

Project: Megatrends and the Future Business District



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Research Questions and Methods

1. What is the likely long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on city centre business districts?
2. How can we ensure they remain successful as places to attract businesses and people and contribute to vibrant city centres?

The range of methods included policy and literature reviews, provocation pieces, online workshops, secondary data analysis, a call for evidence, in-depth expert interviews, advisory panel meetings, and follow-up workshops.

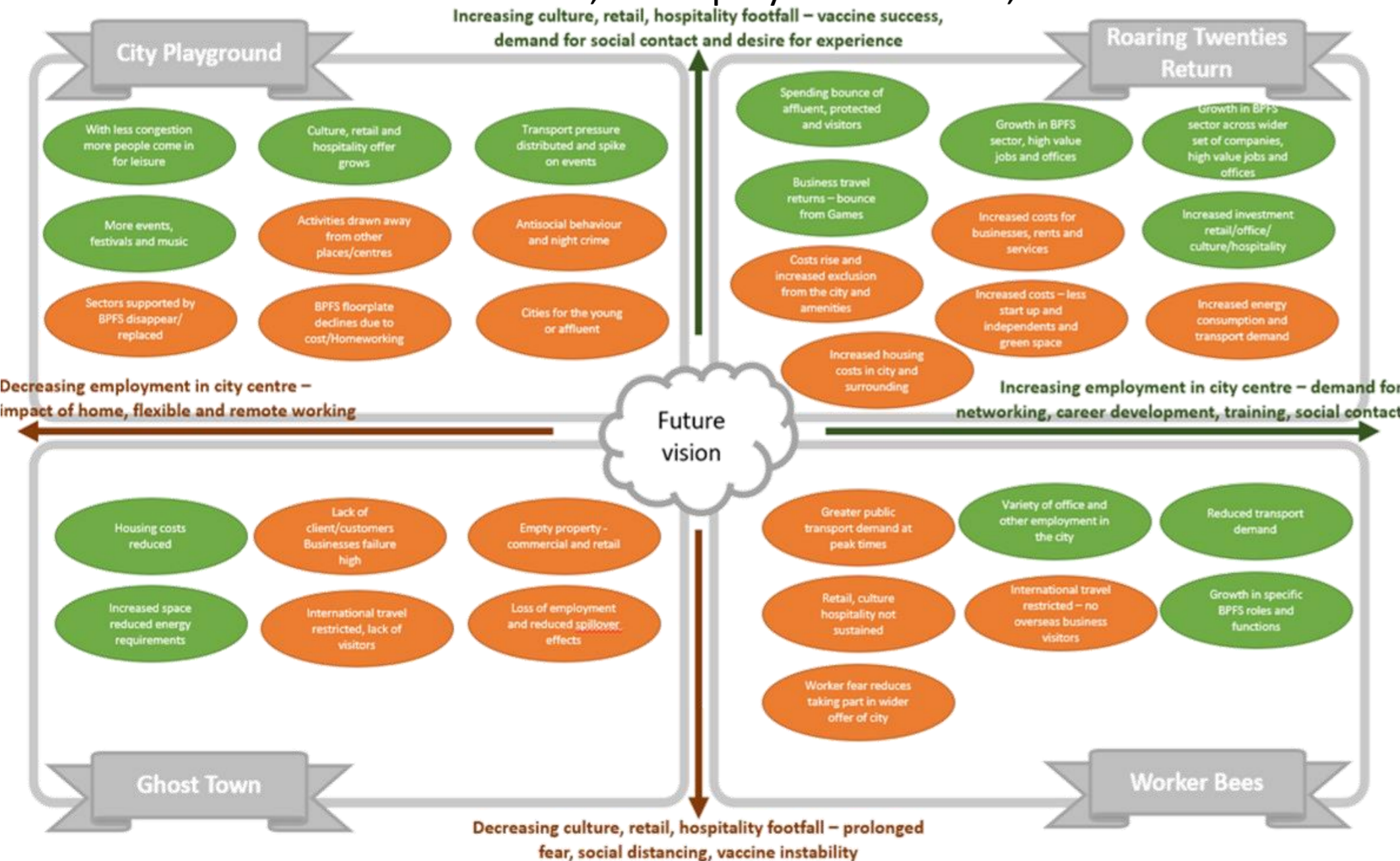
Connecting academics, policy makers, think tanks, local government, and BIDs shows the work as a strong example of collaborative and impactful research.

Trends in City Centres

From the research and engagement the following six key trends were apparent:

1. **Digital transformation** of the workplace and **tech disruption** will continue to impact business models and where and how work is done.
2. **Hybrid working is here to stay** for many (not all) – two-three days working in the office and three-two days working from home (or elsewhere), especially in sectors such as business, professional and financial services, driven by broader 'life' considerations as well as 'work' ones.
3. **Access to talent** is ever more critical and there is an increased demand for skills and jobs that emphasise human interaction – networking, problem solving, collaboration, selling, creating and innovating.
4. Future business districts will be even more around **connections and culture** – a place to connect, interact and collaborate and to enjoy urban experiences.
5. **Safety** – on transport, in public spaces and at offices increased in importance. Encouraging commuters back onto public transport systems – that feel safe and meet the needs of new working patterns – is a major challenge.
6. Demand for recognising **social value, climate change and inclusivity** among consumers and employees will continue to rise.

Looking to the future, whilst we cannot predict what will happen, a number of scenarios could pan out. The diagram below shows various scenarios should entertainment and leisure footfall, or employment footfall, increase or decrease.



Themes for Action

The Space Between – The response report from Colmore BID outlining practical steps for the BID to support the positive and mitigating against the negative trends in a future business district. The steps build on six key themes below.

1. Connections and Culture – A place to meet remains the big idea behind successful cities and their central business districts; office workers and consumers are likely to be driven back into city centres by the need to connect with others via networking and socialising. More collaboration and meeting spaces and leisure/cultural experiences will be needed to keep people returning to the city to connect and exchange.

2. Agile and Flexible – There is a considerable appetite amongst office workers for more flexible and hybrid working. Workspaces and employees are becoming more agile, so the business environment needs to support this trend.

3. Colmore Collaborates – The prominence of hybrid working in the short- to-medium-term is likely to have a significant impact on how floor space demands will evolve and how workers interact with the office as a social space, calling for different types of space and placing prominence on the 'office as a destination' and on exploiting opportunities for growing collaborative workspaces to be utilised by more users.

4. On the Move – There is an opportunity to re-shape an integrated transport system, with greater reliance on active travel and supporting public transport to accommodate the changing needs of the day-time and night-time economies.

5. Safe and Sound – The priority for safety on transport, in offices and in public places, and the future business district will need to meet rising expectations.

6. Open to All – Opening and enhancing the city centre business district to more businesses and more people, and to harness green and open spaces, so resonating with concerns about climate issues, inclusivity and well-being.

Vision

Working with partners, we will:

1

Deliver an unrivalled urban experience across the city centre combining retail, leisure and culture, featuring more independents, and continue to grow our café culture.

2

Harness hybrid to make Birmingham the best city from which to work flexibly and optimise the use of workspaces to make it more inclusive with more active ground floors and imaginative residential developments.

3

Invest in high quality public realm and green spaces to support wellbeing and sustainability.

4

Make it safer and more convenient to come into the city centre and move around.

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