

Re-Imagine Your High Street

Helping communities protect, enhance and benefit from the places that matter to them.

Factsheet 1: Programme introduction

Re-Imagine Your High Street is a programme developed and run by **nef** (the new economics foundation) to help communities design and implement a new kind of town centre programme. The programme supports people to plan and deliver strategies and actions that build on, enhance and develop the local assets they already have – their high street and surrounding areas. The emphasis is on creating a low-carbon, high well-being local economy.

How does it work?

Re-Imagine Your High Street programmes are driven by the creativity and passion of local people and supported by **nef's** national co-ordinating centre. **nef** will develop the programme with a group of representatives from the local business community, resident organisations, statutory agencies, voluntary sector, youth and faith groups. The programme will focus on four main areas: local co-ordination, design, promotion and economic development. All representatives are volunteers and the only criteria for membership is a passion for the place they live and work in. **nef's** involvement is for up to two years, and in the pilot areas self organisation and funding have taken the programmes into their fourth years.

Who can use it?

Everyone with a stake in a community and its future should be involved.

- ▶ **Local authorities** looking for an alternative planning programme that prioritises the needs of people and their communities. Re-Imagine Your High Street provides a way for local authorities to design a planning process side by side with the communities they serve.
- ▶ **Community groups** will find the Re-Imagine Your High Street a useful tool in helping them to understand the planning process and the public sector institutions in their district.
- ▶ **Businesses** can find a way to connect with their communities and build the planning process alongside their market.

Why is Re-Imagine Your High Street needed?

For too long, town centre management has prioritised national chain stores, with well documented consequences for the smaller independents sector. A successful town centre relies on a blend of well known retailers and local independents. Re-Imagine Your High Street seeks to de-clone

the high street by shifting focus to local independent traders. The Re-Imagine Your High Street programme aims to support a **resilient** local independent sector means that more money is retained within the local economy to support local growth in jobs and other opportunities.

The power of the major food supermarkets and shopping malls to dominate a local centre is well known. There are alternatives to this, and the techniques for developing and supporting the full complementary range of independent retailers and facilities is less understood and rarely applied. **nef** believes that our town and city centres should be more than places to just to shop in and this programme seeks to support local initiatives that widen the range of activities and support enterprising opportunities that grow the local economy and high local well being for its residents. Re-Imagine Your High Street can help communities understand and implement initiatives such as shop local, supporting local supply chains, local power generation, local food production and supporting new enterprising and entrepreneurial behaviours.

Town centres are still largely regarded as theatres of consumption or destinations to visit briefly. Re-Imagine Your High Street promotes the idea that the town centre and the high street can be more than that. It supports and develops strong bonds between town centre businesses and residents through volunteering and taking actions, which lead to residents and local traders, participating in and designing of, thriving centres.

Background

Re-Imagine Your High Street is influenced by the highly successful Main Street USA programme, which has been adopted by over 1,600 communities across the States. **nef** have combined some of the MainStreet thinking with knowledge from our Clone Town, Home Town and local economic development programmes. The approach has been developed from initial pilot work delivered in partnership with The Civic Trust.

nef is an independent think-and-do tank that inspires and demonstrates real economic well-being. We aim to improve quality of life by promoting innovative solutions that challenge mainstream thinking on economic, environmental and social issues. We work in partnership and put people and the planet first.

Contact

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