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Marketing the high street:
a solution to the British retail crisis?

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While technological innovation has driven the rise of online shopping and convenience culture, the British high street has been in a downward slope for over a decade, causing turmoil to the whole physical retail sector. The identity of places is closely tied to the concept of the high street in each British town, creating community, jobs and economic development to the area. Professionals, authorities and scholars have all tried to provide their own insight to reversing the decline, with little impact. As technology improves, customer behaviours change and economic climate gets more challenging, it is feared that without quick and sustainable change, the concept of high street will become redundant, causing losses of jobs, diminishing sense of community and areas of increased isolation and economic sorrow.

This thesis discusses the factors that have played key part in causing the decline of the high street, analysing towns, companies, governmental actions and consumer behaviour, and compares these factors to marketing theories, such as omnichannel marketing, PESTLE, Marketing Mix and social supply chain, to determine how relevant marketing is regarding the issue and how marketing theories could work for the benefit of the high street.

Deriving from research and practical examples of successful high streets a link between marketing and high street revival can be found, leading to hypotheses on the best practices for the future success of the British high street.

**Keywords**

High street, death of the high street, physical retail, retail crisis, omnichannel marketing, place branding, social supply chain, high street marketing
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1 Introduction

Retail apocalypse, death of the high streets and closing retail giants have been headlines of the UK newspapers for years now, with the storm only getting worse. 2018 was the tenth consecutive year of footfall decline on UK high streets, with footfall decrease reaching 17% and vacancy rates growing 30% from a decade earlier (Millington et al. 2018). One of the largest single issues touching the high street is the oversupply of retail space, which has created a cut throat competitive environment where retailers are involved in a constant battle of survival of the fittest. Other factors for the change have been identified to evolve around the changes in society and economy, assisted by technological innovation that has brought upon online shopping and more digitalised people.

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines a high street as a street that hosts the most important businesses and shops in town. It is an ever-evolving concept, that has been a focal point of most British communities for century. Wilkinson (2010) suggests the birth of high street came from market traders acquiring permanent locations near the markets of towns, which in the Victorian era evolved into actual shops stocking range of goods. According to Wilkinson (2010) the changes of high streets were driven by innovations from one era to another and accompanied by changes in social climate. When better transportation and refrigerators were invented, the high street adjusted and improved, when women’s clothing took a drastic change after the wars, the high street was quick to react. However, by looking at the current state of high streets across the country and reading related literature, it is apparent that this may not be the case anymore.

Findlay & Sparks (2014), Theoridis, Ntounis and Pal (2017) and Wrigley and Lambiri (2014), suggest that the tipping point for high streets was the 2008 financial crisis, followed by a recession, which led to a countrywide awakening on the state of the high streets. However, others like Portas (2011) and Dobson (2012) focus on a longer timeline, noting that the number of shops on the British high streets has been in downfall since the beginning of the millennium. Some keep blaming the internet for the decline while others consider that high street has a lot of opportunities brought by internet. Gilbert (2016) points out that according to Google, “near me” searches on Google doubled in 2016, showing that the consumers look for local options increasingly. Regardless, altogether tens of thousands of shops have closed, with notable changes beginning from the financial crisis, which put a household favourite Woolworths straight into administration and ever since the number of big brands as well as individual names has been decreasing. Townshend (2017) describes the current high street as toxic, consisting of fast food outlets, all you can eat buffets, sub-prime money lenders, betting shops and beauty salons and mentions that in some neighbourhoods a whole parade of business space lies
vacant. Grimsey (2018) backs this by noting that the current high street structure leans more towards food consumption and experiential services and regardless of this change in the structure, the downfall has instead of ceasing, only increased. In addition to the struggling retail, the situation causes a decline in the economy altogether, as the number of jobs lost within retail adding up to around 70 000 in 2018 (Chapman, 2019). Martin (2018) has also raised concerns towards the decrease of opportunities provided by high streets, as some communities have reported losses of jobs and diminishing sense of community on their local high streets.

Despite widespread acknowledgment of the issue and various warnings on what the future may hold if the situation is not addressed, necessary action has not been taken and the decline of the high street remains unchanged. Professionals and academics across the UK have provided insight and advice on the issue, however the literature overlooks possibilities provided by marketing. The purpose of this thesis is to identify and investigate the drivers of the high street decline alongside marketing theories, to see if and how, marketing could provide a tool in preventing the death of the high streets and reverse the current decline. In order to understand the situation, a look into the drivers of high street decline is provided alongside examples of successful reinventions of high streets and research to marketing theories that may be considered advantageous for reversing the decline of high streets.

Firstly, the thesis will focus on relevant literature and exploring the research issue, in the form of literature review, which will look into the drivers of decline, that have been identified as planning and governing, out of town retail, technology, consumer behaviour, social climate and economic climate. Each cluster of factors contains identification, explanation and implication of some of the main decline factors identified through research. Secondly, marketing theories are looked into briefly, to identify marketing tools and practices that may be beneficial for the stakeholders involved in high streets. To illustrate some of the changes that have been made to high streets examples of successful marketing implementation and high street adaptation or reinvention are presented. A case study of IKEA is added in to explore some of the most relevant marketing theories and their successful implementation more in depth. The analysis and discussion chapter consists of studying the drivers of high street decline and seeing whether some of the presented marketing theories could be applied to neutralise the impact of the specific driver of decline. The drivers of decline are shared into three environments, macro, meso and micro, all focusing on the respective marketing theories. Hypotheses on successful approaches are formed based on the finding of the literature review. Finally, a conclusion of the situation and how marketing may prove beneficial for high street stakeholders, in the battle to reverse the decline, is presented.
2 Literature review

2.1 Drivers of high street decline

This chapter will look into the drivers of the decline on the UK high streets, through relevant current literature. The drivers are vast and varied and are mainly formed over time, partially due to the incapability of the high street to evolve alongside the economy and society. The drivers are shared into six categories: planning and governing, out of town retail, technology, consumer behaviour, social climate and economic climate, each focusing on a “cluster” of factors within the category. The main goal of this part is to identify the relevant change factors, which can then be cross references to marketing theories and successful practices later on in the thesis.

2.1.1 Town centre planning and governance

To gain a thorough understanding of what is the structure the high streets are based on, it is essential to look into their core, to see how they came to be and what the setting behind the current structure is, where there are shortcomings and what should be positively reinforced. Many critics, including Dobson (2012), Grimsey (2013, 2018) and Portas (2011) have criticised the town centres and high streets as retail led. The main occupant on the UK high streets tends to be retail and often the struggling high street is a synonym for struggling retail. Researchers have established a need for something else on the high streets, something the community wants and benefits from more than retail.

The current town centre planning regime has its roots in the Thatcher era, which Hallsworth and Coca-Stefaniak (2018) describe as “the golden age for retail planning permissions and peripheral stores”. This era liberated many town centre plans and began favouring out of town retail, causing rapid suburbanisation. However, town centres were and are still seen as the “hub” of retail and communities, causing higher rents and subsequently decreasing the competitive advantage of the high street retailers. Hallsworth and Coca-Stefaniak (2018) provide examples of the negative impacts that trading laws and retail planning have towards high street businesses, and how they may favour online businesses, such as restricted Sunday opening hours for shops and lack of planning opposition towards online business’ “Regional Distribution Centres” that work as a vital tool in the online retail supply chain.

Peel and Parker (2017) criticise the current planning policies by claiming that the issue behind high street struggles may well lie in the conventional land use and planning policies, which hinder the economic viability of high streets and contribute to the oversupply of out of town retail, both bringing economic turmoil to retail in general. Like many others, Peel and Parker (2017) identify the need for a shift away from retail led high streets, by stating that the high street is a complex entity with need for more than just shopping. They emphasise the necessity to restructure local planning and governing methods into ones revolving around a goal of
community base structure, arguing that a new community driven local governing format that strives to diversify the local community and economy are drivers of successful and resilient new town centre models. Putting the focus on planning and governance, Peel and Parker (2017) take up examples from the High Street UK 2020 study (Millington et al., 2015) arguing that a shift towards a community led governing structure where new partnerships are created between local businesses, local authorities and the local community, has proven to benefit the towns using this form. However, it is still a fairly untested form of solving the issue of failing high streets.

Another perspective to the planning is what goes around the high street. One clear answer is life. There are people living on and around high streets making the high street of the “town centre” the heart of the community. However, in contrast to shops being empty for long periods due to oversupply of retail space, there is an undersupply in housing, as noted by Wilson and Barton (2018). They suggest that the need for new housing is estimated to be between 240 000 and 340 000 homes a year, whereas Grimsey (2018) points out the failure in enabling business space to be converted into housing including space above high street shops. Mike Ashley of retailer Sports Direct gives a practical example of this, by stating that Birmingham’s House of Fraser is far too big at 500,000 sq ft. and suggests housing for the upper parts of the department store building (House of Commons, 2018b:Q298).

With rents for both businesses and citizens being at an all-time high, it is no wonder shops lie empty. However, solutions to this exist, especially innovative ones. A recent phenomenon that has enabled London and a few other cities to use empty business space more efficiently has been pop up shops, more specifically a company making the process of pop up shops easy for both landlords and businesses. Appear Here, founded by Ross Bailey in 2014, is what Fishwick (2019) calls a one-stop-shop for pop ups, enabling a short lease of a business space without the time consuming and expensive process that usually ties retailers with a minimum of 10-year leases. With Appear Here, a business should have its space in three to six days and can rent it for just a week or two. Bailey stated in an interview with Hardy (2019) that the demand for pop up shops grew nearly 300 per cent in 2018, proving that the high street is anything but dead, just in need of a remodelling, while criticising the current form of retail where many shops only want people to buy, instead of offering them any experiences.

Figure 1 shows the size of the issue Bailey and other pop up store initiators are tackling, showing that every tenth shop on the UK high streets lies empty.
However, the high street is not the only location struggling with empty retail space. Rhodes (2018) points out that the vacancy rate in shopping centres is ever higher, at 13.2%. Out of town retail has the lowest rate of vacancy in the physical retail world, of 4.9%.

While all the aforementioned has to be considered in the planning, transport is one of the key factors in determining the viability of a high street. The access must be good, in order to attract footfall, especially as there are shortcomings in town centre housing. What has been a clear oversight here, is parking. McDonald (2013) constructed a report on behalf of Association of Town & City Management, British Parking Association, Parking Data & Research International and Springboard Research Ltd, containing research evidence of a link between footfall and quantity in parking spaces, stating that easier access to parking increases the footfall of the high street. Over time, car parking has proved to be a good tool for generating revenue for local authorities (McDonald, 2013) but not with a small cost as it has left many town centres struggling to increase the footfall and through that revenue. Furthermore, Gough (2017) notes that nearly a third of the population considers expensive parking the biggest frustration of high streets, which only shows how the consumer habit has changed in the recent years as the numbers of car users have soared. The drastic increase in car use can be seen in figure 2.
D’urso and Schraer (2017) point out that nowadays 85% of distance travelled is in cars, whereas the in 1952 cars accounted only 30% of distance travelled. The popularity of buses and coaches has decreased, whereas rail transport has seen some increase, which may be due to travelling longer distances.

ATCM (2014) argues that many high streets are incompatible with the current car culture as they were planned far before car ownership became common, however, increasing or decreasing the motoring possibilities in the town centres may both lead to decrease in footfall, creating an issue on how to strike a balance. Moreover, ATCM (2014) argues that sometimes restricting or even banning parking may be a better solution, but to determine the most appropriate solution each town should understand the needs of their customers and adjust their parking accordingly, which is proven by a series of case studies conducted by ATCM. It is unlikely that car ownership will decrease back to the levels it was in 1952, however, the trend is changing as fewer young people are attaining cars and driving licenses in the UK (Chattarjee et al. 2018). Chattarjee et al. (2018) note that is partially due to factors such as spending more time online than socialising but point out a small increase in public transport as well. At the end of the day, one of the most crucial factors for every high street is connectivity, whether it is by bus, train, car or foot. ATCM (2014) argues that the fault of this issue occurring lies strongly in the fact that there is no natural coordination or management to deal with the connectivity of high streets, arguing that strong local leadership may well be enough to improve the situation.
2.1.2 Out of town retail

Out of town retail centres have grown rapidly in the last decades, attracting customers away from the high streets. What makes out of town retail so tempting for retailers is the amount of floorspace and the low cost of building, which enables building large “palaces of consumption” as noted by Hallsworth and Coca-Stefaniak (2018). Due to the more remote location, parking is usually offered for free, to attract customers to these locations which is a clear competitive advantage against the high street and as Grimsey (2018) points out, a common reason for consumers that are not well connected to high streets to abandon them. Grimsey (2013, 2018) discusses the growth of out of town applications while criticising the lenient attitude towards permissions for out of town retail plans. Out of town is the only form of physical retail that has increased in the last years, leading to increase in the total amount of retail, and ultimately taking away from the high streets, due to what Grimsey (2018) and Portas (2011) describe as an oversupply of shops.

Genecon LLP (2011) found that the town centre retail space had shrunk by 27 million sq. ft., or 9%, from 2000 to 2009, where in contrast out of town retail space grew by 50 million sq. ft, or one-third of the floorspace. Furthermore, it is estimated that since 2009 the town centre floorspace has fallen 19 million sq. ft. more.

However, not all hope is lost - Hart et al. (2014) points out that prior to 2014 the out of town retail was not the most popular destination for shoppers, with only 8% of the UK population heading to out of town retail parks for their shopping. However, Hart (2014) notes that the spend per visit in out of town retail is slightly higher nowadays, which may be due to the nature of the shopping. Where high streets commonly sell top up goods and everyday products, out of town tends to attract businesses with higher expenditure per purchase such as furniture, partially due to the demand of space which town centres have not been able to provide cost-effectively. This has been fuelled by the increase in cars, which enables consumers to buy in bulk and travel longer distances, as previously mentioned.

2.1.3 Technology

When considering technology as a driver for high street decline, online shopping is one of the most discussed factors. Tony Ginty from Marks & Spencer’s described online shopping as the biggest retailing challenge by far in the UK, adding that competition increases from online retailers pose one of the biggest threats to high street retailers (House of Commons, 2018b:Q306). Looking at current data from Office for National Statistics (2018), the increase in total retail spending in the UK has seen growth throughout the decade. However, the growth has been a lot stronger with online retailing. Figure 3 shows the money spent within all retailing
against store-only and online-only sales, capturing the rapidly growing trend in money spent online-only.

Whereas online spending increased by 15.9% in 2017, store spending was behind in growth at 4.7% (Office for National Statistics, 2018). In addition, such rapid growth has been happening throughout the decade, pointing out the grip online retailing is gaining. According to Statista (2019a), nearly 80% of UK consumers shopped online in 2018. However, as volume and value of retail increased, the prices dropped in between 2013 and 2017, creating issues for the retail sector (Grimsey, 2018), which according to Sandle (2018) derives not only from online shopping but also the stagnating disposable income levels of consumers, which will be talked more in depth in the economic factors part of this thesis.

Over a decade ago, Weltevreden (2007) noted that although the data from the impact of online shopping to high street shopping was inconsistent, a clear change was seen in the percentage of people whose trips to the high street had reduced due to online shopping activities. The research suggested that as much as there is a chance for sales decreasing due to online shopping, the high street retailers should also use online as a tool to create an even larger catchment based on the benefits of both online and offline presence. Nowadays, retailers are becoming increasingly more dependent on their online sales and even engage in partnerships that allow them to extend their offering and attract a wider and more diverse customer base (Theodoridis et al., 2017). This has been suggested to lead into a “hybrid" version of retail called click and collect, where consumers buy online but collect the goods from the store or treat stores as showrooms to see and try the product before purchasing online (Grimsey, 2018).
However, Grimsey (2018) argues that this also serves proof that stores will stay relevant, just not necessarily in the traditional sense of going and purchasing items, but more to complement online forms of shopping. Moreover, Rhodes (2018) argues that although online shopping has impacted the high street, the impact is not major, suggesting that instead of hindering the high street retail, providing both online and physical options for customers is an advantage and has increased success for many retailers. Furthermore, Tuahene (2019) notes that 52% of customers would prefer a more seamless online and offline integration from retailers, showing the need for focusing on omnichannel retail and marketing. Tuahene (2019) argues that although around 80% prefer physical shopping to online, there is a clear call for better online presence and new technology such as augmented reality, which enables customers to virtually try on a product, and artificial intelligence, that can provide instant customer service.

Sentance (2018) reassures that digital age will not wipe out physical stores, as long as retailers understand the needs to embrace all channels and adapt to the evolving technological and customer behavioural changes. According to Sentance (2018) omnichannel retailing has been a great competitive edge to some retailers, praising River Island on its focus to create a shopping experience where customers can seamlessly navigate in store and online and choose which part of their journey they wish to complete offline and online, leading to a 30% increase in online sales and 40% increase in click and collect, in 2016. Similar positive impact was experienced by John Lewis, after the business decided to revamp its whole IT platform, which in 2011 dated back to 1990, to make the customer journey seamless and comfortable (Mortleman, 2014). However, as a proof of the demanding and constantly changing environment and importance in focusing on more than just one aspect of strategy, John Lewis experienced its profits plunging 99% in the first half of 2018 (Sandle, 2018). The strategy behind this rise and fall will be discussed among other successful strategies later on in the thesis. However, with some cases even online presence may not be the saviour, as certain businesses will eventually become redundant on the high street. These include the likes of books, music and travel agencies, as new technology benefits e-books, music is more convenient to buy and consume online in a matter of seconds and expensive products such as travel are often compared online and bought online (Heritage, 2017).

Grimsey (2018), puts technology into a larger scale: instead of just the impact of online retailing, he notes that technology has changed the markets and consumer behaviour, implying there is a real threat, but only if the current town centre retail model fails to recalibrate itself to fit the current market, influenced largely by the innovations in technology. He also points out some high street successes that have followed from technology, namely how restaurants have taken the chance to utilise technology through companies like Just Eat, Uber Eats and Deliveroo, that deliver a high street restaurant’s food to homes, enabling restaurants to widen their customer base to the home delivery market.
2.1.4 Consumer behaviour

One of the key variables in the high street decline has been the ever-evolving consumer behaviour, which has one of the largest impacts on the success of retail. A study by Hart et al. (2014) focused on recognising certain behaviour by consumers, that could be used as an aid to revive the high streets going through hardship. The study intended to highlight the customer expectations of high streets and how this could be utilised to strengthen the high streets in comparison to other shopping alternatives, mainly internet and out of town shopping.

Theodoridis, Ntounis & Pal (2017) also note that understanding of marketing issues that relate to consumer behaviour and lifestyle, which at some point rendered high streets unattractive, is required. They suggest that the marketing functions of the high street should reach beyond the current methods, such as litter management and Christmas lights. To succeed in marketing activities, the catchment and their needs and wants should be understood, and the high street developed to cater to this.

Genecon LLP (2011) suggests that as consumers are more mobile and their attitudes and preferences have changed, seeking a shopping experience with a variety of choice has become increasingly popular, leading customers out of town centres into larger destinations with greater choice where the spending has been concentrated. However, this has also resulted in fewer trips being made, due to the time and distance factors, showcasing that when previously high street would be the go to place for regular top ups, nowadays consumers are more inclined to drive further to buy bulk quantities, enabled by the easy storage and transport provided by the increased prevalence of cars and scrapping the need for regular top ups.

Fletcher et al. (2016) argues that to back the claim of customer preferences shifting towards an experience led culture, Grimsey (2018) showcases data on the changes this has brought to the high streets across the UK. Figure 4 below shows which types of shops have decreased between 2013 and 2017 with traditional high street businesses, such as banks and pubs, at the very top of the table.
Further to the evidence of changes, Grimsey (2018) also points out the replacements for these traditional businesses that have been vanishing from the high streets. Figure 5 shows that experiential businesses in the likes of barbers, beauty salons and independent cafes have taken over the space previously occupied by traditional shops. A notable addition to the list is tobacconists, which have increased after the introduction of e-cigarettes, indicating that technology may provide unexpected successes within retail, whether good or bad for the high streets.

These changes back Townshend’s (2017) statement that the current high street is changing into a toxic combination of businesses that decrease the wellbeing of communities. What is missing form Grimsey’s list, is the growing numbers of charity shops, which half of the population deem...
as a signal of struggling high streets (Dudman, 2017). The high numbers of charity shops on high streets are fuelled by the empty business space and notable tax reliefs, where 80% of business rates have to be scrapped for charity shops and the remaining 20% is voluntary relief (Preston, 2018). Hope (2016) criticises charity shops and the tax reliefs they receive, as the shops are still often less profitable than traditional businesses, regardless of benefits such as volunteers, tax reliefs and gift aids, indicating that these shops run inefficiently and are too many considering the number of customers. However, many consumers contradict this, by stating that putting a charity shops into an empty space is better than leaving it empty (Young, 2019). Young (2019) points out that part of the fondness toward charity shops comes from the idea that they provide a beneficial service for the community. This thought provides backing for the argument of high streets needing more community-based services, however, with charity shop numbers believed to be over 11,000 (Kay, 2018) perhaps other forms of community service that can benefit from tax reliefs could provide a more diverse and beneficial future for the high streets.

However, Jenkins (2018) provides an opinion on the situation, stating that thriving high streets have already started to replace the vast numbers of shops with experience services such as gyms, restaurants, golf ranges and art galleries, while farmer’s markets are one of the elements growing fast in popularity. This shows a shift in consumer behaviour, which is natural, however to detach from the mix of toxic businesses, the authorities should put necessary regulations in place, to encourage and enable a diverse mix of beneficial businesses on the high street, advises Jenkins (2018), stating this shift is called “experience economy”. Jenkins (2018) also points out the fact that many novelty businesses have not completely wiped out traditional ones, but found a balanced place in the consumer markets, providing examples such as kindles replacing books and televisions replacing cinemas, as they both provided more variety to the market. Furthermore, McDonald and Swinney (2019) point out that majority of people choose their neighbourhood based on the proximity to restaurants and leisure facilities, whereas approximately 10% less value being close to local shops, indicating that leisure and cultural activities are what drives more people into an area.

On the contrary, Barua and Bachman (2017) argue that statistics show the spending in experience has not grown in percentages in the last decades, while also showing that spending on retail has decreased. They note a small increase in the ratio of foreign travel spending, deeming it insignificant. Furthermore, the statistics show that the real increase in spending is in health care, insurance and pensions, which is closely linked to the ageing population, impacting the whole economy, implying that the large age groups tying their money into insurances, pension saving and health care, impacts the whole retail sector negatively.
2.1.5 Social climate

Social climate in the context of high street tends to bring up one word, community. Community based high street is something most authors mention in their literature, making it one of the most prominent and discussed factors related to high streets. The factors improving the social aspects of high street can range from libraries to community centres, places of worship and simple face-to-face contact, something that consumers cannot gain online (We Made That and LSE Cities, 2017).

A report by We Made That and LSE Cities (2017) states that 45% of surveyed high street users in London use high streets for non-retail related purposes and 75% value something else than retail the most on their high street, showing evidence that the social value of high streets is still significant. The report demonstrates evidence that marginalised groups and elderly are the biggest users of high streets, with over 51% of users surveyed stating they are not in employment. Furthermore, most high street users in London value the people, character and range of functions more than retail on their high street. While the report focuses on the London area specifically, it gives valuable information to other high streets due to the varied nature of the three declining high streets surveyed.

Wilkinson (2010) describes the earlier eras of the high street, especially the Victorian era as highly community-based entities, where people not only did their shopping, but socialised and spent time. Portas (2011) agrees, indicating that the high streets should be developed to create a sense of belonging and community, while arguing that by investing in and creating social capital in the heart of the communities across the UK, the economic capital would follow. She notes that in order to achieve this, communities should be included in the planning and development process, ultimately leading towards more cultural and social experiences to attract footfall to the high street, at which she states the current form of retail led high streets is failing.

However, when forming a community based and socially valuable high street, the whole community should be considered. A key factor with high street footfall is opening hours, that tend to be 9-5 on most high streets. As We Made That and LSE Cities (2017) report pointed out, most high street users are not in employment, meaning they can take advantage of the high street and its services at any time of the day, unlike people who work office hours, 9am to 5pm. Manchester Metropolitan University (2018) lists timing as the first thing to improve on the high streets across the UK, stating that it needs to suit the catchment, especially when it comes to commuter towns, from where people tend to travel to larger cities to work for the day. Therefore, 9-5 hours for the local shops will not work, as a large part of the catchment is unable to take advantage of the shops during these hours. Parker et al. (2017) back this suggestion, with a list of 25 key activities for struggling high streets, of which the most important one is the activity hours, which they point out need to be adjusted to fit the catchment. Wood and Reynolds (2012)
argue that this kind of adaptation is key in order to achieve a sustainable and resilient high street.

When it comes to implementing the community aspects to high streets, suitable long-term strategy should be formed. Dobson (2012) criticises plans like the Portas Pilot by arguing that the idea of a social town centre cannot be achieved through a few temporary projects, but instead requires long-term effort in reconceptualising what the key factors in success for each town are and who are the beneficiaries. Dobson (2012) also points out that more emphasis should be put on creating town centres to communities, forms of ownership and types of activity that are currently excluded, instead of attempting to solve long-term problems with the likes of casinos and leisure quarters.

2.1.6 Economic climate

The high street is a vital part of UK economy, providing jobs, business opportunities, tax income and spending avenues for the whole economy. In the recent years, the high street has become increasingly volatile as a result of the changes in the economy (Clarke, 2018). The more volatile the high street is, the higher is the risk of companies going into administration. Between 2007 and mid-2018, the high street has seen a total of 443 major failures, with over 300 000 staff members affected, but what is notable, is that in the recent years the sizes of the companies failing have been larger (Grimsey, 2018), showing how the volatility has started to affect bigger retailers.

Grimsey (2018) points out that despite the enormous impact the retail sector has on the economy, the economic conditions have been far from ideal in recent years. The costs of running shops have increased, causing business to be more expensive, especially to independent retailers. In addition, inflation, exchange rates and wages have added pressure to physical retailers. Deloitte (2019) reports shows that the disproportionate growth between inflation and wages has resulted into weakened consumer confidence and lower spending. Lower spending has also been noted in the news with Clarke (2018) pointing out that consumer spending is poor to respond to what are generally considered positive factors such as weather and holidays. However, these factors can be considered as double-edged swords, as weather is one of the common factors for consumers refraining from high street shopping showcasing the vulnerability the high street has to short-term issues, which is likely to derive from longer-term more structural issues as Ipsos Retail Performance (2018) suggests.

While the financial crisis of 2008 may have given a nudge to the high street decline, many issues were underlying. Part of the economic turmoil for the high street has been caused by the retail factor itself, with a disproportionate number of shops opened over time, resulting in far too
many shops and an “oversaturated” market (Grimsey, 2018) (Portas, 2011) (Thomas, 2018) (Breach and McDonald, 2018). Breach and McDonald (2018) note that the more dominant the retail sector is in a town, the likelier the town is to struggle, linking large amounts of retail floor space and decline in retail together. They point out that in towns with more office space, the retail sector is healthier arguing that there is a link between low-skilled low-income cities and failing retail, noting that retail tends to hold even larger quantity of floor space in these cities Breach and McDonald (2018). When there are less highly skilled people and salaries are lower, there is naturally less buying power and the same leisure activities such as restaurants and cafes may not serve the local community that can’t afford them. Breach and McDonald (2018) emphasize the importance of factoring in the town’s economic standing when planning the town centre, suggesting that any spaces that work for the local community and attract footfall are valuable, emphasising the fact that a high street does not live or die based on its retail, instead more factors play a part in the equation.

Income levels are a great factor for retail in general, with the amount of disposable income directly reflecting to retail. Romei (2018) points out that UK is unique compared to other big advanced economies, as it is the only country with strong economic growth and increasing employment yet contracting wages between 2007 and 2015. Meanwhile, consumer prices have expanded, and inflation has been one of the fastest in wealthy countries, which has squeezed the wages even more (Romei, 2018). The most affected groups have been the low- and middle-income groups, while the richer people have still been experiencing increasing wealth, according to Monaghan (2018). The comparison point for wage development is the pre-crisis growth, with O’Grady (cited in Morrison, 2018) stating that the growth after the 2008 financial crisis has been slower than after the Great Depression. Romei (2018) argues that this is due to slower growth in productivity while Morrison (2018) calls for government measures to get the wages growing. While the growth in employment has benefitted disadvantaged groups like ethnic minorities, the growth in overall poverty is at its highest since Margaret Thatcher’s power (Morrison, 2018) which paves way to economic turmoil to other aspects of the economy including retail.

While the disposable income levels in the UK are relatively low, for households with debt the squeeze has been even stronger. Debt can work for the benefit of economy, as long as repaying it does not become too difficult (Harari, 2018). Harari (2018), points out that UK households with debt were associated with 40% of the fall in total consumer spending after 2007, meaning 2% of the 5% total fall in consumer spending was linked with decreased spending due to debt. However, this has not decreased the amount of money borrowed, as consumer debt rose by 7% between 2012 and 2017 (Inman and Barr, 2017). Inman and Barr (2017) note that the overall debt is still lower than prior to the 2008 financial crash, however the rising debt shows how households are struggling to make ends meet, with credit card loans,
overdrafts and second mortgages soaring. Inman and Barr (2017) argue that this is due to low wage growth, government cuts on welfare and public services as well as uncertainty caused by Brexit.

Another largely reported issue in the economic viability of high streets is taxation, with bricks and mortar shops paying higher taxes than online, altogether 25% of all business rates, 10% of taxes and 5% of the UK gross domestic product (House of Commons, 2018a:Q73). Local Data Company (2018) backs this, adding that passing the costs from high taxation to the customer is getting increasingly demanding due to the competitive market. Grimsey (2018) focuses largely on business rates, which have shown to increase in the recent years, causing high numbers of individual retailers to struggle. Regardless of the suggestion provided to the government in 2013, Grimsey (2018) has pointed out half a decade later that no reductions in business rates has only accelerated the struggle of the high street businesses, criticising the fact that at 42% of taxes, the business rate burden is more than three times greater than that of corporation tax at 12%, a tax on profits. This criticism is in line with Hallsworth and Coca-Stefaniak’s (2018) opinion on governance favouring the online businesses. However, Connaughton (2019) points out that business rate reliefs are a welcome aid to smaller retailers but will have less impact on larger chains, which have been going into administration one after another.

2.2 Marketing theories

Bickhoff, Hollensen and Opresnik (2014:3) state that instead of just being sales and advertising, as commonly misinterpreted, marketing aims to satisfy customer needs, wants and expectations better than competition, leading to achieving sought after business goals, something the high street retail is not coping with in the current climate. Warnaby (2005) argues that the homogenous offering of high streets and retail in general has made marketing even more crucial, as there is an increasing need to differentiate.

Branding and strategy are key marketing elements to any successful business, and places can be branded just as products, to attract customers and money. Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2007) state that place branding opportunities are currently the least explored form of branding, with vast opportunities. Heeley and Cooper (2011) describe city branding as the planned activity that determines perception, thought and emotion connected to the city, giving a city its identity, while noting that most commonly city brand is associated with the customer’s perception of the city. Furthermore, the Local Government Association (n.d.) has highlighted the importance of place branding, stating that it is vital for economic growth and plays an important part in attracting people and money to an area. A common misconception in place branding, especially in branding high streets, is that the image can be created with logos, slogan, events and other material that can be created by consultants, whereas to gain real advantages from branding
high streets, the community should be in the centre of the branding processes as Ntounis and Kavaratzis (2017:393) recommend.

PESTLE analysis, consisting of political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors, is described as one of the most focal points to any marketing analysis, and should be assessed continuously over time, to retain competitive advantage (Bickhoff, Hollensen and Opresnik, 2014:45). Currently, many independent businesses in the UK have conducted and published such analysis, however, no industry wide analysis exists, that would bring together all the macroenvironmental factors the high streets are dealing with. Genecon LLP and partners (2011), offer a view that PESTLE as a tool may be inapt for the wide range of evidence the research issue has, suggesting a bespoke tool, related to PESTLE, consisting of externalities, spatial and physical factors, market forces and competition, demographics, regulation and legislation and management. Genecon LLP and partners (2011) also point out four key performance indicators; footfall, consumer and business satisfaction, diversity and economic activity, which, after being analysed in a case specific manner, may provide a more structured business plan to high street, such as out of town shopping has.

Marketing Mix, a basic element of any marketing strategy, is described as the process of 4Ps, by Kotler and Armstrong (2015). The tool is intended to be used by companies, to achieve the sought-after outcome in the target market, and targets elements firms themselves can influence. Alongside this tool, Parker et al. (2017) suggest “the 4Rs”, “repositioning”, “reinventing”, “rebranding” and “restructuring”, which are intended to aid the high streets, on both independent business and local authority level, to understand and embrace the change process the high streets need to go through to compete in the modern markets. The framework provides 25 priority actions (see Appendix 1) to analyse, which lead to defining the correct “R” strategy to focus on, or an overlap of multiple Rs. Figure 6 shows the elements of each “R”.
Parker et al. (2017:322) imply that their new framework brought clarity and cohesion to stakeholders, enabling the stakeholders to better focus on creating a suitable strategy for their high street, with practical examples of successful implementation. However not all of these remained successful long-term, suggesting more research on how to approach the framework may be required (Parker et al., 2017:325).

The examples of success in the literature review, as well as the case study, serve evidence that omnichannel marketing is an important success factor for high street businesses. Omnichannel marketing means creating a smooth customer experience on multiple channel, to enable the consumer to seamlessly search, navigate and buy across various channels during their customer journey, while using one common supply chain (Berman and Thelen, 2018). This supports the changing consumer behaviour, by encouraging and enabling the customers to use the shop as a showroom and by online, or to search online but purchase in store (Berman and Thelen, 2018). Rodrigues-Torrico, San Jose Cabezudo and San-Martin (2016) point out how omnichannel strategy supports engaging both impulsive and careful consumers, by allowing quick and effortless mobile purchases, but also the chance to conduct research and examine
the product physically, therefore catering various different behaviour types and a larger consumer base. Proof of the importance of omnichannel comes from the likes of IKEA and Amazon, that have never embraced the high street, until now, at an age of retail revolution. Whytock (2018) argues the current market situation requires providing the consumer with ultimate convenience, whether it is online or on the high street, and make joining all aspects of retailing into one big entity.

Falling slightly outside the lines of traditional marketing theories, the Delphi technique is an essential part of theories used for researching solutions for high street, already utilised by some expert studies such as Parker et al. (2015) and Ntounis et al. (2017). The idea behind Delphi is to systematically use a panel of experts, repeated measurement and controlled feedback, thus replacing confrontation and debate that may appear in other methods, by individually questioning the panel participants. (Jolson and Rossow, 1971) (Donohoe, Stellefson and Tennant, 2011). Grisham (2009) suggests that the Delphi technique is particularly advantageous in complex problems of a qualitative nature; however, it falls short on providing clinical precision with quantitative data. Jolson and Rossow (1971) point out that the technique makes qualitative research consensus easier and quicker for panels where each participant is an expert but does not necessarily work when used with a panel that does not have extensive knowledge on the matter. With respect to high streets, Parker et al. (2015) successfully implemented the Delphi method in identifying 25 key problems and distributing them to categories including spatial, macro, meso, and micro factors.

Finally, the supply chain, one of the key elements in creating value and competitive advantage is examined. Christopher (2011: 2-4) notes that supply chains consist of the whole process of goods and information flow from businesses to customers and if managed successfully can be a crucial part in creating competitive advantage. This can manifest in either lower price due to more efficient supply chain management or additional value such as service, speed or product features (Christopher, 2011: 5-6). Currently, online shopping often manages a more efficient supply chain that is more responsive and has a vaster product catalogue, something that requires great investment and coordination and is often too expensive for brick and mortar retailers (Li, Lu and Talebian, 2014). Part of the success of digital supply chain is the speed of goods and information flow and lower costs deriving from less physical space and involvement. Shelton (2018) argues that the traditional supply chain is inapt for the modern climate and omnichannel retailing, suggesting that a move towards a nimble supply chain with real-time information in the push and pull factors in essential and requires large investments. Fletcher et al. (2016) argue that a new model called “social supply chain” that focuses on co-creation, co-consumption and co-production, which entail processes to involve more stakeholders to the supply chain processes, such as consumers providing raw materials or social networking to aid in purchase decisions, can potentially create a more efficient future for retail. The social supply
chain works to combine a more efficient supply chain and the community aspect of the high street by utilising social data, social interaction and social media (Wilding and Proctor, 2015). The social supply chain has been proven beneficial in case studies by Fletcher et al. (2016) and in real-life setting at Travis Perkins, a FTSE 100-listed builders’ merchant and home improvement retailer, where the key factor in developing a social supply chain was a virtual community (Wilding and Proctor, 2015).

2.3 Case Study – IKEA

IKEA is the world’s largest furniture retailer with nearly 40 billion euros in revenue in 2016 and over 60% of it in Europe with other locations growing year by year (Statista, 2019b). In order to find out, whether there is something the high street can learn from IKEA, a more in depth look into the company’s strategy is provided in this short case study.

The furniture giant is globally known for its affordable yet chic Scandinavian style furniture, and innovative solutions to everyday issues in furnishing and has over 300 warehouse type stores around the world and 18 of them in the UK (IKEA, 2019). IKEA’s presence in the UK began in 1987, and it has found a strategy enabling it to be profitable and grow continuously, to become the leader in furniture sales.

2.3.1 Why is IKEA so important in the context of high streets?

IKEA may well be one of the reasons high street is struggling, as the company is famous for its massive box like out of town warehouses. A look into IKEA reveals the company has developed many of the elements the literature review in this thesis showcases as “key issues” to their benefit. Moreover, IKEA is changing the high streets in the UK, by opening “planning studios” on some of the busiest and best-connected locations in city centres.

According to Hardy (2018), these planning studios are targeting the customers that are looking to make larger purchases, such as kitchens, but are not appealed by the fuss of venturing outside the city centre to one of IKEA’s huge warehouse stores. Furthermore, the studios can be used for workshops, events and training, thus providing an added service to the community (Nazir, 2019). Strategically, the studios will be great visibility for the furniture giant that is rarely found outside suburbia. As the high street retailers are failing one after another, IKEA has great chances of making bargain deals of prime locations with landlords. The first store was opened to Tottenham Court Road in Central London in late 2018 and second one to Bromley, in early 2019 (Hardy, 2018) (Nazir, 2019).
This is not the first time IKEA ventures outside the suburbia, as it does already have some more central “order and collection” locations open. These are small locations where the product range is far smaller, but customers can order online and collect straight from the store, while IKEA gets to do some market research in the non-identical stores (IKEA, 2019). This move from IKEA indicates a growing interest to the “click and collect” shopping, which has been discussed in the literature review.

2.3.2 Strategy

IKEA’s strategy is so wide and versatile that it would be enough to make its own business strategy case study, hence for the purposes of the thesis we will concise the strategy into the relevant areas; omnichannel retailing, innovation and customer experience.

In 2017, IKEA was chosen the best omnichannel retailer in the UK by Red Ant (2017). Grimsey (2018) talks extensively on the importance of utilising multiple channels in retail and marketing and embracing innovation, in a bid to revive the high streets. IKEA was slow to react to the changes, much like the high streets, but swiftly became a leader in omnichannel marketing and retail innovation (Zisko, 2016).

IKEA’s out of town stores consider the customer from multiple perspectives, providing a showroom for trying out the furniture and getting inspired, a store area to pick up smaller goods, a warehouse for getting the flat packed furniture, a restaurant and cafeteria for breaks and a free childcare area. As the massive warehouses aren’t always that well connected, or do not appeal to everyone, IKEA also has click and collect stores for picking up goods that are ordered online, much in the same style as another retail giant Argos has. The new store category are the city centre planning studios, where people can come to get professional help in planning their larger purchases, without being surrounded by masses of people.

In addition to this, IKEA has an extensive website that reached nearly 200 million hits and grew its sales by almost 15% in fiscal year 2018. The website consists of a planner software, full product catalogue, in store stock counts and in-depth product data consisting of useful descriptions, product and shipping dimensions and downloadable assembly instructions, coupled with coordinating products and related items (Zisko, 2016). Customers can join loyalty programmes and organise finance for the items online. Figure 7 below shows some of the key services IKEA website offers in the UK.
IKEA has focused strongly on customer experience, trying to make the customer journey not easy and short as many other retailers, but instead a comfortable and memorable experience (Annesley, 2018). Many people for long treaded assembling flat pack furniture, hence an assembly service was introduced and for the DIY customers, IKEA provides YouTube video tutorials on assembly (Vaughn, 2017). In order to provide customers ultimate choice on how they shop, IKEA supports both in store and online shopping, by providing both home delivery and van rentals. When something needs replacing, they will sort out the removal and recycling.

In 2018, IKEA took full advantage of innovation, by creating an augmented reality app, that customers can use in their homes to “try” the furniture in real setting (Vaughn, 2017). This led to the retail giant having three separate mobile apps, which they intend to merge into one soon, again, creating a more comfortable experience for customers (Joseph, 2018).

Gordon Bell, (cited in Red Ant, 2017) stated that one of the core missions of IKEA is to enable customers to shop whenever and however suits them, reflecting the consumer behaviour that has been strongly evolving towards convenience in recent years. The country retail manager of the UK, Javier Quiñones (cited in Jahshan, 2018) states that behind IKEA’s successful omnichannel strategy is the changing perception of stores and consumer behaviour.

Furthermore, the London city centre market leader of IKEA, Janet Bisset (cited in Hardy, 2018) states that IKEA knows the customer want the retailer to be closer, arguing that the high street stores will not only fulfil this but drive traffic to their out of town and online stores.

While IKEA’s good value furniture shows increasing demand for the affordable consumer goods market, the strategy of IKEA and delivering what consumers want and how they want it, has paved the furniture giant’s way into becoming successful across the world. Paying focus to digital transformation, changing consumer behaviour and innovation has enabled IKEA to reach sales of £1.96 billion in the UK in fiscal year 2018, a growth of nearly 6% from fiscal year 2017, indicating that harnessing omnichannel strategy, understanding customers and taking advantage of technology can bring profits even in economically challenging times.
Probably the most visible and notable attempt to reverse the high street decline by the government came in 2011 when Mary Portas was commissioned to conduct a study into high streets and provide suggestions on the improvements. Based on this study the government allocated a prominent sum of funding to the initiative to improve the state of 27 high streets, selected by Portas, where the Portas review suggestions would be applied by local town teams with the help of government and retail “gurus”. The initiative called Portas Pilot turned out to be a failure and has been criticised strongly by Grimsey (2013) in the Grimsey Review 1. Grimsey also voices frustration to the government and Portas for conducting the whole scheme as a “PR stunt” and using it as more of a cash cow, which indeed led to producing a new TV series. This can be considered to have been the case since the beginning, as Portas herself lacks any real merits regarding the retail sector but has been a firm favourite of the British population within the entertainment sector, having herself the status of “retail queen”. Furthermore, Thompson (2013) and Fenwick (2017) state that the pilot was a failure revealing that the town teams chose to use the money on irrelevant items and only engaged in the project half-heartedly, with little attempt to actually create and implement plans that could aid the struggling town centres.

Upon the failure of Portas Pilot, Grimsey (2013) constructed his own version, highlighting some issues he considered were lacking from the Portas Review. The Grimsey Review was intended as a guideline for the government to improve the situation of high streets. However, this never happened in the UK. Instead, a Belgian town, Roeselare, utilised the report for one of its struggling high streets, thus it can be considered for the purposes of this thesis. In Roeselare, the initiator of change in the high street was the Mayor, which Grimsey (2018) argues would be the most suitable authority to implement such change. Grimsey (2017) points out that technology played a big part in the improvements of Roeselare high street, with free Wi-Fi, smart parking and an app to support the city with loyalty card, personalised merchandising and community information, provided to develop and modernise the high street. The local library was transformed into a community space servicing many needs with technology space, bar/café and beehive, while focus on developing its green spaces and pedestrianising some areas to encourage walking, cycling and healthier lifestyle was introduced (Grimsey, 2017). The community impact was further encouraged with retailers providing a reward scheme where the rewards could be used in local activities such as swimming pool (Grimsey, 2017). Further attention to detail was demonstrated with increase breastfeeding facilities for mothers and involving some of the local churches to help create a fresh food market (Grimsey, 2017). When it came to empty shop units, the local authorities took a strict line and decided to monitor empty units and send letters to landlords with empty units for longer than a month and if the unit stayed empty for a year, an empty shop tax was introduced to get the landlords to act in the benefit of the town and take necessary measures to rent out the property (Creasey, 2019). All of this came from a seven-point plan created by the Mayor, which other parties signed a pledge to support, proving such strong leadership is essential in achieving real transformation (Grimsey,
The impact of the taken measures was positive with footfall increasing 25% in 2018, but the situation is continuously monitored, to determine whether further action, and what kind, may be needed (Creasey, 2019).

While some towns have made larger structural changes, a few have benefitted from smaller things such as regular events. Grimsey (2018) points out the success Stockport Old Town has experienced by hosting regular events such as “Foodie Fridays” where local artists come to perform live alongside vendors of street food and craft ales. The event has impacted local retailers positively, while also bringing an estimated £250,000 more into the local economy annually, making it a truly significant change (Grimsey, 2018). Grimsey (2018) also notes that in addition to the popular weekly event, Stockport Old Town hosts a Fringe festival, inspired by one in Edinburgh, annually, which is frequented by thousands of people, aiding the brand of the town as a vibrant and culturally rich place. Moreover, a Folk Festival and a Medieval Viking Fair have been organised annually to celebrate the local heritage of the town, again attracting thousands of people (Grimsey, 2018).

Developing more convenient parking has been one of the measures a few councils have tried. Portas (2011) showcases the results Swindon had in lowering parking prices so that they encouraged a four hour stay, resulting in more spend on the high street and even more interest on letting units. Grimsey (2018) suggests a free parking for 30 minutes scheme, utilising modern technology for monitoring, so that the shoppers can pop in and out of the high street to run daily errands but quickly enough to free up the parking space for the next user. This has been tried in Roeselare, Belgium, where people can now park 30 minutes for free on certain streets, enabled by parking bay sensors that detect the time a car enters and leaves (Creasey, 2019). Dehullu (cited in Creasey, 2019) states it has been on of the most successful changes and will be implemented elsewhere in the city. McDonald (2013) provides another good example of parking changes, a town centre that has introduced a fixed £2 tariff for people parking after 2pm and departing after 7pm, thus avoiding adding to congestion and encouraging spending longer time in the town centre, much on the contrary to the free parking for 30 minutes. While all these changes to reduce the cost of parking have been proven to work, not enough is done to implement the change across the country, leaving many town centres to continue with the struggle of their existence.

According to Bubb (cited in Hooker, 2018) middle- or mass market is one of the most difficult ones for retailers, whereas the high end and budget retailers have been more resilient to the high street decline. As a great budget end success example is Primark, a megastore for mass produced goods, mainly fashion. Why Primark’s success is so remarkable, leads from its strategy, where price is the first and foremost category and other “key factors” such as having an online shopping possibility are defied, yet without hindering the chains success.
Kraaijenbrink (2019) suggests that in the core of Primark’s success, is how the chain recognises who it is and what it does, the so-called DNA, and sticks to it in everything. The DNA consists of low price, or seeking price leadership, and having an enormous selection (Kraaijenbrink, 2019). Phillips (2018) points out that despite the high street decline, Primark, which has 38% of its store on the high streets, has continued to increase profits and expand with new stores, which is notably better than its budget fashion competitors New Look, Peacock and Matalan have done. Phillips (2018) argues that while Primark has no e-commerce functions, one of its key success factors is its website, which makes people want to visit the physical stores through piquing their interest with a product catalogue that includes prices and a social media platform called “Primania” where customers feature their styles of Primark clothing, giving other customers ideas on how to style the products. In addition, the website tackles the rumours and perception of Primark as an unethical business (due to its low prices) by dedicating a section to explaining what the business does to enforce its ethicality. Furthermore, the business focuses largely on providing customers what they want, and stays on top of the trends, often by offering “high end” lookalikes with lower prices or fashion related to current trends whether it is cartoon themed clothing or tackling the athleisure trend by introducing sportswear (Phillips, 2019).

At the high-end scale of high street success stories, is John Lewis, which has been doing markedly better than its department store competitors Debenhams and House of Fraser, despite its aforementioned slump in 2018. The reason for John Lewis’ success, in addition to the revamped technological aspect that was touched upon earlier in this thesis, has evolved around its omnichannel marketing and strive to develop the store of the future, which reaches the 13th position on the Connected Retail Index (Red Ant, 2017). In addition, the store has gained standing due to its exceptional customer service, which has led to John Lewis being the “nation’s favourite retailer” on multiple occasions (Sabharwal, 2015) aided by its emotional advertising and ability to anticipate changes in shopping habit, as stated by Street (cited in Denholm-Hall, 2015). Moreover, John Lewis competes with its price matching policy “never knowingly undersold” and customer centred innovation which is implemented in small steps where each step informs the next (Ghobadian, 2013). However, the current storm in retail, alongside Brexit uncertainty and falling Pound Sterling, has showed that even the likes of John Lewis can trip over themselves, with the price matching policy and large investments on IT turning the retailer into downwards slope when its competitors keep alluring customers with lower prices (Mustoe, 2019). Khalaf (cited in Mustoe, 2019) points out that the whole department store field is struggling, but that it may not be all doom and gloom for John Lewis, who may end up picking up the customers from failed competitors.
2.5 Gaps in literature

The literature regarding the high street is extensive and a group of certain prominent experts can be identified. However, the research tends to focus around the same topics and has a repetitive nature. This may derive from the fact that regardless of suggestions based on research, improvements are not made, and methods are not implemented at the level of authority as Grimsey (2018) points out in his second review. Furthermore, the repetitive nature may promote focusing on a narrower outlook, leading to further issues when dealing with complex problems that require thinking outside the box. Little research exists on the marketing perspective of high street decline, leading to forming hypotheses based on combining existing literature from outside marketing and using marketing theories to examine them in this thesis. Furthermore, the research falls short in drawing from theories that have been deemed useful, especially on the field of marketing but elsewhere too.

Implementing the research suggestions made by multiple experts has been slow and unsuccessful in the UK. Much research points to key factors, which often are similar, to create positive change to the UK high streets, but these are not tried and implemented, with many blaming the government for poor action towards the issue (Portas, 2011; Grimsey, 2018). To examine the relevance of current literature, implementing the suggestions and monitoring the impact in different types of town should be done, to pave way for the meaningfulness of future research.

In addition, the involvement of retailers and the impact of their activities should be researched in practice, as currently most of the research focuses on the issue on a more governmental level. Portas (2011) briefly discussed the importance of the business owners’ adaptability, calling for retailers that don’t have place in today’s economy to shut down their shops and the rest to be more creative and to add something the internet can’t provide to the offering. Whether retailers, especially independent ones, have attempted to adjust their business, e.g. product offering, price, placement, is currently little known when it comes to the majority. The success stories like John Lewis, River Island and Primark as well as the ones outside the traditional high street retail like IKEA, can give great information on what works and for which kind of retailers, as the clear common factor is not the type of the business, but the strategy and how it has been constructed.

3 Methodology

The research approach for this thesis was to examine the existing literature within both the problem and more broadly in terms of marketing theories, to form a holistic view of the problem situation and marketing tools, which can be applied in the forming of hypotheses. As the
existing literature is vast and relatively varied and the research problem’s nature multidimensional as well as on-going, the method chosen was purely secondary research, as primary research for such a large-scale problem involving various stakeholders on multiple levels was implausible. The focus is set to examining the research issue through qualitative analysis, to determine what can possibly be achieved by drawing relevant literature together to form a comprehensive and multidimensional entity. Where there are gaps within the literature, supporting literature from closely related fields is applied.

The material used includes books, journals, case studies, news articles, national statistics and government briefing papers. The authors behind these range from experienced professionals in the field to scholars working in reputable universities and political authorities and bodies. The material considered most relevant for the purposes of this thesis is mainly published after the 2008 financial crisis, in order to gain data relevant to the current market situation that was largely affected by the crisis. Some data prior to that is used for the purpose of discussing the background and historical elements of the research issue, which have impacted the problem situation through long term trends, such as planning policies and car use in relation to the design of high streets which are often built prior personal motoring becoming common.

In addition to analysing literature related to the decline of high streets, marketing theories and related literature were used to examine the depth marketing could improve the high street decline. This approach was taken as such link had not been properly formed in existing literature. Alongside the theories, some examples of how different marketing techniques have been used in existing successful businesses was examined. These real-life examples are used to draw evidence on what can be achieved if theoretical recommendations are put to action, and to determine the impact. However, as the research issue is of a complex nature and has a tendency to vary depending on geographical and socio-economic factors, these examples cannot be gentrified to a national level.

Initially the research for the purposes of this thesis was exploratory, looking at the research issue broadly and examining areas from a variety of authors as well as professionals and once the prominent themes related to high street decline had been established a more structured approach was taken.

4 Analysis and discussion

The high street decline has been ongoing for over a decade, leading to despair in many areas of the UK. Regardless of the vast number of research and studies that have been created in the recent years, no real improvement has been seen across the country and where to start seems to be a key issue many stakeholders face. Grimsey (2013, 2018) states that there is no one
cause for the decline in high street retail suggesting that revolution in the form and function of places, driven by consumer behaviour, enabled through technology and a connected global economy is the combination of high street decline drivers. This chapter will analyse and discuss the different drivers of high street decline and whether marketing theories could potentially provide a solution to the issue.

The high street needs to tackle a complex and multi-dimensional problem in order to shift towards a socially and economically sustainable concept. The factors that have been identified as the causes of the decline derive from different aspects, which in this thesis are identified as town centre planning, governing, technology, out of town retail, social climate, economic climate and customer behaviour. These all entail various subcategories and all of them together create the wicked problem of declining high streets, given with fluctuation in the strength depending on the factors of each individual high street. Upon researching the literature, it became clear that regardless of the vast amount of research and hypotheses conducted by various authors, experts and consultants, these were often presented in a fragmented nature with a narrow look into specific issues. Considering the presented topics holistically, there is a clear resemblance towards the simplest of marketing and strategy tools such as PESTLE, which brings a mix of factors together and rebranding, which is vital for companies to keep up with the ebb and flow of consumer behaviour. The bespoke tool, that Genecon LLP and partners (2011) suggested consisting of externalities, spatial and physical factors, market forces and competition, demographics, regulation and legislation and management is virtually a mix of macro- meso- and microenvironmental factors, drawing from PESTLE, Porter's Fiver Forces and Marketing Mix, vital marketing theories. As much as such bespoke tool may be useful, these factors can, and for the purposes of this thesis will, be discussed separately, to gain a view on where marketing could most benefit the high streets and how.

4.1 Macro environment

The literature review focuses on the most prominent and researched topics related to the issue, and many of the drivers fall into the category of macroeconomic factors, more specifically, PESTLE. Planning and governing are the political and legal factors, technology, social and economic climate are a part of PESTLE in themselves and environmental aspects are present within a variety of these topics. However, current literature, although it is closely related to the macroeconomic environment, pays little look into the theory. Ntounis and Parker (2017) argue that high streets are unable of changing the macroeconomic factors of their business, which PESTLE represents, however, as tool it can be used to examine the wider environment and industrial factors and thus give an indication to what could be done to the macroeconomic environment or what can be learned from it in the local catchment area to enable adjusting the
local town centre suitable for the these factors. This falls in line with Grimsey’s (2018) suggestion of customising high streets to suit the local community.

The issue of empty high street store seems to lie mainly within the landlords and authorities. Will to use these spaces for other purposes exists, but the stringent requirements seem to make redeveloping retail space into something else or renting it with lower price or for shorter duration too difficult. Pop up shop demand has had an enormous growth, much larger than that of online shopping, indicating there may well be a suitable market gap for this. For struggling high streets with plenty of empty retail space, a cluster of pop up shops, cafes and bars may be something that injects a new interest to the whole area. As much as pop up concepts can be useful for bricks and mortar companies, there is also increasing interest from online based and out of town businesses to make short appearances to the high streets via pop ups, as shown by Amazon creating physical stores and IKEA expanding to the high streets. This only fortifies the assumption, that a combination of online and physical business is what lies in the future, making it even clearer that in order for high street businesses to keep up with the changing customer behaviour and socio-economic climate, it is key for them to move into a hybrid version of retail where technology complements the physical experience and vice versa. In addition, the redevelopment of vacant business space into residential, or other, should be decidable by the local authorities and made less difficult, in order to use the space efficiently for a variety of purposes, as McDonald and Swinney (2019) call for.

Economic factors are possibly ones that are furthest out of control for high streets, as there is little local authorities or retailers can do to impact factors such as disposable income or too high saturation in retail sector, however, government interference could be beneficial. Due to the large contribution retail has to the Gross Domestic Product, in economically challenging times the government should support retail, instead of raising taxes which may have a further impact as the businesses attempt to move the costs onto consumers who already have less disposable income, potentially decreasing the viability of the business. While the current government support has been commissioning research including the Portas Review (Portas, 2011) and allocating funds for the revival of high streets, a more sustainable and action-based approach should be taken. Tax reliefs, instead of handing out funds, may provide a better relief for the retail on high streets and longer term structural changes in taxation, where retail and other businesses are treated more equally regarding taxation, could have more sustainable impact as Grimsey (2013, 2018) and Hallsworth and Coca-Stefaniak (2017) argue.

One of the largest changes in the macroenvironment has come from the social and technological factors, mainly through changing society and customer behaviour. The society is nowadays much more “online based” than a decade ago and perhaps more used to convenience, as technology allows ease in a variety of everyday activities nowadays.
Comparing prices and products has become increasingly easy and the variety is much larger nowadays, which, as Hart et al. (2014) point out has increased the customer expectations. The higher expectations with the new norm of having large variety, has fed to the popularity of online shopping and out of town centres, as these have less spatial restrictions than high street. It is unlikely that the high street can compete in quantity and variety, however, many out of town centres consist of homogenous retail giants, hence the high street could derive competitive advantage from differentiating and understanding the communities, which again needs a thorough understanding of the high street's local social factors. There is clear evidence that consumers seek something else than retail from their local high streets nowadays, as shown by We Made That and LSE Cities’ (2017) statement that 75% value non-retail factors more and McDonald and Swinney’s (2019) point that most people choose to live close to leisure facilities and restaurants, which both feed into the theory of so-called “experience economy” Jenkins (2018) discusses. This indicates that high streets are likelier to find competitive advantage in focusing on experiences for their local community, something out of town and online are less likely to successfully offer. This may mean pubs, restaurants and cafes to socialise in, physical activities such as escape rooms, laser tag and gyms and community spaces like pools, libraries and museums. This does not mean retail needs to be excluded but a suitable mix is required to attract footfall, as pointed out by Jenkins (2018) and Grimsey (2018). Experience can also be achieved by retail, for example in the forms of harnessing innovative technology, hosting community events and creating an atmosphere of novelty via pop-up shops, as proven by Stockport old town (Grimsey, 2018) and Appear Here (Fishwick, 2019).

4.2 Meso environment

The meso environment identifies the threats and issues that high street is experiencing on an industrial level, deriving from Porter’s Five Forces theory. One of the largest industrial level factors that high streets need to focus on is competition. The competitor range of high street is broad, consisting of online and out of town businesses, as identified in the literature review, as well as other high streets. While online shopping is a big competitor for the high streets, no data that it would directly cause decrease in the money spent in store was found. However, it is only a matter of time with such rapid growth that online shopping starts eating away the profits of high streets, as disposable income stagnates. Therefore, better online presence and use of technology from physical retailers is crucial in order to adjust to the current and future level of technological involvement in consumer lives, as called for by Tuahene (2017), Grimsey (2018) and Millington et al. (2018). It seems that investing in technology is currently a strategically better choice for high street retailers than investing in new floorspace, of which there is too much for retail already as pointed out by Grimsey (2018), Peel and Parker (2017) and Portas
(2011). For some high street retailers, even this may not be enough, as the rise of e-commerce will eventually make many physical stores redundant, such as music, that is nowadays mainly bought and listened to online and travel agents. In order for physical stores on online-convenient fields surviving, they need to focus on creating an experience that cannot be received online, such as record stores having regular events, introducing new artists and gathering a “community” of their own, where people with similar interests come together, something that adds value enough to pay the higher in-store price but that the online cannot replicate.

When it comes to out of town competitors, the governing should interfere with this as there already is an excess amount of retail space across the UK, despite, as pointed out by Rhodes (2018), out of town having the lowest vacancy rate. Out of town can provide more selection and lower price due to lower costs in business rates and rents and is more accessible nowadays due to increase in cars. The government could impose higher taxation for these retailers to keep the cost structure more balanced, however as many high street names have their “megastores” out of town it may mean more wiped out businesses and thus become a double-edged sword. What rarely occurs out of town is independent retailers, which can provide more specialised and individual service, unlike large and homogenous chains that out of town retail consists of. The biggest advantage for high street is its uniqueness and ability to provide an experience, unlike any other, through the community, history and character, which was a successful approach for Stockport Old Town and can together with smart space use and mix of services and retail provide the solution to competing with out of town and online retail for many high streets (Grimsey, 2018).

Another key factor is opening hours, which as pointed out by Manchester Metropolitan University (2018) needs improvement, due to many consumers in the catchment area being unable to take advantage of the high street services during office hours. Out of town centres are often open later, creating better shopping possibilities for the consumers that work during office hours. By having restricted opening hours, high streets are shrinking their catchment themselves, being able to cater mainly to people who are not working during the daytime, which often include groups with lower disposable income such as unemployed and pensioners. Such restriction also feeds into the use of cars, as reaching retail after 5-6pm without a car is virtually impossible in many areas.

The last relevant meso factor regarding the decline of high street is the supply chain, which has fallen behind the times for physical retail, and paves way to the digital retailers. Currently many physical retailers are in the need of a better supply chain that can respond to push and pull factors faster and provide goods to customers sooner, while also being efficient to operate. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, as each retailer has individual requirements and strategies,
for example, Primark hardly needs a real-time stock information system as their strategy is to pile high and sell cheap, however, for fashion store like River Island, allowing customers and staff to check online with their phones the stock availability of items online and in different physical locations, has proven beneficial as Sentence (2018) points out. Fletcher et al. (2018) argue that in the future the supply chain of physical retail needs to harness technology and be social, to have the “personal” impact in it, which is rarely achieved by online retail, calling this the “social supply chain”. Wilding and Proctor (2015) describe the core of the social supply chain as incorporating social factors such as social data, social networks and social interactions into elements of the supply chain to maximise value and cost-efficiency, while improving the agility and synergy of the supply chain process which currently falls short of the consumer preference. These types of innovation that both use technology beneficially and improve the social lifestyle and community feeling, whether physically or online, may have potential to create innovative competitive advantage to high street businesses. If the concept of social supply chain could be implemented on high street wide basis, it may well revolutionise the way high streets and people co-exist.

All in all, meso factors are more relevant to individual retailers, as the ways to solve these are out of reach for other stakeholders. However, support from local authorities, even government would be beneficial if not essential, in creating a unified strategy to tackle the meso-environmental issues, and potentially reach wider catchment,

4.3 Micro environment

Retailers need to understand that in the current world where the markets are fairly saturated, they don’t just exist to provide a necessity, they need to provide an experience that makes the customer opt for traditional way of shopping on the high street, within close proximity. The ease of online shopping has shifted the consumer wants so that the same ease needs to be found from the high street too. One way to move forward with this is to look into the Marketing Mix, and define the product offering, location of the business, promotional activities and price point to suit the customer base. It is commonly perceived by authors and authorities, that community focused high streets are a key to reverse the turmoil.

When considering the retail activities within the community, the product offering should be catering the catchment area, its social and economic climate. As an example, where high end luxury brands may be a suitable offering for some of the wealthiest areas in central London, selling these in a rural town with less buying power makes little sense and if a high street already has one or two charity shops, does it need any more of them. While retailers themselves may not care about how many similar shops there are on the high street, thinking they can outsell the competition, authorities should be involved in the offering to some extent, to
avoid clusters of shops. Mirroring this, is the element of placement, which in the same way needs to be considered in choosing a viable market for a business. Centre for Cities (2018) pointed out a link between low-skilled low-income cities and failing retail, which should serve as a warning sign in retailers expanding to such areas without careful consideration. As an example, Barr (2018) reports that House of Fraser is closing dozens of its locations, for example Hull. Hull is one of the most deprived areas in the country, with Hull City Council (2017) reporting it has high levels of poverty and deprivation as well as higher unemployment, more poor housing and more crime than the national average. When considering opening higher end department stores into these locations, the retailer should consider the environment and adjust the offering accordingly, to cater as large number of the catchment as possible and ensure the saturation in the retail sector is not too high already. With such decisions, temporary factors such as Hull being the UK City of Culture in 2017, may create buzz and positive outlook, however longer term trend and commitment level to regeneration should be considered to avoid situations where jobs are created due to temporary factors but upon the trend fading away the business is deemed unprofitable and will be forced to close down leading to losses of jobs and further negative impact to the local economy.

The literature review shows evidence that in addition to just retailers, the authorities too may benefit from drawing conclusions from theories such as Marketing Mix, in the context of the whole high street, by looking into the areas identified as needing change. Price could be considered as adjusting the price of the high street, including parking, business space rents and business rates to be attractive. According to Warnaby (2005) the local authorities may not be the key to pricing, as they have no control over the price of retailers, however this part of marketing mix could be considered in the form of other financial measures. Roose (2018) argues that when it comes to retailers, the modern pricing strategy needs to be longer-term, without discounting frenzies but rather by applying new technology to adapt the price to economic factors such as price elasticity by demand, which is an approach the whole retail sector should consider. The product includes factors like suitable mix of businesses and services, including enough housing. Promotion tackles key areas of high street/town centre online presence, place branding and promotional activities such as events and finally by looking at placement the high street should commit to making all the aforementioned factors to suit the history and identity of the town and local community. The positive impact of such approach is proven by Roeselare, led by its proactive Mayor, that tackled many of these elements in its town centre reformation, which was explained in the literature review. However, it is important to consider the negative impacts of looking into the marketing mix too narrowly, for example heavy discounting to lure more customers may impact the whole retail sector negatively as competitors may be urges to match the prices, but the supplier costs are not reducing (Mustoe, 2018). Warnaby (2005) points out a lack of understanding towards marketing theories and a narrow look to marketing mix based on evidence from town centre managers, who consider
marketing as an activity outside their budget and promotion as the main factor of the marketing mix. By applying the theories as a whole, the cost effectiveness and impact would likely increase, however this may be a difficult task to overtake without any expertise on marketing, leaving a knowledge gap that could be filled by acquiring suitable professionals to consult for or even as a permanent part of the local authorities. However, to avoid the inconclusive temporary impacts such as ones brought by the Portas Review and criticised by Dobson (2012) experts should be involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring and adjusting phases of the marketing.

Where the involvement of marketing professionals is impossible, the 4R’s framework could offer an adapted version particularly for high streets, with readymade questions and activities to follow in the process of reformation. While the 4R framework may be inapt for retailers, local authorities or even better, groups formed of local authorities, retailers and residents, much like Portas (2011) suggests, could benefit from this approach, as it is a ready-made model and more suitable for people with little knowledge in marketing. However, with such vast tool, tackling the whole concept at once may prove too difficult to retain in longer term, as Parker et al. (2017) pointed out which is why a slow and strategic approach to the 4R framework, with a large and varied group of stakeholders involved, may be more beneficial.

A prominent theme in the literature is how the high street seems to be stuck in the past and in order to stay competitive, the local authorities and retailers must realise a change towards a more modern marketplace must happen as Grimsey (2018) argues. This is direct rebranding, something the high street has been doing since the Georgian era, although often more organically, led by the adaptability of retailers. As Wilkinson (2010) points out, the changes in high street have always been predominantly driven by innovation and changes in social climate, however in the current world, this has not happened, feeding to the decline of the high street. Place branding was discussed as one of the most overlooked factors in the literature review. The common factor Heeley and Cooper (2011) and Ntounis and Kavaratzis (2017) focused on was the identity of the place, pointing out that regular vague branding efforts such as slogan and logos are not adequate, but the focus to the brand needs to stem from the history and character and evolve around the community. Such development has already been successful in places like Stockport Old Town, one of the successful examples of rebranding in the literature review. In addition, successful rebranding has been proven to work, with Altrincham, a town outside Manchester, rebranding itself to be “a modern market town” by improving its offering by focusing on a good mix of retailers and services which are anchored around the historical market and offer the community something special within an easy access, established by improving
transport links (Altrincham today 2016, cited in Millington, 2015). In 2018, Altrincham was chosen the high street of the year, proving the power of rebranding the high street to fit the local community and giving competitive advantage against the likes of Manchester, which is located less than 10 miles away. What is important to consider is the commitment level of multiple stakeholders. Without the joined effort of stakeholders including retailers, cultural organisations, local authorities, landlords/space owners and service providers, such wide level rebranding would not be possible. However, the local authorities are often the key people in starting such collaboration.
5 Conclusion

The decline of UK high street started over a decade ago and is an ongoing issue with diverse stakeholders included. As this thesis shows, the issues derive from a variety of factors that are spread out to different market players, where a single stakeholder such as retailer or consumer cannot make sustainable change. It is evident that authorities, retailers and communities needs to work together, to create a more sustainable high street that is adapted to the modern environment.

The most prevailing issues derive from changes in the society, to which the high street has not adapted yet, such as new technology, changing consumer behaviour and widening gap between the costs of online and physical retail activities. These are fed by the difficult economic situation and poor governance. However, the demanding market conditions have created a “survival of the fittest” situation, where only the ones able to adapt and evolve will survive. This is not solely a bad thing in the UK, where the physical retail space is twice as high as needed, however, in the current climate it seems high streets are the ones struggling the most, causing a risk to a concept dating back to Victorian era and being a key part of identity and economic functions to societies and geographical locations. The literature around the reversal of this decline is immense, yet, an overlooked area of improvement is marketing, which this thesis put the focus on. Marketing functions are relevant to almost all businesses, as well as places. The research for this thesis shows that there are vast possibilities in marketing the high streets, both on a level of place as well as on a level of retailers. The example of IKEA’s success through omnichannel marketing, case studies in social supply chain and existing evidence of the benefits of place branding for high streets, such as Altrincham and Stockport Old Town provide valuable data on how to achieve a new model of high street, without forgetting the need for innovation and reinvention of businesses.

A key factor within the success of any high street is the local authority, which, as Warnaby (2005) states, often has little to no knowledge on marketing. However, many of high streets’ disadvantages are self-caused and can be solved without extensive marketing knowledge, such as poor parking possibilities or poor access, highly restricted opening hours and limited mix of services. These are all factors a local authority can change by themselves, however these all require a proper plan, which is not difficult to access with the vast amount of literature and step-by-step suggestions, such as the 4R framework and Grimsey Review, yet it seems that the local authorities have been unwilling to put the required effort in. Governmental involvement should not be disregarded, as the national policies on inequal taxation, planning policies preferring out of town and poor investment in less prosperous areas have increased the depth of the issue especially on a structural level.
While marketing has been overlooked in the process of reviving the British high street, it can provide valuable insight in finding solutions and competitive advantages against many of the forces driving the decline. However, the decline of the high street also involves structural issues that require a further look into economy and town centre planning, to combine theories and practices from a variety of fields. The current era of the high street proves that an across board change is in place to achieve a more sustainable version of high streets, catering to the modern society and economy, and the increasing presence of online and out of town retailers on the high streets proves that there is an advantage to being local. With a proper strategy and sufficient involvement from all stakeholders, the death of the high street is avoidable.
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Appendix 1: The Top 25 priorities for high street action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>CONSIDERATIONS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ACTIVITY HOURS</td>
<td>Ensuring the centre is open when the catchment needs it. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. APPEARANCE</td>
<td>Improving the quality of the visual appearance. How clean is the centre?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. RETAILERS</td>
<td>Offering the right type and quantity of retailers. What retailers are represented?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. VISION &amp; STRATEGY</td>
<td>Having a common vision and some leadership. Do the High Street stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>Considering the quality of the experience? Measuring levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. What is the image of the centre?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>Building capacity to get things done. Is there effective management – of the shopping centre(s) and town centre?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. MERCHANDISE</td>
<td>Meeting the needs of the catchment. What is the range and quality of goods on offer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. NECESSITIES</td>
<td>Ensuring basic facilities are present and maintained. Is there appropriate car-parking; amenities; general facilities, like places to sit and down and toilets etc?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. ANCHORS</td>
<td>The presence of an anchor which drives footfall. This could be retail (like a department store) or could be a busy transport interchange or large employer.</td>
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<td>10. NETWORKS &amp; PARTNERSHIPS WITH COUNCIL</td>
<td>Presence of strong networks and effective formal or informal partnerships. Do stakeholders communicate and trust each other? Can the council facilitate action (not just lead it?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. DIVERSITY</td>
<td>A multi-functional centre. What attractions are there, apart from retail? What is the tenant mix and tenant variety?</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. WALKING</td>
<td>The ‘walkability’ of the centre. Are linked trips between areas possible – or are the distances too great? Are there other obstacles that stop people walking?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE</td>
<td>An entertainment and leisure offer. What is it? Is it attractive to various segments of the catchment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. ATTRACTIVENESS</td>
<td>The “pulling power” of a centre. Can it attract people from a distance?</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. PLACE ASSURANCE</td>
<td>Getting the basics right. Does the centre offer a basic level of customer service, is this consistent? Or do some operators, or parts of the offer, let this down?</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. ACCESSIBLE</td>
<td>Each of reach. How convenient is the centre to access? Is it accessible by a number of different means, e.g. car, public transport, cycling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. PLACE MARKETING</td>
<td>Communicating the offer. How does the centre market and promote itself? Do all stakeholders communicate a consistent image? How well does the centre orientate visitors and encourage flow – with signage and guides etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. COMPARISON/CONVENIENCE</td>
<td>The amount of comparison shopping opportunities compared to convenience (usually in percentage terms). Is this sustainable?</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. RECREATIONAL SPACE</td>
<td>The amount and quality of recreational areas and public space/open space. Is there places that are uncommodified? Where people can enjoy spending time without spending money?</td>
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<td>20. BARRIERS TO ENTRY</td>
<td>Refers to obstacles that make it difficult for interested retailers to enter the centre’s/High Street’s market. What is the location doing to make it easier for new businesses to come onto the High Street?</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. CHAIN VS INDEPENDENT</td>
<td>Number of multiples stores and independent stores in the retail mix of a centre/High Street. Is this suitably balanced?</td>
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<td>22. SAFETY/CrIME</td>
<td>A centre KPI measuring perceptions or actual crime including shoplifting. Perceptions of crime are usually higher than actual crime rates. Does the centre monitor these and how does it communicate results to stakeholders?</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. LIVEABLE</td>
<td>The resident population or potential for residential in the centre. Does the centre offer the services/environment that residents need? Doctors, schools etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. ADAPTABILITY</td>
<td>The flexibility of the space/property in a centre. Are there inflexible and outdated units that are unlikely to be re-let or re-purposed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. STORE DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>The willingness for retailers/property owners to develop their stores. Are they willing to coordinate/cooperate in updating activities? Or do they act independently (or not at all!).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Parker et al., 2017

Appendix 1 shows the 25 priority activities identified by Parker et al. (2017) as the key elements in determining suitable regeneration strategy.