

Re-Imagine Your High Street

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

Fact sheet 2: Values and principles

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.

Programme Components

Local residents from the business community, resident organisations, statutory agencies, and voluntary sector, youth and faith groups manage a Re-imagine programme. The only criteria for volunteering to be passionate about the place a programme runs in.

There are four main programme components:

- ▶ Local co-ordination group
- ▶ Design group
- ▶ Promotion group
- ▶ Economic development group

Local Co-ordination involves getting everyone working toward the same goal of creating a low carbon, high well-being local high street, and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement and sustain a Re-imagine programme.

Promotion group creates a positive image of the High Street and surrounding area and encourages residents and investors to live, work, shop, play and invest in the High Street district. The promotions group focus on local residents as much as attracting visitors and do this by actively supporting the projects, action and interventions planned and delivered by other volunteers.

Design means getting the High Street district into top physical shape. Capitalising on its best assets — such as historic buildings and pedestrian-oriented streets — is just part of the story. The Five Ways to Well-being (Connect, Be active, Take notice, Keep learning, and Give) will drive the design frame to help people look at their high streets differently, and explore new possibilities for developing a convivial space at the heart of their community which is not just about shopping.

An inviting atmosphere a diverse offer of activities and use of the high street, created through attractive window displays, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, pavements, shared space, street lights, and landscaping, conveys a positive visual message about the district and what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices in the district, enhancing the physical appearance of the district by restoring historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning for sustainability.

Economic Development strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. The re-imagine your High Street programme helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a high street district that responds to developing a diverse range of uses of the high street. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district, as does opening up creative spaces which encourage people to spend more time in the high street.

All representatives are volunteers and the only criteria for membership are a passion for the place they live and work in. The groups are supported by staff from **nef** and have in the pilot programmes led to local employment. Projects in 2011 will be the second tranche of Re-imagine your High Street pilots and the development approach will both participatory and based on the principles of action learning. **nef** believes that successful social, economic and environmental outcomes in any geographic place can only come from residents and local stakeholders co-designing and co-delivering this in partnership with local authorities and private sector groups. Re-imagine Your High Street is a programme driven by values, and its overriding outcome is to develop Low Carbon, High Well-being local economies.

Nine Principles which create the framework for the programme

- ▶ **Comprehensive:** No single focus — lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events — can revitalise the High Street. For successful, sustainable, long-term regeneration, a comprehensive approach, including activity in each of the Re-imagine programme's four groups, is *essential*.
- ▶ **Incremental:** Small steps come before walking. Successful regeneration programmes begin with basic, simple activities that demonstrate that "new things are happening" on the High Street. As public confidence grows and participants' understanding of the regeneration process becomes more sophisticated, Re-imagined High Street is able to tackle increasingly complex problems and more ambitious projects. This incremental change leads to much longer-lasting positive change in the High Street are.
- ▶ **Self-help:** No one else will save your High Street. Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilise local resources and talent. That means convincing residents and business owners of the rewards they'll reap by investing time and money in the High Street — the heart of their community. Only local leadership can produce long-term success by fostering and demonstrating

community involvement and commitment to the regeneration effort.

- ▶ **Partnerships:** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the district and must work together to achieve common goals of programme. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations in order to forge an effective partnership.
- ▶ **Identifying and capitalising on existing assets:** Business districts must capitalise on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the programme.
- ▶ **Quality:** Emphasise quality in every aspect of the programme. This applies to all elements of the process — from shop front designs to promotional campaigns to educational programmes. Shoestring budgets and "cut and paste" efforts reinforce a negative image of the commercial district. Instead, concentrate on quality projects over quantity.
- ▶ **Change:** Skeptics turn into believers and attitudes on the High Street will turn around. At first, almost no one believes the programme can really turn around. Changes in attitude and practice are slow but definite — public support for change will build as the programme grows and consistently meets its goals. Change also means engaging in better business practices, altering ways of thinking, and improving the physical appearance of the commercial district. A carefully planned re-imagined programme will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.
- ▶ **Implementation:** To succeed, a Re-imagined High Street programme must show visible results that can only come from completing projects. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the regeneration effort is under way and succeeding. Small projects at the beginning of the programme pave the way for larger ones as the regeneration effort matures, and that constant regeneration activity creates confidence in the programme and ever-greater levels of participation.
- ▶ **High Well Being, Low Carbon:** Always ask the questions “does this project or action increase our local Well Being, and what is the impact on the environment?” We think measuring the success of where we live and what we do there should be based on increasing local well being and that indicators such as GDP (measurement of economic growth) give useful information but tells us nothing about sustainable development or how as residents we are satisfied with life. So increasing local well being while reducing environmental impact is the over-arching goal of this programme.

Contact

If you would like to know more about this programme of work and how to get involved, please contact:

Elizabeth Cox

nef (the new economics foundation)
3 Jonathan Street
London
SE11 5NH

tel: 020 7820 6381

email: elizabeth.cox@neweconomics.org

www.neweconomics.org

www.reimagineyourhighstreet.org