

Whose town centre is it anyway?

Perspectives on the purpose of town centres in North East England:

A seminar organised by the **Institute for Local Governance** at Teesside University, Darlington

Friday 23rd November 2018, 9.30 – 13.00

Town centres provide options for working, socialising, shopping and pampering ourselves. But they are more than just hubs for such activity, they also represent a focal point for civic pride and sometimes protest – they tell us something about our local culture, our sense of place and about who we are.

Recently, however, alarm bells have been ringing about the decline of town centres. Some of these challenges are not new. For years, critics have argued that there has been an over-production of retail space. Certainly, North East towns have experienced increased competition from out-of-town shopping centres – especially from supermarkets, DIY, furniture and electrical goods outlets.

But the growing popularity of online shopping is now threatening other high street staples. The closure of banks and other high street institutions such as Marks and Spencer has been accompanied by an inward rush of discount stores and charity shops. Empty shops look like scars on the urban landscape – offending the integrity and prominence of towns.

This seminar aims to challenge doom-laden accounts of town centre decline and will look at recent positive thinking on how to reshape urban space, reuse buildings and renew social pathways into the town as a socially inclusive cultural, working and, once again, residential arena. In so doing it will try to balance debates which prioritise economic wellbeing with those associated with social and cultural growth.

The seminar will be chaired by **Councillor Chris McEwan**, Deputy Leader, Darlington Borough Council, and speakers will include:

- **Rachel Anderson**, North East England Chamber of Commerce: on the diverse challenges facing five town centres in North East England.
- **Professor Colin Haylock**, University College London and Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation: on planning and urban design with more varied uses to enrich the role and reshape the experience of town centres.
- **Richard McGuckin**, Director of Growth and Development, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council: on town centre cultures and the journey of transformation.
- **Chris Watson**, Head of Land and Communities, Groundwork NE & Cumbria: on the engagement of the community with town centre regeneration strategies.

The seminar is free to attend, but places are limited and they tend to book up quickly, so please register your attendance via: Janet Atkinson, Institute for Local Governance, Durham University
janet.atkinson@durham.ac.uk.

The Institute for Local Governance is a North East Research and Knowledge Exchange Partnership established in 2009 comprising the North East region's Universities, Local Authorities, Police and Fire and Rescue Services.

Further information about the content of the event can be obtained by contacting:-
tony.chapman@durham.ac.uk or john.mawson@durham.ac.uk.

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AGENDA

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| 10.00 – 10.05 | Welcome to the seminar: Professor John Mawson , Director, Institute for Local Governance. |
| 10.05 – 10.15 | Chair's introduction: Councillor Chris McEwan , Deputy Leader, Darlington Borough Council. |
| 10.15 – 10.45 | Rachel Anderson , Assistant Director, Policy, North East England Chamber of Commerce: on the diverse challenges facing five town centres in North East England. |
| 10.45 – 11.15 | Professor Colin Haylock , University College London and Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation: on planning and urban design with more varied uses to enrich the role and reshape the experience of town centres. |
| 11.15 – 11.40 | Coffee and networking. |
| 11.40 – 12.10 | Chris Watson , Head of Land and Communities, Groundwork NE & Cumbria: on the engagement of the community with town centre regeneration strategies. |
| 12.10 – 12.40 | Richard McGuckin , Director of Growth and Development, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council: on town centre cultures and the journey of transformation. |
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| 12.40 – 1.00 | Questions from the floor and panel discussion. |
| 1.00 | Close of seminar. |