropriate in some larger centres but will not be for everyone. However, to access external funding some degree of formal organisation will probably be necessary. For example, the recent Portas Pilots funding required those bidding to set themselves up as town teams to bid for the funding. The Association of Town Centre Managers "100 Ways to Help the High Street" online guide provides further guidance on setting up a formal town centre partnership the guide can be accessed via this link: http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/economy/-/journal_content/56/10171/3510581/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE**

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Holding events is a great way to add vitality and life to your local high street. They enhance the retail offer, the shopping experience and give people the chance to experience the town centre in a new way.

There are many different reasons to run an event, from seasonal celebrations and fundraising events, to promotional events like a town-centre-wide promotion or celebration.

IDENTIFY AN EVENT SPACE

Having a suitable venue for events makes it more likely that people will choose to run events in your town, and that they will be successful. 'Think outside the box' or in this case the shop! The space can be indoors or outdoors - maybe a vacant unit or an underused area, a car park that is always empty? Often town centres have suitable public spaces, which may just need a few changes to be turned into a really useful event space.

Things to consider are the size of the space, as this will reflect the size and type of events you can hold, access and car parking, local amenities (such as public toilets and places to eat), and the impact on local residents.

TAP INTO LOCAL EVENTS

If events are planned locally, perhaps they could be linked to the town centre to draw attention to the town centre's offer. They don't necessarily need to be shopping based to attract shoppers! Perhaps a charity run route in the local park could be extended to run down the high street, or a local school's concert could take place in the town centre... ultimately anything that draws people in and shows them what your centre has to offer.

RUNNING AN EVENT

If you decide that you want to run an event, you'll need to set some key goals - who? why? what? and where? Decide who are the target audience, and why you are running the event?

You'll also need an event team in place. This need not be anything too complicated or costly but if everyone knows what the objectives are, and what their individual roles and responsibilities are, you will all be working together towards the same outcome.

You'll need a proper plan to run the event, let people know about it, and to raise money or pay for the event. There are a few different laws which might apply to your event, to ensure your event or activity is fair and safe. You can find out about licensing requirements here and apply for a temporary events licence here. If you need to speak to someone about the licences you might need, our licensing team will be happy to help and can be contacted by emailing licensing@wirral.gov.uk or phoning **0151 691 8043**.

**Events Advisory Group -
Chris Higgins on 0151 691 8269.**

CASE STUDY

COMING TOGETHER OVER A SHARED ISSUE

Traders in one local centre came together to resolve a parking issue in the centre which was losing their businesses passing trade. By working together they successful resolved the issue with the Council's Highways team and the Police. This was the starting point of a small and successful trader group who have now organised many events and promotions in the centre.

CASE STUDY

PRESERVING THE CHARACTER OF THE CENTRE

In another of Wirral's centres, a successful residents group working together have had some fantastic results which have benefitted the centre.

This includes 'open days' in the area, improved signage and high quality shop fronts. By working together closely with businesses and residents the quality of the area has been maintained. The centre has a thriving independent range of shops and restaurants which are well supported and are flourishing.

**starting or
growing
your town
centre
business**

CHANGING THE USE OF A SHOP OR BUILDING

If you're looking to expand or open a new business in an existing building, you'll need to consider whether the shop unit or building is going to be used for a different activity to the existing use, as you might need planning permission to change the building's "use class".

The activities which take place in a building are grouped into "use classes" which are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order. Use Classes specify the uses buildings can be used for without the need for planning permission.

In many cases involving similar types of use, a change of use of a building does not need planning permission when both the present and proposed uses fall within the same 'class', for example, if you were looking to open a greengrocer's shop in what used to be a shoe shop you generally won't need planning permission for a change of use as these uses fall within the same retail 'use class'. However, if you were looking to open a restaurant in what used to be a shop, this would require permission as the restaurant falls into a different 'use class', reflecting the fact that they generally have different impacts on the local area - a restaurant open until 10pm could result in a lot more traffic and noise later into the evening than a fruit shop open until 5pm.

CAN I CHANGE MY SHOP/BUILDING'S USE?

The first thing you will need to know when changing the use of a premises, is what the current use class is, and which use class the intended use will fall into. You can find out your current use class, and which changes are allowed without permission here on the planning portal website.

www.planningportal.gov.uk

If you would like to make a change which is not automatically allowed, you will need planning permission. It's useful to get advice on which uses might be permitted in your unit, and which locations are suitable for your use from Wirral's planning team. If you would like to make an application for change of use, you will need to make a "Full Planning Application." You can find the forms here and advice on making applications here. www.wirral.gov.uk

For some uses, such as hot food takeaways, the consideration of 'change of use' planning applications will be subject to assessment against the Council's planning policies which seek to prevent adverse impacts on the rest of the shopping centre from issues such as noise and disturbance which may arise from an over-concentration of such uses within a street containing similar establishments.

(See page 22 for Class Table - Class A uses only)

WHAT IF I DON'T NEED PLANNING PERMISSION FOR CHANGE OF USE? CAN I JUST MOVE IN?

In some cases even if the change of use doesn't require consent, any changes that you make to the building are likely to require consent, for example a new shop front or a new sign. You may also need a licence for certain activities, e.g. selling alcohol, playing music or using the pavement. Planning conditions may also control the trading hours and the timing of deliveries.



SHOP FRONTS

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THE PUBLIC FACE OF YOUR BUSINESS

The design of the shop front is important in terms of the streetscape and the overall appearance of the shopping centre but above all else it is the biggest and most effective advertisement for your business. The shop frontage is the public face of your business. It should attract customers, reflect the quality of service your business provides and make an excellent first impression.

An attractive high street is one people want to visit. As well as being an advert for your own business it is important to consider the effect of your shopfront on the centre as a whole.

I'M REPLACING OR ALTERING MY SHOPFRONT - DO I NEED PERMISSION?

You'll normally need planning permission for a new shop front, signage and external shuttering and any other works that affect the use of the building and its appearance and any building work will need Building Regulations approval. It's always best to check which permissions you'll need with the planning department. The Council will be producing detailed guidance on the issues to consider when preparing a planning application for a new shopfront. In the meantime, the following are a few basic suggestions to consider when revamping your shop front.

Take a moment to look at the row in which your shop is situated, which shop stands out or draws your eye? What is the character of existing buildings along the street, is there a rhythm, material, colour or detail that they all share? The design of frontage should respect the established character of the locality - a traditional or contemporary approach could be acceptable depending on the context. Think about the service you offer, the function you want the shop front to provide and the image you are portraying. Remember that people walking or driving past may only glance at your shopfront for a second, so keep it simple, let people know what you're offering and give a good first impression!

SHOP SECURITY



HOW DOES YOUR BUSINESS LOOK WHEN IT'S SHUT?

Security is a concern for any business, everyone wants to protect their livelihood.

Before deciding on how to secure your premises you should consider the different options available.

Your shop front is key to the success of your business, it's how you advertise your business or services and attract customers. Whatever security measures you decide on they should be considered as an integral component of the overall frontage and not as an afterthought.

The most common means of security for commercial premises is the installation of roller shutters, which can often hide your business from the public when you're closed. Often ugly shutter boxes are placed below the shop sign, detracting from signage boards and window displays. However hiding the shutter box behind the fascia, or mounting shutters internally can provide security without detracting from your signage or displays.

Think about how your business looks when it's shut. Could you think imaginatively about how shutters could improve your shop's appearance, or work with surrounding shops to attract attention even when the shutters are closed? Options such as laminated glass and internally mounted shutters allow potential customers to view the products or services you offer 24 hours a day. Likewise a perforated design can provide some pedestrian interest and with lighting provides animation to your shop front and the streetscene. Rather than solid barriers, light and activity are very effective ways of preventing crime. Solid shutters may attract vandalism, providing a blank canvas for graffiti .

Shutters should ideally be colour coated in a colour that relates to the shop front.

I WANT TO INSTALL OR REPLACE ROLLER SHUTTERS - DO I NEED PLANNING PERMISSION?

Whatever option you decide on, the installation of a roller shutter will normally require planning consent. To find out how to make a planning application, see the council's planning pages here.

www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/environment-and-planning/planning

A photograph of a street sign on a sidewalk. The sign is rectangular with a white border and a bright orange background. It is mounted on a grey plastic base. To the left of the sign is a concrete planter with purple and yellow flowers. In the background, a city street is visible with cars and buildings.

**ADVERTISING
AND
SIGNAGE**

CREATE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Having well designed signage can give customers or clients a good first impression of your business.

Signage is a key part of the overall frontage so it's important that your sign is well integrated into the shop front and has a design appropriate to the building's design. Think about the image you are trying to portray? Does this come across from a quick glance at the shop?

Passers by, especially in vehicles, will only see your sign for a second or two, so a simple clear message often works best. Fascia signs should typically contain no more than the name of the trader and street number. You might also want to indicate the nature of the trade, through the sign's colours, materials or design.

The most important feature of a sign is the lettering. The scale, style and material will have a large impact on the building's appearance. A simple, eye-catching design will identify your business, attract attention and enhance the appearance of your building. Additional signage or advertising should be kept to a minimum and should be accommodated in a subtle manner, so as not to detract from your shop frontage and window displays.

Think about where your advert is best placed, and how it should be displayed? If you're opening a café you might want to display a menu in the window or an A-board on the pavement. An interiors shop might put a picture frame in the window with its opening hours. None of these ideas are expensive but thinking creatively will make your shop appeal to customers and stand out for all the right reasons.

I WANT TO INSTALL OR CHANGE MY SIGNAGE AND ADVERTISEMENTS - DO I NEED PERMISSION?

The display of advertisements is controlled by different legislation to planning, so you won't require planning consent but you could require advertisement consent.

The Government has published a great guide to advertising and signage requirements, which you can find at www.gov.uk/government/publications/outdoor-advertisements-and-signs-a-guide-for-advertisers

**USING THE
HIGHWAY**

CONSIDERING YOUR OUTSIDE SPACE

The highway outside your premises is where customers will get their first impression of your business, so it's important that people are able to move freely to access your shop, and that your business looks attractive and inviting from the outside.

The public highway includes footpaths, pavements, roads and pedestrianised spaces.

If the pavement is big enough, or you are in a pedestrianised area, you might be able to make greater use of the pavement to add life to the street outside and use the outside area to draw customers in. You may wish to place a display outside your shop, tables and chairs outside your café, or an A-board advertising what's going on inside your premises.

SOME IDEAS...

CREATING AN OUTDOOR SEATING AREA

If you have a café, bar, restaurant, pub or sandwich bar you may wish to place a few tables and chairs outside. This can significantly boost trade during the warmer months, and on cooler evenings gas patio-style heaters can be used to extend the outdoor seating season. This can be enhanced with a parasol or canopy to reduce the heat escaping.

DISPLAYING GOODS OUTSIDE

Some businesses might find it beneficial to display goods outside, such as plant shops or florists, where the plants can benefit from being outside and soften the appearance of the street. This can be a good way to show off your goods to passers-by and encourage passing trade.

A-BOARDS

In addition to signage on your shop front, you might also want to display an A-board on the pavement. Providing it doesn't cause an obstruction on the pavement, an attractively designed A-board can highlight your business and add some animation to the street.

DO I NEED PERMISSION?

The Highways Act 1980 says that it is an offence to wilfully obstruct the highway without lawful excuse, and gives the council power to remove any items. Wirral Council wants to encourage businesses to thrive but has a duty to ensure the highways are safe, so please contact the Highways licensing team before you consider doing any works to your business.

For pavement cafes you'll also need planning permission, as you are changing what the pavement is used for. Parasols or canopies overhanging the street also need planning permission.

PRIOR TO UNDERTAKING ANY OF THE ABOVE WORKS PLEASE CONTACT:

PLANNING TEAM	0151 606 2020
HIGHWAYS TEAM	0151 606 2004

Or see these pages on the website:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/business/licensing/-boards-shop-displays-and-pavement-cafes>

VACANT UNITS

CONSIDERING NEW AND INNOVATIVE USES

Our high streets have experienced a long term trend of increasing vacancy rates, which has only been accelerated by the current economic climate. Some areas have been able to buck the trend, whilst some are becoming characterised by empty shops, with both businesses and shutters permanently closed.

Vacant units can give a negative impression of an area's vitality. They can attract fly-posting/ graffiti, and result in inactive and visually unattractive streetscapes. This often worsens existing issues, making premises harder to let and deterring new businesses from investing in the centre.

In some centres the high vacancy rates are partly due to the type of accommodation available. The more traditional high street units can provide only a limited accommodation offer in terms of size and layout. These don't attract larger retailers or meet the needs of growing businesses, which means successful businesses sometimes have to relocate to grow. Adapting or combining units may be a way to ensure that the high street has the mix of units it needs to attract and retain businesses and remain a viable option in a competitive climate.

Although the focus of our centre should remain as retail, new and innovative uses should be considered for vacant units, to introduce new customers and allow the high street to adapt and remain at the heart of the community. Before considering proposals to change a retail unit into a non-town centre use such as residential, the Council will look for evidence that the unit has been marketed for retail purposes.

RE-USING EMPTY UNITS

Reusing empty units is key to preventing and managing the decline of our centres. Finding new uses or temporary uses for vacant units results in lower vacancy rates, a more attractive lively high street and can demonstrate the attractiveness of the unit to potential new tenants. The following sets out some possible options for owners of vacant retail premises.

There are various business rates implications to having an empty shop. Encouraging retailers to open a shop in empty premises can have benefits for landlords and the surrounding businesses. This saves you money on empty property rates, security and utilities. Having the space occupied means that the space is much less likely to get vandalised, potentially saving you money on security and repairs.

Opening a 'pop up' shop is a good way to test out your business idea. This is a less risky and cheaper way to pilot your business idea. Setting up a temporary shop can be a great way to expand your business from an at home enterprise or growing your existing business into another unit or centre.

If you own an empty shop, encouraging a new business to open in a vacant unit on a temporary, possibly rent-free period creates a new attraction on the high street, leading to new customers and eventually can lead to a successful long-term tenant.

Using shop fronts for interesting displays or art installations can also be a great way to improve the attractiveness of an empty unit, and allow it to look its best for potential occupiers. This can add interest and give people a reason to visit the high street. This could be an extension to a nearby attraction or involve local community groups or students. By ensuring the unit is contributing to the vibrancy of the high street, you are maximising the attractiveness of your unit's location to potential investors. So in short its not only of benefit to the centre and the local community, but also to the property owner.

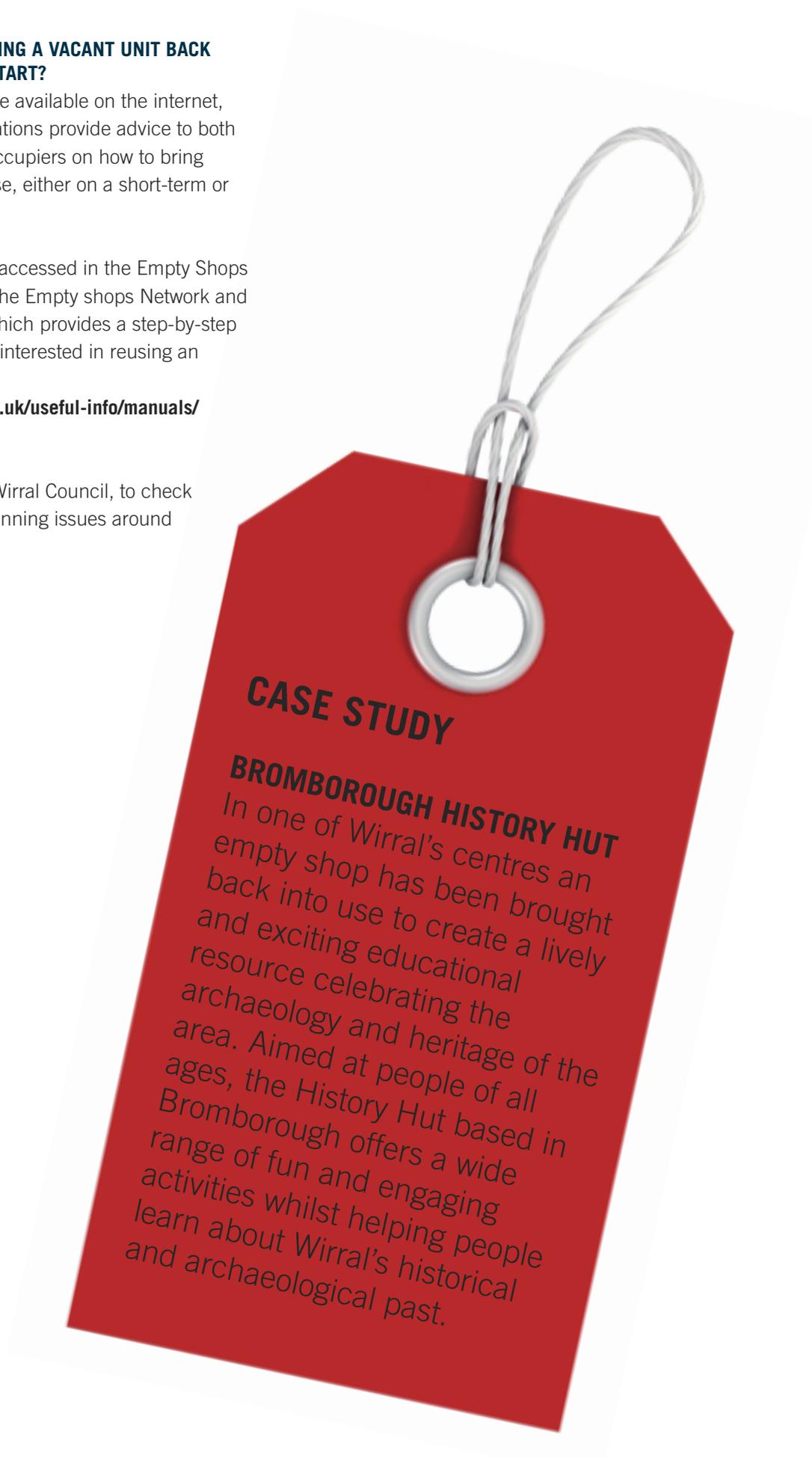
I'M INTERESTED IN BRINGING A VACANT UNIT BACK INTO USE - WHERE DO I START?

There is a wealth of advice available on the internet, and a number of organisations provide advice to both landlords and potential occupiers on how to bring empty shops back into use, either on a short-term or more permanent basis.

More information can be accessed in the Empty Shops Workbook, produced by the Empty shops Network and the Meanwhile Project, which provides a step-by-step guide for people who are interested in reusing an empty shop.

<http://www.meanwhile.org.uk/useful-info/manuals/shop-manual>

You should also contact Wirral Council, to check whether there are any planning issues around your proposals.



CLASS TABLE

USE CLASS	USE / DEVELOPMENT	PERMITTED CHANGE
A1 SHOPS	The retail sale of goods to the public: shops, post offices, travel agencies, hairdressers, funeral directors, domestic hire shops, dry cleaners, internet cafes, sandwich bars (cold food)	No permitted change
A2 FINANCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	Financial services: banks, building societies and bureau de change. Professional services (other than health or medical): estate agents and employment agencies. Other services which it is appropriate to provide in a shopping area: betting shops.	A1 (where there is a ground floor window display)
A3 RESTAURANTS AND CAFES	Restaurants and cafes (primary purpose is the sale and consumption of	A1 or A2
A4 DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS	Public House, wine bar or other drinking establishments (primary purpose is the sale of alcoholic drinks)	A1, A2 or A3
A5 HOT FOOD TAKEAWAY	Take-aways (premises where the primary purpose is the sale of hot food take-away)	A1, A2 or A3

