

# RANCHISE & STANDARDISATION • FRANCHISE

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***is the***

# RANCHISE & STANDARDISATION • FRANCHISE

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***of design breaking down  
community and our identity?***



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“places you can work, rest & play”

# introduction.



*Figure 1.  
Basildon Town Centre,  
(Modern Moving Image 2020.)*

**Walking through a high street in 2021 will present to you an issue** that has become the norm, but it is not necessarily noticed, nor was it always the way things were. The issue has been discussed before when it was noticed by Ian Nairn in 1955 when the topic “ sparked a debate over architecture, conservation and planning” (Walker 2017). The issue is franchising and the loss of a community’s soul due to a standard frame of design taking over our towns.

**In the same edition of Architectural Review by Nairn**, illustrations he drew “castigated the fusing of urban and suburban standards rather than retaining and celebrating their distinct identities.” (Darley 2019). Fifty five years later and the conversation of the loss of a town’s identity is very much the same, pointed out by Poulter in 2010 that “shoppers could be in any one of hundreds of locations without any clue to the area and its history.” Poulter captures the essence of my interest in the topic perfectly, as I have personally noticed an identity issue in towns that are miles apart, but feel exactly the same. Guildford is one hundred and thirty five miles away from Cardiff, yet there are only a handful of unique factors these towns present to their visitors.

**This is the same for many of the UK’s towns and cities**, for example Cambridge once boasted independent shops encompassed in a Victorian terrace of shops that hosted a butcher, baker and candlestick maker amongst other things. But today the terrace has gone, replaced by a chain of indistinguishable franchises, “resulting in Cambridge being named as the UK’s ‘King Clone’, with only nine varieties of shops on the main high street.” (Poulter 2010).

**Hearing “the death of the high street” being batted around in conversation is common** as store closures seem to happen more frequently, backed up by the Independent stating that there were “583,000 shops in 1950 and just over 300,000 shops in the UK by 1997” (McRuddan 2019). Changing consumer habits could be to blame, with “21% of consumers choosing to shop online” (Andrews 2020) resulting in the high street taking a hit. Adam Shaw believes “high streets have traditionally been at the heart of communities, but as shops close, it can make whole areas unwelcoming.” Perhaps when we become fixated on retail is when the breakdown of community and identity start within our towns.

**Professor Cathy Parker, co-chair of the Institute of Place Management**, thinks this fixation is unhealthy by stating that “many once-distinctive town centres became home to the same old set of stores owned by a limited number of powerful chains.” But why is this an issue that needs to be solved? 61% of British people are worried about what is happening to the high street according to “Death or transformation : The future of the high street”, so this implies that the majority of the country feel this is a real issue.

**Parker goes on to say in the article that it could be solved by** “building town centres which aren’t just about buying stuff, but places where you can “work, rest and play”. This issue needs a solution before the identities of our towns are lost for good, and as Simon Jenkins adds in his 2018 article “Why high streets don’t need shops to survive” : “They are social institutions, the heart and soul of urban Britain. They must be helped to stay that way.”

# aims &



The aim of this report was to find out public perceptions of a town's identity to coincide with what modern communities look like, and to accumulate schools of thought about where communities are going in the future.

This investigation looked at how towns and communities have responded to change.

Figure 2.  
Stevenage Town Centre,  
(Matthew Denney 2018.)

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**Surveying a variety of age groups about their opinions on community**, past, present and future in mind has created a base and audience for an outcome to be created. This has also meant that predictions have been made about where my audience sees the community going and how they feel about franchising within towns and cities. A concrete goal was finding out what people want within their own towns, and how they feel their identity is currently seen, going on to find out how they would like their identity to be seen.

The survey was posted on social media as this was the best way to reach the most amount of people in the shortest amount of time, and the survey was also sent to professionals to find professional and academic opinions.

**This was carried out to capture basic observations of users of the high street** and it allowed real-time studies and reflections of the type of people currently going there, covid considering. Members of the public were watched to see how they interacted with the space, how they behaved in the area and what type of person they were, from sight alone. From this, assumptions were made and identified, along with any themes or patterns that started to appear. Profiling observations allowed for the formation of a range of users of the high street, and how these profiles were categorised was taken into account, ie grouping them by the type of store they go into.

**Interviews were the first primary research method that was undertaken.** Interviews were conducted to clarify general thoughts and feelings of the standardisation and franchising of design and how it coincided with identity. This also allowed for a base to start a natural lead to ethnography. The informal interviews consisted of six to ten questions that began with asking the opinions of the interviewee, and depending on what their answer was, another question was tailored and asked.

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Primary Research -  
Surveying.

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Primary Research -  
Ethnography.

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Primary Research -  
Interviews.

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**Articles currently published have provided an insight into why planning and re-branding current towns are necessary**, however the opinions these articles lead you to form may be one sided and they are purely opinion based. Articles have also been published from a design standpoint which were useful to include in the wider research stage. This has helped to cover more topics on a shorter timescale, and those written by academics or professionals have provided a reliable and balanced viewpoint.




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Secondary Research -  
Online Literature.

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# methodologies.



*the heart and soul  
of urban britain.*

To understand the issue of standardisation and franchising contributing to the loss of identity on a first-hand basis, the town of Basildon can be used as an example to reiterate the point. In 1946, the New Towns Act was one of the first acts passed under Clement Attlee's Post War Labour Government. In 1948 the government granted provisional approval for Basildon to become one of the eight designated 'new towns' (Cox 2005). "Cicero said 'a man's dignity is enhanced by the home he lives in.' I say even more, by the town he lives in" Attlee proudly claimed.

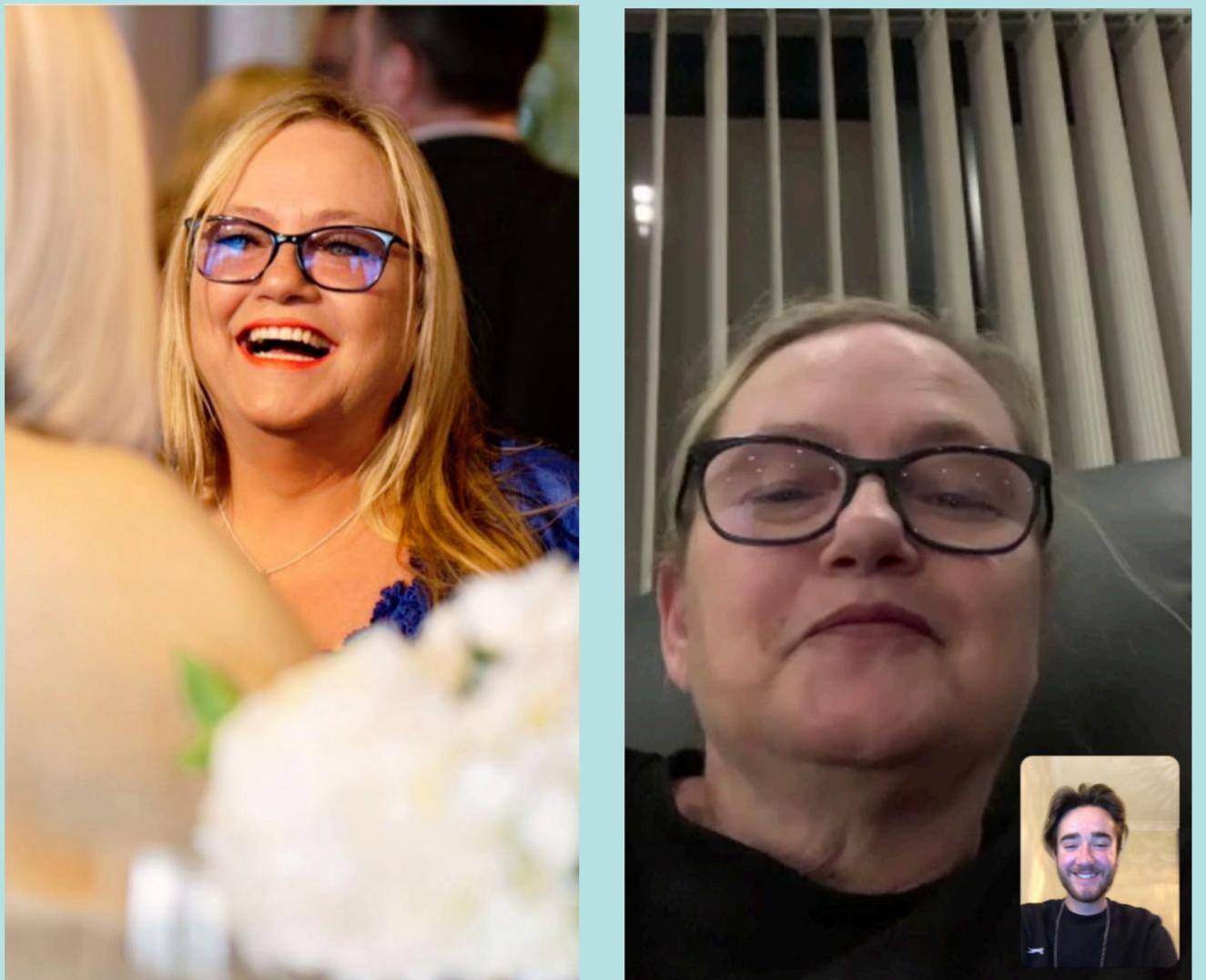
**But the community that eventually settled here held a different tone to what Attlee desired for the town.** The predominantly working class residents of the town realised when industry started to leave due to Conservative government policies clashing with the labour unions, that the area was going into decline (New Town Utopia, 2017). Residents of the town in the 2017 British Film Institute Documentary, 'New Town Utopia' expressed their frustration with living with a 'hopeless and baron' place.

**"Arts and culture is not a priority to Basildon Council.** People who have the money and control for these things to happen are driven by other things. Car parks, office blocks and new supermarkets. They're not interested in culture." This point is shared and repeated again, with a local artist commenting "The people making decisions are focusing on one thing and thing alone, that the answer to any community is retail and nothing else."

**To find out whether this is still an opinion of residents,** an interview was carried out with a member of Basildon community to not only find out their wants and needs for a towns identity, but to find out whether the standardisation and franchise of design has played a part in the deterioration of this. This was also carried out to try and gain a diverse source point to form an opinion later on.



# morel.



*Primary Research - Interviews,  
Diana Morel,  
2021.*

*Figure 4.5.  
Diana Morel.  
(Charlie Salter 2021.  
Facebook 2021)*

*Figure 6.  
Basildon Today.  
(Dave Black 2011)*

**From Morel's interview and watching 'New Town Utopia'**, it can be established that the opinions expressed in both are similar. However, in the documentary, view points made are by residents over the age of forty. This assumption has been made by observation alone based on appearance. From this, it can be presumed that the opinions are biased due to a different experience of living within the community, and perhaps if younger people were interviewed, then the opinions on Basildon could be different. The distaste for retail is shared between both sources, and is mentioned as a factor for the breakdown of community. It is also a shared opinion that something is needing to change to encourage visitors to revive the town.

**Diana Morel is forty five and has lived in Basildon for fifteen years.** Morel was interviewed to find out more about a resident's thoughts about what is currently happening within the community, stating that she was first drawn to the area "because it was quiet. There wasn't much trouble or crime, it was a clean and safe area. No guns or chavs, but they're all here now." (Morel, D 2021)

**However, when asked her opinions on the town & community now**, she highlights that there is more crime. There is no town centre anymore and she feels uneasy about going into Basildon by herself at night. Morel thinks the current town is "rubbish; there's nothing." She goes on to add that "Debenhams have gone, M&S have gone, Poundstretchers have gone." It was also added that she "doesn't really go into town anymore, if I did it would have been for clothes in M&S. It's not very nice to go into town, we go to Lakeside". (Morel, D 2021)

**Moving forward, Morel was asked what her thoughts were about what needs to be done to create a positive identity for the town.** "Because a lot of the shops have closed down, not many people go in. If they're not going to put shops then they need to put in bars and restaurants to bring people in". When asked to what extent did she agree with the comment "the people making decisions (in Basildon) are focusing on one thing and one alone, that the answer to any community is retail and nothing else", Morel answered "I actually disagree with that because they're closing retail, but I think online shopping has contributed to the shops closing, because I shop online. I won't go into town. It's a shame the government or the council don't do something to encourage people to use the town." (Morel, D 2021)

# Llanelli.

To add focus to the question around whether standardisation and franchise has had a large part to play within the loss of identity and community, an ethnography study was undertaken to gather first hand information about the topic.

The study was centered around Llanelli, the largest town in Carmarthenshire, Wales. Llanelli is planned to have a major regeneration scheme for its town centre to update and rejuvenate the area. The £3M regeneration scheme is also needed “to create a vibrant community by delivering mixed-use housing, improving the environment, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, developing more community facilities” (Youle, 2019).



Figure 7.  
Yr Ffrwes, Llanelli.  
(Design Commission for Wales  
2021)



Figure 8.  
St Elli's Shopping Centre.  
(New River, 2021)

# Llanelli town.

**The study was carried out on Thursday the 11th February at 1pm.** Two locations were observed to compare and contrast the spaces. It should be noted that Coronavirus restrictions are a variable that may have affected findings and results, and possibly the cold weather with temperatures around -1°C. The first location visited was Llanelli town centre. Upon arrival, it was immediately apparent that most of the shop fronts were closed or empty, and some of shops that weren't empty units were Cancer Research, Ladbrokes, Boots, Specsavers and Greggs, as well as banks. From this, it can be assumed that only charity shops, who pay no or reduced rate rent, and franchises can afford to stay afloat in the town.

**The lack of independent shops carried further to St Elli's shopping centre** just off of the town centre where mainly people were using the indoor shopping area as a thoroughfare. There were mainly older people, from sight around fifty five plus, using a kebab van in the centre of the area, and a noticeable amount of couples aged fifty plus looking into closed shop windows. The majority of people passing through were carrying reusable bags as Asda Supermarket was around the corner. Overall it was noticed that nobody was stopping within the town from the areas that were observed, and all users of the town seemed to be using it as a shortcut to another destination.

**An independent delicatessen was used as an interview point to find out an independent shop owners opinion** of the town with franchising and standardisation in mind. She asked to remain anonymous as she felt her opinions were political. She said she had doubts in Llanelli's council, "I've been in this town merchandising for at least 15 years, the council are doing nothing to rejuvenate the town. They're just not helping small businesses." (Interviewee 1, 2021). She pushed her point of the lack of support for independent business further, saying "once all the big boys left and went to Trostree, we have more charity spaces or empty shops in the town".

**The interviewee added that her and her partner enquired about a space at Trostree Retail Park,** but the rates were too high for an independent shop like hers to afford. She added that "we need a different approach, and understanding of community and what it's all about, and trying to place new and fresh ideas, this could be a beautiful tourist town because we are just on the seaside. So why they don't take it in a tourist direction." The shop owner summed up her feelings and opinions by saying "the town centre is the heart of the town, why are they doing everything to get it to move out of here to Trostree? Money? Why can't it be here?" (Interviewee 1, 2021)

Primary Research -  
Ethnography,  
Llanelli Town Centre,  
2021.

Primary Research -  
Interviews,  
Interviewee 1,  
2021.

# Llanelli town.



Figure 9,10,11,12.  
Llanelli Town Centre  
(Charlie Salter 2021).



Similarly to thoughts expressed by the Basildon community in New Town Utopia (2017), arts and culture don't seem to be a big topic to the council. Llanelli arts society wanted to rent a shop space according to the interviewee, but the council didn't agree to it. Showing people that there is more than spending money to a town will help build a community could be a resolution in her opinion. "The culture is part of us, if we start forgetting about art for example, whether it be painting or performing, we have to be sensitive of that. It's not all about spending money because I need a new jumper or shoes, these are our basic needs but we are more than that." (Interviewee 1, 2021)

The financial issue of trying to upkeep an independent shop was expressed, and the question of her opinions on big brands being in the town centre was asked from the point of view that at least they invite some of the community into town. She responded with "in today's climate, big brands will not come to town because town is not inviting anymore, it's not the same as it used to be. Now big brands choose to go to Trostree. Councillors should think to invite small businesses to give them a chance or a free period of a year or two years to see how it goes, and try to rejuvenate the place this way. Shopping and browsing around is part of our culture." (Interviewee 1, 2021)

“Llanelli

*years ago*

was the  
place to come.”

# parc



# trostre.

The secondary location for the ethnography study was Parc Trostre Retail Park, mentioned by the Interviewee 1. Parc Trostre was built in the late 1988 where the first phase of development in the area began when Tesco, which was first in Llanelli town centre before occupying a large space where Tinopolis stands, decided to relocate to the area. (Thomas, 2020). The retail park contains some of the biggest high-street names and franchises, and free parking.

However, in the 2020 article from Wales Online “The story of Parc Trostre in Llanelli and the shops that have come and gone”, “Marks and Spencer was added to the list of retailers that closed up shop in Vaughan Street, Llanelli, to move to a huge unit in Trostre which many locals said was one of the biggest blows to the town centre.” (Thomas, 2020). This validates the interviewee’s point that the ‘big boys’ are shutting up shop in the town centre to relocate to the retail park, leaving the heart of the town to suffer.

Primary Research -  
Ethnography,  
Parc Trostre,  
2021.

Figure 13, 14.  
Parc Trostre  
(Wales Online 2020).

# parc



*Figure 15  
Parc Trostre, Llanelli  
(StockfordAnderson 2018).*



*Figure 16  
Victoria Retail Park,  
Nottingham  
(NottinghamshireLive 2019).*



*Figure 17.  
Edge Lane, Liverpool  
(Liverpool Shopping Park  
2019).*

# trostre.

**Comparing Parc Trostre and Llanelli Town Centre will present a huge range of differences** and very little similarities. Parc Trostre follows the same uniform feeling as shared in Liverpool, Walkden and Nottingham for example, with the same repeating franchises. From this, it can be assumed that the chance for any distinct identity that is individual to the area to thrive won't be supported, as backed up by the interviewee. The study can also be used to form a suggestion that an individual, independent and community driven place can easily be replaced by franchise and standardisation.

The study at Parc Trostre started at 3pm on the same day. A strong variable that might have affected results is the fact that many of the shops were deemed "non - essential" due to Coronavirus restrictions, and therefore are not open as usual meaning less footfall to the area. Compared to Llanelli town centre, every unit was occupied. The shops ranged from

Superdrug, M&S, O2 and Dreams to name a few. The large car park suggested that high volumes of customers and visitors is normally the case, and the fast food restaurants like McDonalds and KFC also added to the range of franchises here. There were a little amount of cars in the car park, but the busiest area was the McDonald's 'Drive Thru' which were mainly males aged eighteen to thirty or tradespeople in work vans.



**Primary Research -  
Interviews.  
Catherine Edwards  
2021.**

*Figure 18.  
Llanelli Town Centre,  
(LoveLlanelli 2021)*

**To find out a resident of Llanelli's thoughts about the topic,** fifty three year old retired police officer Catherine Edwards who has lived in Llanelli for twenty three years, was interviewed for her opinions. Edwards felt that other towns were encouraging the individuality of a person by having bespoke shops, like jewellery shops for example. She said "the council is looking after them, but Llanelli? They don't care". She felt that Llanelli council "didn't want to encourage the bespoke, the individuality". (Edwards, 2021)

**Edwards also said that once Trostre was built,** it took all the places like Marks & Spencers. "Llanelli years ago was the place to come, it had Woolworths, the original Marks & Spencers and there was money here." But Edwards suggested that money dwindled in the area when industry dwindled, and Trostre was the solution to encourage shopping. "You took your Debenhams, your Boots but the only reason there's a Boots still in Llanelli is because of prescription drugs." (Edwards, 2021)

**The topic of business rates was discussed as a possible factor for the difficulty individual shops face,** and Edwards suggested "give new business 3 years of reduced rate, because that's better than no rate." By doing this, she suggested it would bring the community back into the town centre. "Years ago you had the conservative club, the liberal club, the RAF club. All those, they're gone. But instead of trying to give it a go, they've just left buildings to rot." The Conservative Club in question has now had a disruption order placed on it, and it will be regenerated into flats, "so the town before long will be more residential flats. I think all towns will become residential." (Edwards, 2021)

**The interview continued with Edwards expressing her thoughts on franchising,** "I can see what's going to happen. The likes of Tesco, again a big conglomerate, their F&F clothing is going to go through the roof." she said. "All of a sudden your Debenhams is gone, but then big conglomerates like Asda, Sainsburys, Tesco, they can see there's going to be a niche in the market for the likes of 70+, because they're going to have everyone in one store." She built on her point by adding "it will be like Walmart in America. You go food shopping then you go gun shopping, you go everything shopping in Walmart." (Edwards, 2021)



*Figure 19.  
Catherine Edwards,  
(Charlie Salter 2021)*

*“A town with an*

# amorphous blob

***has no long term future”***

# survey.

**A survey was created to advance the amount of qualitative and quantitative data** gathered from a large group of people that was posted to social media platforms, and sent to people in the professional field who would hold valuable opinions on the topic.

**It also allowed for a true reflection of the audience** that any later work will be created for. The majority of responses were from people aged 18-24, followed by ages between 51-60, then 31-40 and 41-50.

**The question of to what extent was the respondents agreement with this statement** “The people making decisions about our towns are focusing on one thing and one alone, that the answer to any community is retail and nothing else”, mostly respondents strongly agreed.

**However, the average point on the scale was 6 sitting just up from ‘neutral’ towards ‘strong agreement’.** 21% felt positive about their local town/city, but on average people felt neutral. 37% voted for their local town or city being an equal split of franchises and independent shops, with the second most popular response being mainly independent shops with some chains and franchises.

**On average, answers pointed to respondents feeling between ‘neutral’ and in ‘strong agreement’** with the fact that unique and tailored design incorporated into and applied to a town would have a positive effect for the community. A mixed scattering of results on the scale for the statement “my town/city centre feels similar to other towns and cities” concluded with on average people feeling ‘neutral’. The second most popular votes were 14% ‘strongly agreeing’ with the statement, but 14% in the middle of feeling ‘neutral’ and in ‘strong disagreement’.

**One respondent said** “Although some towns may differ in architecture/ layout etc, I feel as though most towns I’ve been to have more or less the exact same collection of shops / businesses.” to reinforce their point that town planners are only focused on retail, with another agreeing that “The same retail outlets appear in every regeneration.”

**The majority of respondents did not feel positively about their local towns** because they consisted of “lots of takeaways, very limited retail or opportunities to socialise”, and one respondent did not feel positively because they felt that the “common shops take away the beauty and individuality of the city.”

**Most appealing aspects of towns were the green and woodland spaces, pedestrianised areas and how close local amenities are.** The housing issue appeared again when respondents were asked what puts them off their local town or city, saying too many were being built. One respondent said that they felt put off because “some of the buildings here are absolutely stunning, but you can be looking at a beautiful building and beneath it is a hideous bank or pound-land.”



Figure 20.  
Illustration.  
(R. Fresson 2019)



Figure 21.  
Poundland, Cardiff.  
(@FORCardiff 2020)

Primary Research - Surveys,  
Charlie Salter  
2021.

**“you can be looking at a beautiful building and beneath it is a hideous bank or poundland.”**

Figure 22.  
High street of the future.  
(Sam Edwards, 2020)



# Survey.

The respondents who said their town was a 50/50 split of independent and franchise shops felt “it’s good, chains can bring convenience and cheaper alternatives which is essential for some but the locals make the town” but those with mostly franchises within their town felt it was “Bad, as I said I would like to see less of the same shops within a small radius.” On the other hand, mostly franchises were viewed as a positive as areas with a low income couldn’t afford independent shops, or areas with a high student population.

Respondents thought that unique design incorporated into a town would be a good idea for the economy to draw people in from further afield, and to stimulate local pride. Respondents thought “it’s so important to give local people a chance to express themselves and their passions in the busiest parts of the city because it’s a lot more personal and unique than the common chains you see everywhere across the UK.”

**Going forward, the audience was asked what they needed from their town.** Typically, the answers consisted of leisure activities like cinemas and restaurants, but also the preservation of green spaces and pedestrianised areas with “prettier layouts” and high streets with more “life and cheer”. One respondent stated “What’s more important is that a town must have a clear reason (industrial, market, garrison etc). A town with an amorphous blob urbanisation has no long term future for retail or anything else.”



# outline.

**Upon reflection, this report has uncovered many key points.** Independent shops can't afford to stay open in the current economic climate due to franchising within other areas of a town and community, thus shifting the footfall into a standardised and commercially uniform area. Once chains who can afford more expensive plots of land leave the "heart of the town", (Interviewee 1, 2021) bespoke, individual and unique shops that represent and serve the community are left behind.

**Town councils seem to be viewed negatively** as empty promises, unfair business rates and high taxation sits unwell with residents and shop owners as the Llanelli and Basildon studies suggest. Rapid urbanisation and the construction of identikit housing without proper infrastructure in the area is viewed negatively, perhaps creating a further uniform feeling to the area.

**However, the research took a turn when the blame shifted** from the chains and franchises being responsible, to the town planners and council. It can be asserted however that town planners and council are only to blame for the loss of identity and community if one considers retail as the heart of the two factors. If town centres reconfigured from primarily retail to instead "areas of work, rest and play" (Parker, 2020), then it can be assumed that communities would be given renewed and sustainable purpose.

**From this, it can be suggested that standardisation and franchise** have played a part in the decline of community representation. Industry, or any other economic activity or sector, leaving a community that it was initially a key player within also contributes to loss of identity.

**Research suggests that towns and communities need to adapt** and adjust so that they aren't solely focused on retail if the trend of online shopping is going to continue, to ensure that the area still has purpose.

**Research started with looking into whether towns have lost their unique and individual factor** due to franchises and chains buying up space within, and whether this was to blame for the breakdown of community. As the research continued, this theory was supported by interviews from people who have first hand experience in the topic, whether they be consumers or producers, and sustainable purpose.

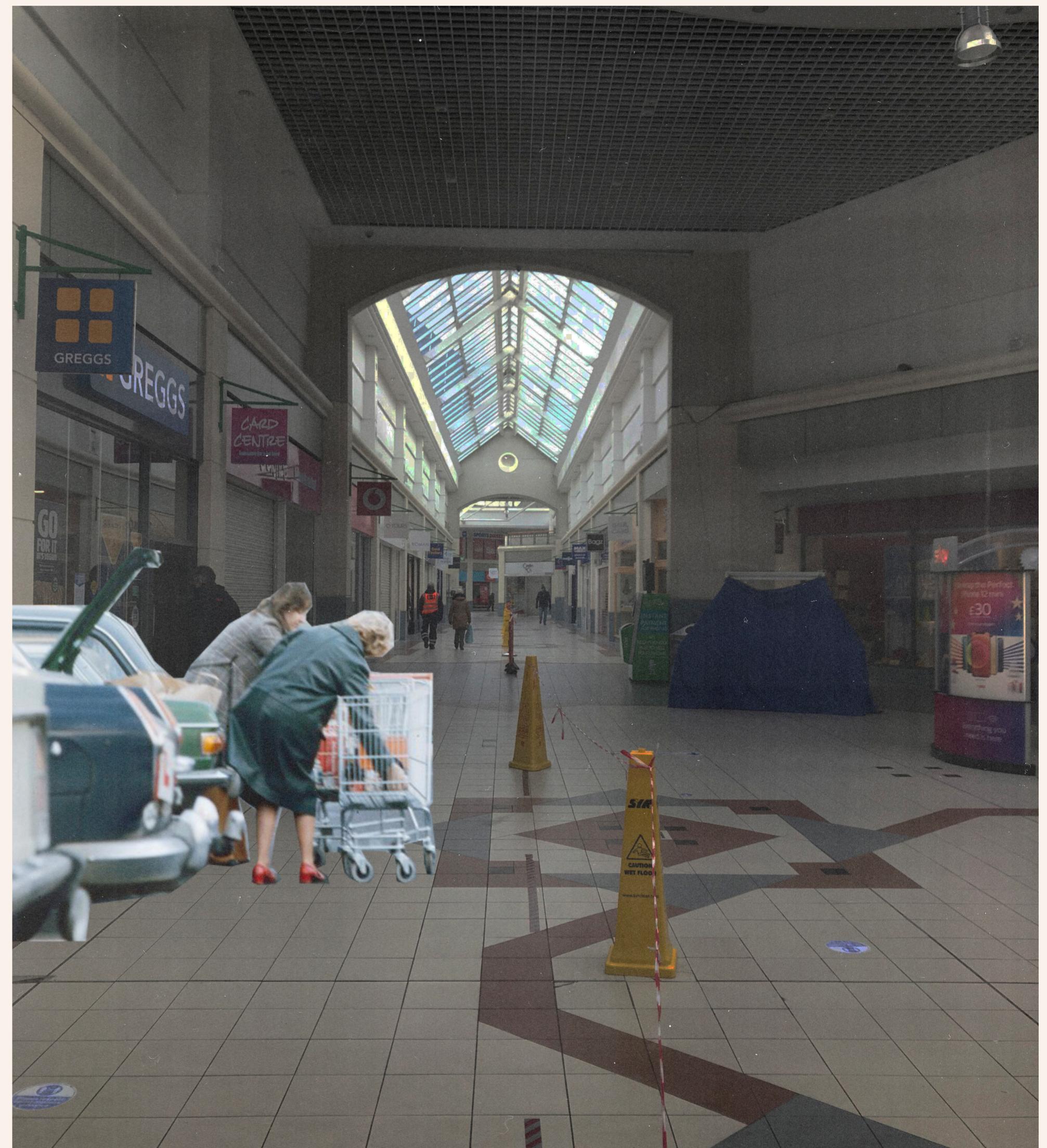
**Going forward, potential research questions** to base the second part of the report revolve around areas that positive change can be implemented. These could be changes in town planning and town purpose, creating experiences within retail and shopping or creating local pride.

Figure 23.  
Basildon then & now.  
(@BasildonHistory, 2017)

# outline.

The research states that towns that were once about consumerism and shopping perhaps need to be re-thought and re-planned to create a strong local identity and community, perhaps through the persuasion of experiences to validate a town's new purpose. From this, "How can we stimulate consumer experience to regenerate town centres?" has been identified as the question to take forward.

To conclude, there are many factors that play a part in the loss of identity and community, but research suggests that the standardisation and franchise of design are some of the initial starting points for the breakdown or loss of identity and community.



shoppers could be in any one of hundreds of locations without any clue to the area and its history

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