

Bury St. Edmunds Benchmarking 2012-15



Four Years' Town Trends September 2015

Introduction

The Approach

The People and Places Town Benchmarking System has been developed to address the real issues of how to understand measure, evaluate and ultimately improve town centres. The approach offers a simple way of capturing data on Key Performance Indicators selected by those involved in town centre management. By having the tools to measure performance, strategic decision making is both encouraged and improved. By considering performance, forward strategies and action planning can be more focused and effective.

People and Places Town Benchmarking licenses allow users to collect data on the 12 Key Performance Indicators from 1st January to 31st December in a systematic manner. All license holders are provided with a Town Benchmarking Handbook and associated data collection sheets to ensure standardization. Once the data has been collected it is sent to People and Places for analysis and report production. Other towns such as Bury St. Edmunds commission People and Places to conduct the work starting from £2,500.

The System

The Benchmarking system is divided into two sections:

- Large Towns; consisting of those localities with more than 250 units
- Small Towns; consisting of those localities with less than 250 units

Towns, depending on their size, contribute to either the Large or Small Town analysis. The analysis provides data on each KPI for the Benchmarked town individually and in a Regional, National and where possible Typology context.

The all important KPI's include a visual audit of all ground floor commercial units in the defined town centre area indicating Use Class, Business Type and Vacancy Rates. A review of the Market and the operation of the locality in regards to Footfall and Car Parking on Market and Non Market Days are also undertaken. On Line, Face to Face and Paper Based Surveys are conducted with Business Owners, Residents, Visitors and Tourists ascertaining the positive and negative aspects of the locality, whilst a Shoppers Origin survey provides clients with a review of where customers are travelling from.



The Reports

The People and Places Town Benchmarking report provides statistical analysis of each of the KPI's. Individual towns are encouraged to add their own commentary to the analysis, noting specific patterns or trends and using local knowledge to provide specific explanations. The reports are used by a variety of key stakeholders such as local authorities, town and parish councils, local partnerships and universities to;

- benchmark clusters of towns to ascertain high performers / under achievers
- understand their locality in a Regional, National and Typology context
- measure town centre performance year on year
- identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement
- measure the impact of initiatives and developments within the town centre
- act as an evidence base for funding applications
- create an action plan for town centre improvements



Key Findings



The historic and beautiful Bury St. Edmunds could never be described as a typical English town, and this has been highlighted by a consistent and marked improvement in certain aspects of town centre performance. Since 2012, ourburystedmunds BID have commissioned Mike King and Chris Wade of the People and Places Partnership to complete the nationally renowned Town Benchmarking Review, and the longitudinal data provides an interesting insight into a town centre that has proved durable throughout the harsh trading conditions of recent years. Mark Cordell, Chief Executive of ourburystedmunds BID has used the Benchmarking data to develop and inform project delivery and influence changes, in the town centre. Mark writes;

“As well as being able to compare our annual performance with other locations both locally and nationally we are also able to meaningfully compare how our town is performing with the previous 3 years. This is essential in identifying our priorities for the BID and the town.”



5 key areas of continuous improvement are;

- ❖ **High and Rising Footfall;** Footfall in Bury St. Edmunds is noticeably higher than the National and Typology averages. On a Market Day an average of 405 persons per ten minutes pass through the busiest location in the town centre, 91 persons higher than the National average and 214 higher than towns of a similar Typology. The 2015 average of 405 is also a large increase on the recordings in previous Benchmarking exercises, 244 in 2014, 288 in 2013 and 292 in 2012. On a Non Market Day, Footfall drops to 233 persons per ten minutes, but this is noticeably higher than the National Large Towns (193) and Typology 2 (123) figures and once again an increase on previous evaluations, 158 in 2014, 147 in 2013 and 117 in 2012.

	Nat. Large Towns	Nat. Small Towns	East of Eng. Small Towns	Typ. 2	BSE	2014	2013	2012
Market Day	314	134	238	191	405	244	288	292
Non Market Day	193	98	156	123	233	158	147	117

- ❖ **Stable Vacancy Rates;** The vacancy rate in Bury St. Edmunds town centre has remained stable at 8% since 2012 and 1% lower than the National Large Towns figure. To place the data in further context, in February 2015 The Local Data Company reported that vacancy rates in all town centres in Great Britain is 14%.

	Nat. Large Towns %	Nat. Small Towns %	East of Eng. Small Towns %	Typ. 2 %	BSE %	2014	2013	2012
Vacancy %	9	7	5	7	8	8	8	9

- ❖ **A Growing Market;** 76 Market Stall Traders were present at the time of the audit representing a figure higher than the National Large Towns average (61) and a year on year increase since 2012. 54% of Businesses also reported that Market(s) were a positive aspect of the town centre.



- ❖ **Business Confidence;** 68% of Businesses reported that compared to last year their turnover had Increased, 27% higher than the National Large Towns average and 25% higher than the Typology 2 Towns. The figure is also a marked increase from previous years evaluations, 51% in 2014, 47% in 2013 and 35% in 2013
- ❖ **High Customer Spend;** 43% of town centre users spent £20.01-£50.00 on a normal visit to Bury St Edmunds, which is an increase on the 2014 (27%), 2013 (33%) and 2012 (29%) figures. The Bury St Edmunds figure of 43% is also 20% higher than the National Large Towns average.

The story of Benchmarking in Bury St Edmunds is an exemplar of how a consistent and standardized performance management system can help an organization understand the town centre in grounded evidence. The evidence base then creates a clear action plan to deliver both suitable and sustainable projects.

