



PEOPLE & PLACES

Insight

HOUGHTON REGIS

TOWN BENCHMARKING REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

People and Places Insight strive to improve the performance of localities through a series of well-used and advanced Town Centre Services. We have worked with National Government, Business Improvement Districts, Local Authorities, Town Councils, Community and Town Partnerships and Retailers on a wide range of projects including Town Benchmarking, First Time Visitor Reviews, Signage and Wayfinding, Footfall Counts, Event Evaluation, Car Parking Studies, Disability Access Audits and Neighbourhood Planning.

In 2025 Central Bedfordshire Council commissioned People and Places Insight to undertake a Benchmarking Review in Houghton Regis to measure town centre performance. Previous evaluations in the town centre have taken place by People and Places Insight in 2019 and 2021. The detailed results of the Benchmarking Review can be found in the following report whilst the Executive Summary provides the headline findings.

GENERAL

Commercial Offer

- 9% of the ground floor units in the defined town centre were vacant during the audit in April 2025, identical to the National Small Towns average but higher than in previous evaluations.
- 37% of the ground floor units in the defined Houghton Regis town centre area are A1 Shops, 14% lower than the National Small Towns average, whilst 15% are B1 Businesses, 12% higher than the National average.
- 60% of the A1 Shops sell 'Comparison Goods'.
- 47% of the A1 Shops in Houghton Regis are unique to the town centre whilst 47% have a Nationwide presence.

Town Centre Use

- As in previous evaluations 'Convenience Shopping' (55%) was the key reason for Town Centre Users to visit Houghton Regis.
- 50% of Town Centre Users reported that they spend £10.00-£20.00' on a normal visit to Houghton Regis.

Footfall

- 'Busy Day' Footfall in Houghton Regis remained the same from the 2021 evaluation with 57 persons per ten minutes, lower than both the National Small Towns average, 110 persons and the 2019 figure. (83). 'Quiet Day' footfall, 44 persons per ten minutes is more than double the 2021 figure but lower than the 2019 average of 64 persons per ten minutes. Saturday footfall sits between the 'Busy Day' and Quiet Day' counts with 51 people per ten minutes.

Car Parking

- 51% of all car parking provision was vacant on the 'Busy Day' in Houghton Regis and the same figure for the 'Quiet Day', the former 24% higher than the National Small Towns average and the latter 18%.
- 47% of car parking spaces were vacant on the 'Saturday' car parking audit.
- Additional analysis with the removal of Morrisons Car Park provides vacancy figures of 'Busy Day' (28%), Quiet Day (24%) and 'Saturday' (21%).

POSITIVE

Business Confidence and Performance

- All of the Businesses reported that their 'Turnover' and 'Profitability' has 'Increased' over the last year and 75% expected their 'Turnover' to increase over the next 12 months.

Local Customers

- 'Convenience' (82%) was classed as the most positive aspects of Houghton Regis by Town Centre Users.
- 81% of Town Centre Users visit Houghton Regis at 'Least Once a Week'.
- 55% of Town Centre Users travel into Houghton Regis Town Centre 'On Foot', with 36% by 'Car'.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Physical Appearance

- As in 2019, 'Physical Appearance' (78%) was classed as the most negative aspect of Houghton Regis Town Centre, 53% higher than the National Small Towns average.
- 'Safety' (56%) was rated by Town Centre Users as a negative aspect of Houghton Regis, 50% higher than the National average.

Visit Recommendation

- 55% of Town Centre Users would not recommend a visit to Houghton Regis, 30% higher than the National Small Towns average of 25% but lower than in the 2021 (68%) and 2019 (67%) evaluations.

METHODOLOGY

THE APPROACH

The People and Places Insight 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.

THE SYSTEM

The Benchmarking system is divided into two sections:

- National Large Towns; consisting of those localities with more than 300 units
- National Small Towns; consisting of those localities with less than 300 units

Towns, depending on their size, contribute to either the Large or Small-Town analysis. The defined town centre area of **HOUGHTON REGIS** consists of **45** units and is thus classed as a **Small** Town. A list of all the Commercial Units in the defined town centre area are listed in the Appendix.

The analysis provides data on each KPI for the Benchmarked town individually and in a National and Longitudinal. The National figure is the average for all the towns which participated in Benchmarking from July 2022 to January 2024.

THE REPORTS

The People and Places Insight Town Benchmarking report provides statistical analysis of each of the KPIs. The reports are used by a variety of key stakeholders such as Local Authorities, Town and Parish Councils, Business Improvement Districts, Local Partnerships, Retailers and Universities to assist with;

- Measuring High Street regeneration projects
- Developing Town Centre regeneration
- Measuring the impact of events and festivals against normal trading conditions
- Providing an evidence base for funding applications
- Providing an evidence base for car parking initiatives
- Providing an evidence base for Neighbourhood Planning
- Supporting Business Improvement Districts
- Supporting Community groups

Each KPI in a typical Benchmarking Review is collected in a standardized manner as highlighted in the Table below.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	METHODOLOGY
KPI: COMMERCIAL OFFER; USE CLASS	Visual Survey of ground floor units in defined Town Centre area.
KPI: COMMERCIAL OFFER; COMPARISON/CONVENIENCE	Visual Survey of A1 ground floor units in defined Town Centre area.
KPI: COMMERCIAL OFFER: TRADER TYPE	Visual Survey of A1 ground floor units in defined Town Centre area.
KPI: COMMERCIAL OFFER: VACANCY RATES	Visual Survey of A1 ground floor units in defined Town Centre area.
KPI: MARKETS	Visual Survey of total number of traders on a Weekday Market
KPI: FOOTFALL	Footfall Survey on a Busy Weekday, Quiet Weekday and Saturday from 10.00-13.00 on each day
KPI: CAR PARKING	Audit of total number of spaces and vacancy rate on a Busy Weekday, Quiet Weekday and Saturday between 11.00-14.00
KPI: BUSINESS CONFIDENCE SURVEYS	Paper Based Surveys
KPI: TOWN CENTRE USER SURVEYS	Face to face/ Paper Based/ Online
KPI: SHOPPERS ORIGIN SURVEYS	Paper Based Surveys

KEY FINDINGS

KPI: GROUND FLOOR; USE CLASS

It is important to understand the scale and variety of the “offer” throughout the town. A variety of shops and a wide range of services in a town are important to its ability to remain competitive and continue to attract customers. Sustaining a balance between the different aspects of buying and selling goods and services ensures that the local population (and visitors from outside) can spend time and money there, keeping the generated wealth of the town within the local economy. Importantly, it forms the employment base for a substantial proportion of the community too, helping to retain the population rather than lose it to nearby towns and cities.

The Use Class Order from 1987 was updated into larger segments in 2020. Due to the more in-depth breakdown provision in 1987, People and Places Insight Limited continue to deploy these Use Class classifications.

The following table provides a detailed breakdown of each of the Use Classes:

CLASS	TYPE OF USE	CLASS INCLUDES
A1	Shops	Shops, retail warehouses, hairdressers, travel and ticket agencies, post offices (but not sorting offices), pet shops, sandwich bars, showrooms, domestic hire shops, dry cleaners, funeral directors and internet cafes.
A2	Financial and Professional Services	Financial services such as banks and building societies, professional services (other than health and medical services) including estate and employment agencies and betting offices.
A3	Restaurants and Cafes	Food and drink for consumption on the premises- restaurants, snack bars and cafes.
A4	Drinking Establishments	Public houses, wine bars or other drinking establishments (but not nightclubs).
A5	Hot Food Takeaways	Sale of hot food for consumption off the premises.
B1	Businesses	Offices (other than those that fall within A2) research and development of products and processes, light industry appropriate in a residential area.
B2	General Industrial	General Industrial.
B8	Storage and Distribution	Warehouses, includes open air storage.
C1	Hotels	Hotels, boarding and guest houses where no significant element of care is provided (excludes hostels).
C2	Residential Institutions	Residential care homes, hospitals, nursing homes, boarding schools, residential colleges and training centres.

C2A	Secure Residential Institution	Use for a provision of secure residential accommodation, including use as a prison, young offenders' institution, detention centre, secure training centre, custody centre, short-term holding centre, secure hospital, secure local authority accommodation or use as a military barracks.
D1	Non-Residential Institutions	Clinics, health centres, crèches, day centres, schools, art galleries (other than for sale or hire), museums, libraries, halls, places of worship, church halls, law court. Non-residential education and training centres.
D2	Assembly and Leisure	Cinemas, music and concert halls, bingo and dance halls (but not nightclubs), swimming baths, skating rinks, gymnasiums or area for indoor or outdoor sports and recreations (except for motor sports, or where firearms are used).
SG	Sui Generis ("unique" establishments)	Theatres, hostels providing no significant element of care, scrap yards. Petrol filling stations and shops selling and/ or displaying motor vehicles. Retail warehouse clubs, nightclubs, laundrettes, taxi business, amusement centres, casinos, haulage yards, transport depots, veterinary clinics, dog parlours, tanning and beauty salons and tattoo studios.

The following table provides a detailed analysis of the offering in the town centre by Use Class.

The figures are presented as a percentage of the **41** occupied units recorded.

CLASS	TYPE OF USE	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
A1	SHOPS	51	37	34	34
A2	FINANCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	13	2	8	8
A3	RESTAURANTS AND CAFES	9	12	5	5
A4	DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS	4	2	5	5
A5	HOT FOOD TAKEAWAYS	4	10	8	8
B1	BUSINESSES	3	15	24	24
B2	GENERAL INDUSTRIAL	1	0	0	0
B8	STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION	0	0	0	0
C1	HOTELS	1	0	0	0
C2	RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS	0	5	5	5
C2A	SECURE RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTION	0	0	0	0
D1	NON-RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS	7	7	8	8
D2	ASSEMBLY AND LEISURE	1	0	0	0
SG	SUI GENERIS	5	10	3	3

37% of the ground floor units in the defined Houghton Regis town centre area are A1 Shops, 14% lower than the National Small Towns average, whilst 15% are B1 Businesses, 12% higher than the National average.

KPI: GROUND FLOOR; COMPARISON VERSUS CONVENIENCE

The presence of a variety of shops in a town centre is important to its ability to remain competitive and continue to attract customers. A balance of both comparison and convenience retail units is therefore ideal in terms of encouraging visitors / potential customers.

The following table outlines the classification for Convenience and Comparison Goods.

CONVENIENCE GOODS:	COMPARISON GOODS
Food and Non Alcoholic Drinks	Books
Tobacco	Clothing and Furniture
Alcohol	Furniture-Floor Coverings and Household Textiles
Newspapers and Magazines	Audio-Visual Equipment and other durable goods
Non-Durable Household Goods	Hardware and DIY Supplies
	Chemists Goods
	Jewelry, Watches and Clocks
	Bicycles
	Recreational and Miscellaneous Goods
	Hairdressing

The following table provides a percentage of the A1 Shops which sell mainly Comparison Goods/ Convenience Goods.

	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
COMPARISON	82	60	77	79
CONVENIENCE	18	40	23	21

60% of the A1 Shops mainly sell 'Comparison Goods'.

KPI: GROUND FLOOR UNITS; TRADER TYPES

The vitality of a Town Centre depends highly on the quality and variety of retailers represented. A sustainable balance of key attractors and multiple names alongside local independent shops is likely to have the greatest positive impact on the vitality and viability of a town.

The following shops are considered Key attractors by Experian Goad.

DEPARTMENT STORES

- Marks and Spencer
- Debenhams
- House of Fraser
- John Lewis

MIXED GOODS RETAILERS

- Wilkinson
- Argos
- Boots
- TK Maxx
- WH Smith

SUPERMARKETS

- Waitrose
- Sainsbury's
- Tesco

CLOTHING

- Burton
- Dorothy Perkins
- H & M
- New Look
- Primark
- River Island
- Topman
- Topshop

OTHER RETAILERS

- Carphone Warehouse
- Clarks
- Clintons
- O2
- Superdrug
- Phones 4 U
- Vodafone
- Waterstones

Multiple traders have a countrywide presence and are well known household names. Regional shops are identified as those with stores/units in several towns throughout one geographical region only and Independent shops are identified as those that are specific to a particular town. The following table provides a percentage of the A1 Shops which are Key Attractors, Multiples, Regional and Independent to the locality.

	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
KEY ATTRCTOR	8	0	0	0
MULTIPLE	21	47	38	38
REGIONAL	10	7	8	8
INDEPENDENT	61	47	54	54

47% of the A1 Shops in Houghton Regis are unique to the town centre whilst 47% have a Nationwide presence.

KPI: GROUND FLOOR UNITS; VACANCY RATES

Vacant units are an important indicator of the vitality and viability of a Town Centre. The presence of vacant units over a period of time can identify potential weaknesses, whether due to locational criteria, high rent levels or strong competition from other centres.

The following table provides the percentage figure of vacant units from the total number of commercial units.

	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
VACANCY	9	9	2	5

9% of the ground floor units in the defined town centre were vacant during the audit in April 2025, identical to the National Small Towns average but higher than in previous evaluations.

KPI: MARKETS

Good quality markets provide competition and choice for consumers. A busy and well-used street market can therefore be a good indicator of the vitality of a town centre. Conversely, if a market is in decline (e.g., empty pitches reducing numbers), it can be an indication of potential weaknesses in the town centre e.g., a lack of footfall customers due to an inappropriate retail mix or increased competitor activity. Street markets can also generate substantial benefits for the local economy. Markets can also provide a local mechanism for a diverse range of local enterprises to start, flourish and grow, adding to the sustainable mix of shops services on offer throughout the town.

The following table provides the average number of market traders at the main regular (at least once a fortnight) weekday market within the locality.

	NAT SMALL TOWNS	HOUGHTON 2025	HOUGHTON 2021	HOUGHTON 2019
MARKET TRADERS	15	N/A	N/A	N/A

There is no regular weekday Market in Houghton Regis.

KPI: FOOTFALL

The arrival and movement of people, whether as residents, workers, visitors or a shopper is vital to the success of most businesses within the Town Centre. Measuring passing people in a consistent manner in the same place, at the same time builds up a picture of the town, its traders and their relative success over the weeks and months.

Benchmarking footfall is conducted on weekdays in specific locations for a set period, between 10.00am to 1.00pm, counting the people passing in both directions through a fixed point (e.g., an imaginary line across the road) for a precise ten minutes in every hour (e.g., 10.00–10.10am, 11.20am-11.30am, 12.40pm-12.50pm). Aside from the above basic rules are applied to the process:

- An accurate stopwatch and a hand operated mechanical counter are used
- If a person walks pass
- more than once they are included in the count each time they pass through the 'line'
- Children under 12 are not included in the count
- Footfall counts are not conducted in weather conditions which will limit the number of town centre users i.e., heavy rain, snow

	NAT SMALL TOWNS	HOUGHTON 2025	HOUGHTON 2021	HOUGHTON 2019
BUSY DAY	110	57	57	83
QUIET DAY	105	44	21	64
SATURDAY	N/A	51	N/A	N/A

'Busy Day' Footfall in Houghton Regis remained the same from the 2021 evaluation with 57 persons per ten minutes, lower than both the National Small Towns average, 110 persons and the 2019 figure. (83) 'Quiet Day' footfall, 44 persons per ten minutes is more than double the 2021 figure but lower than the 2019 average of 64 persons per ten minutes. Saturday footfall sits between the 'Busy Day' and Quiet Day counts with 51 persons per ten minutes.

The following tables provide full details of the footfall counts.

FOOTFALL- BUSY DAY

LADBROKES TO POUNDSTRETCHER, BEDFORD SQUARE	
FRIDAY 25 TH APRIL 2025	
10.30-10.40	46
11.30-11.40	62
12.30-12.40	64
TOTAL	172
AVERAGE	57

KINGS ARMS TO DENTAL CENTRE, HIGH STREET

FRIDAY 25 TH APRIL 2025	
10.30-10.40	39
11.30-11.40	38
12.30-12.40	49
TOTAL	126
AVERAGE	42

ALL SAINTS VIEW

FRIDAY 25 TH APRIL 2025	
10.30-10.40	29
11.30-11.40	14
12.30-12.40	20
TOTAL	63
AVERAGE	21

FOOTFALL- QUIET DAY

LADBROKES TO POUNDSTRETCHER, BEDFORD SQUARE	
	MONDAY 24TH MARCH 2025
10.30-10.40	39
11.30-11.40	41
12.30-12.40	53
TOTAL	133
AVERAGE	44

KINGS ARMS TO DENTAL CENTRE, HIGH STREET	
	MONDAY 24TH MARCH 2025
10.30-10.40	23
11.30-11.40	21
12.30-12.40	31
TOTAL	75
AVERAGE	25

ALL SAINTS VIEW	
	MONDAY 24TH MARCH 2025
10.30-10.40	18
11.30-11.40	25
12.30-12.40	25
TOTAL	68
AVERAGE	23

FOOTFALL- SATURDAY

LADBROKES TO POUNDSTRETCHER, BEDFORD SQUARE	
	SATURDAY 24TH MAY 2025
10.30-10.40	42
11.30-11.40	47
12.30-12.40	50
TOTAL	139
AVERAGE	46

KINGS ARMS TO DENTAL CENTRE, HIGH STREET	
	SATURDAY 24TH MAY 2025
10.30-10.40	46
11.30-11.40	41
12.30-12.40	66
TOTAL	153
AVERAGE	51

ALL SAINTS VIEW	
	SATURDAY 24TH MAY 2025
10.30-10.40	16
11.30-11.40	39
12.30-12.40	32
TOTAL	87
AVERAGE	29

KPI: CAR PARKING

A large proportion of spending customers in a Town Centre come by car. In the rural setting, the car tends to be an essential tool, used by both those who come to spend and those who come to work. The provision of adequate and convenient car parking facilities is therefore a key element of town centre vitality. An acceptable number of available spaces with a regular, quick turn-over for shoppers are the ideal while adequate longer stay, less convenient spaces for local owners/ workers and visitors must be considered too.

Within the town on street and off parking within the core commercial offering were identified as being integral to the study. The following tables provide a summary of the Car Parking offering broken down into;

- Overall percentage of short stay, long stay and disabled spaces
- Overall percentage of vacant spaces on a Market Day, Non-Market Day and Saturday

	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
OVERALL				
SHORT STAY SPACES: (4 HOURS AND UNDER)	48	81	81	87
LONG STAY SPACES: (OVER 4 HOURS)	47	10	12	5
DISABLED SPACES:	5	9	7	7
NOT REGISTERED	0	0	0	0
VACANT SPACES ON A BUSY DAY:	27	51	46	29
VACANT SPACES ON A QUIET DAY:	33	51	51	47
VACANT SPACES ON A SATURDAY	N/A	47	N/A	N/A

51% of all car parking provision was vacant on the 'Busy Day' and the same figure for the 'Quiet Day', the former 24% higher than the National Small Towns average and the latter 18%. 47% of car parking spaces were vacant on the 'Saturday' car parking audit.

Additional analysis with the removal of Morrisons Car Park provides vacancy figures of 'Busy Day' (28%), Quiet Day (24%) and 'Saturday' (21%).

KPI: BUSINESS CONFIDENCE SURVEY

With regards to the 'business confidence' by establishing the trading conditions of Town Centre businesses, stakeholders can focus their regeneration efforts on building on existing strengths and addressing any specific issues.

The following percentage figures are based on the **6** returned Business Confidence Surveys.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR BUSINESS?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
RETAIL	N/A	50	N/A	100
FINANCIAL/PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	N/A	0	N/A	0
PUBLIC SECTOR	N/A	0	N/A	0
FOOD AND DRINK	N/A	50	N/A	0
ACCOMMODATION	N/A	0	N/A	0
OTHER	N/A	0	N/A	0
WHAT TYPE OF BUSINESS ARE YOU?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
MULTIPLE	11	25	N/A	0
REGIONAL	6	25	N/A	0
INDEPENDENT	83	50	N/A	100
HOW LONG HAS YOUR BUSINESS BEEN BASED IN THE TOWN?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
LESS THAN A YEAR	8	0	N/A	0
ONE TO FIVE YEARS	20	25	N/A	0
SIX TO TEN YEARS	13	0	N/A	0
MORE THAN TEN YEARS	59	75	N/A	100

50% of Business Survey respondents are based in the 'Retail' sector and the same figure 'Food and Drink'. 50% are 'Independent' and 75% based in the Town Centre for 'More than Ten Years'.

COMPARED TO LAST YEAR HAS YOUR TURNOVER?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
INCREASED	39	100	N/A	0
STAYED THE SAME	27	0	N/A	0
DECREASED	34	0	N/A	100
COMPARED TO LAST YEAR HAS YOUR PROFITABILITY?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
INCREASED	30	100	N/A	0
STAYED THE SAME	32	0	N/A	0
DECREASED	39	0	N/A	100
OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS DO YOU THINK YOUR TURNOVER WILL....?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
INCREASE	42	75	N/A	0
STAY THE SAME	39	25	N/A	100
DECREASE	19	0	N/A	0

All of the Businesses reported that their 'Turnover' and 'Profitability' has 'Increased' over the last year and 75% expected their 'Turnover' to increase over the next 12 months.

WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF HAVING A BUSINESS LOCATED IN THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	50	50	N/A	0
CLEANLINESS	N/A	50	N/A	0
PROSPERITY OF THE TOWN	42	50	N/A	0
LABOUR POOL	15	0	N/A	0
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION	47	50	N/A	0
MIX OF RETAIL OFFER	50	50	N/A	100
POTENTIAL TOURIST CUSTOMERS	36	25	N/A	0
POTENTIAL LOCAL CUSTOMERS	74	75	N/A	0
AFFORDABLE HOUSING	16	25	N/A	0
TRANSPORT LINKS	41	25	N/A	0
FOOTFALL	31	0	N/A	0
CAR PARKING	27	50	N/A	0
SAFETY	N/A	0	N/A	0
RENTAL VALUES/ PROPERTY COSTS	12	75	N/A	0
MARKET(S)	13	0	N/A	0
EVENTS/ACTIVITIES	20	50	N/A	0
MARKETING/PROMOTIONS	10	25	N/A	0
LOCALPARTNERSHIPS/ ORGANISATIONS	20	50	N/A	0

'Potential Local Customers' (75%) and 'Rental Values/ Property Costs' (80%) were classed as positive aspects of trading from Houghton Regis Town Centre.

WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF HAVING A BUSINESS LOCATED IN THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	18	25	N/A	0
CLEANLINESS	N/A	25	N/A	0
PROSPERITY OF THE TOWN	22	50	N/A	100
LABOUR POOL	16	0	N/A	100
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION	8	25	N/A	0
MIX OF RETAIL OFFER	25	0	N/A	0
NUMBER OF VACANT UNITS	N/A	0	N/A	0
POTENTIAL TOURIST CUSTOMERS	13	0	N/A	0
POTENTIAL LOCAL CUSTOMERS	5	0	N/A	0
AFFORDABLE HOUSING	14	0	N/A	0
TRANSPORT LINKS	15	25	N/A	0
FOOTFALL	23	25	N/A	0
CAR PARKING	44	75	N/A	100
SAFETY	N/A	0	N/A	0
RENTAL VALUES/ PROPERTY COSTS	25	25	N/A	0
MARKET(S)	9	25	N/A	0
LOCAL BUSINESS COMPETITION	21	50	N/A	0
COMPETITION FROM OUT-OF-TOWN LOCATIONS	39	25	N/A	100
COMPETITION FROM OTHER TOWNS/CITIES	29	25	N/A	0
COMPETITION FROM THE INTERNET	44	0	N/A	0
EVENTS/ACTIVITIES	N/A	0	N/A	0
MARKETINGG/ PROMOTIONS	N/A	0	N/A	0
LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS/ ORGANISATIONS	N/A	0	N/A	0

75% of Businesses classed 'Car Parking' as negative aspect of trading from the Town Centre.

HAS YOUR BUSINESS SUFFERED FROM ANY CRIME OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
YES	27	25	N/A	100
NO	73	75	N/A	0
IF YES, WHAT TYPE OF BUSINESS CRIME HAVE YOU SUFFERED?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
THEFT	66	100	N/A	0
CRIMINAL DAMAGE	27	0	N/A	0
ABUSE	12	100	N/A	100
OTHER	8	0	N/A	0
HAS YOUR BUSINESS SUFFERED FROM ANY ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
YES	27	75	N/A	100
NO	73	25	N/A	0

75% of Businesses have not suffered any 'Crime' over the last 12 months, with 75% reporting that they had suffered from 'Anti-Social Behaviour'.

WHAT SUGGESTIONS WOULD YOU MAKE TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE TOWN CENTRE?

- Bedford Square was designed in the 1960's when most people walked everywhere. Now, a lot of people drive by and do not realise it is a shopping centre because they only see the back of the shops. It needs redeveloping or failing that make clear what it is.
- Better shopping centre.
- More variety of shops.
- More security presence as lot of kids shoplifting
- Most kids are at school during the day period
- There is almost no evening economy beyond a few food outlets/ restaurants. Since CBC took over our Community Centre there is no space to even add anything
- More security walking about
- Get quite a lot of children throwing litter and being loud at night, Aa lot of it is boredom, a lot of shops in the area get targeted

TOWN CENTRE USERS SURVEY

The aim of the Town Centre Users Survey is to establish how your town is seen by those people who use it. By asking visitors, of all types, a more detailed picture can be obtained as what matters to regular visitors can be different to someone who has never been to the place before.

In total **64** surveys were completed. The following percentage figures are based upon the total number of respondents to each question.

GENDER/ AGE	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
MALE	32	43	29	33
FEMALE	67	57	67	64
NON-BINARY	N/A	0	N/A	N/A
PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	1	0	4	3
UNDER 16	N/A	0	N/A	N/A
16-25	6	0	1	4
26-35	15	8	15	9
36-45	24	8	19	16
46-55	23	31	21	20
56-65	17	23	19	22
OVER 65	N/A	31	19	25
PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	1	0	4	4

57% of Town Centre Users are 'Female' and 43% 'Male'. 31% of respondents are aged '46-55' and the same figure 'Over 65'.

WHAT DO YOU GENERALLY VISIT THE TOWN CENTRE FOR?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
WORK	N/A	18	6	8
CONVENIENCE SHOPPING	N/A	55	70	58
COMPARISON SHOPPING	N/A	0	1	0
ACCESS SERVICES	N/A	9	14	20
EATING AND DRINKING OUT	N/A	9	N/A	N/A
LEISURE	N/A	0	0	4
DOCTORS SURGERY/ MEDICAL CENTRE	N/A	0		
OTHER	N/A	9	9	11

As in previous evaluations 'Convenience Shopping' (55%) was the key reason for Town Centre Users to visit Houghton Regis.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
DAILY	23	18	10	8
MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK	37	45	30	34
WEEKLY	21	18	27	26
FORTNIGHTLY	7	0	9	9
MORE THAN ONCE A MONTH	5	9	9	6
ONCE A MONTH OR LESS/ FIRST VISIT	8	9	15	16

81% of Town Centre Users visit Houghton Regis at 'Least Once a Week'.

HOW DO YOU NORMALLY TRAVEL INTO THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
ON FOOT	40	55	36	N/A
BICYCLE	1	0	2	N/A
MOTORBIKE	0	0	0	N/A
CAR	55	36	56	N/A
BUS	2	9	4	N/A
TAXI	N/A	0	N/A	N/A
OTHER	0	0	2	N/A

55% of Town Centre Users travel into Houghton Regis Town Centre 'On Foot', with 36% by 'Car'.

ON AVERAGE, ON YOUR NORMAL VISIT TO THE TOWN CENTRE HOW MUCH DO YOU NORMALLY SPEND?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
NOTHING	3	0	5	2
£0.01-£5.00	11	18	5	16
£5.01-£10.00	23	27	11	23
£10.01-£20.00	32	50	32	25
£20.01-£50.00	26	5	43	27
MORE THAN £50.00	6	0	5	7

50% of Town Centre Users reported that they spend £10.00-£20.00' on a normal visit to Houghton Regis.

WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	45	0	3	5
CLEANLINESS	40	27	12	18
RETAIL OFFER	22	9	20	13
CUSTOMER SERVICE	24	9	14	12
CAFES/RESTAURANTS	56	36	10	16
ACCESS TO SERVICES	57	73	47	51
LEISURE FACILITIES	14	0	3	N/A
CULTURAL ACTIVITIES/EVENTS	20	0	10	9
PUBS/ BARS/ NIGHTCLUBS	29	0	3	6
PUBLIC TOILETS	20	27	32	22
TRANSPORT LINKS	14	27	8	16
EASE OF WALKING AROUND THE TOWN CENTRE	59	82	36	33
CONVENIENCE	69	82	61	61
SAFETY	23	9	7	7
CAR PARKING	27	18	24	26
OTHER	6	0	15	11

'Convenience' (82%), 'Ease of Walking Around' (83%) and 'Access to Services' (73%) were classed as the most positive aspects of Houghton Regis Town Centre.

WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	25	78	70	70
CLEANLINESS	19	44	37	41
RETAIL OFFER	47	44	52	47
CUSTOMER SERVICE	7	0	8	10
CAFES/RESTAURANTS	12	11	23	24
ACCESS TO SERVICES	12	0	22	1
LEISURE FACILITIES	27	11	22	26
CULTURAL ACTIVITIES/EVENTS	20	11	18	14
PUBS/ BARS/ NIGHTCLUBS	14	33	18	18
PUBLIC TOILETS	25	33	12	26
TRANSPORT LINKS	19	11	3	5
EASE OF WALKING AROUND THE TOWN CENTRE	10	0	5	7
CONVENIENCE	3	0	2	3
SAFETY	16	56	48	50
CAR PARKING	43	44	27	44
OTHER	17	11	18	13

As in 2019, 'Physical Appearance' (78%) was classed as the most negative aspect of Houghton Regis Town Centre, 53% higher than the National Small Towns average. Similarly, 'Safety' (56%) was also rated as a negative aspect, 50% higher than the National average.

HOW LONG DO YOU STAY IN THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
LESS THAN AN HOUR	35	45	53	66
1-2 HOURS	44	36	32	28
2-4 HOURS	13	0	8	3
4-6 HOURS	3	0	2	1
ALL DAY	4	9	3	0
OTHER		9	3	2

91% of Town Centre users stay in Houghton Regis for 'Less than 2 Hours'.

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND A VISIT TO THE TOWN CENTRE?	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
YES	75	45	32	33
NO	25	55	68	67

55% of Town Centre Users would not recommend a visit to Houghton Regis, 30% higher than the National Small Towns average of 25% but lower than in the 2021 (68%) and 2019 (67%) evaluations.

WHAT WOULD YOU MAKE TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE TOWN CENTRE?

As in previous evaluations the key themes to emerge were 'Improving Physical Appearance' and 'Improving Safety'.

KPI: SHOPPERS ORIGIN SURVEY

The Shoppers Origin Survey tracks the general area that your town centre visitors originate from. The data can be used to target local marketing or promotional literature. It can also be used as evidence of the success of such campaigns by gauging the penetration into the population. The post codes gathered from businesses are split into 3 categories to be able to compare with other towns. The categories are:

- Locals; those who live within a Post Code covering the town
- Visitors; those who live within a Post Code less than a 30-minute drive away
- Tourists; those who live within a Post Code further than a 30-minute drive away

	NAT SMALL TOWNS (%)	HOUGHTON 2025 (%)	HOUGHTON 2021 (%)	HOUGHTON 2019 (%)
LOCALS	55	N/A	N/A	N/A
VISITORS	19	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOURISTS	15	N/A	N/A	N/A

Businesses did not complete enough Shoppers Origin Surveys to provide a valid analysis.

ADDITIONAL KPI INFORMATION

A successful 21st Century Market Town must be a blend of a commercial offer suitable for locals and visitors, a place of employment, have a strong culture and events-based offer and provide leisure and recreation opportunities both during the day and in the evening.

**Please note those in Italics are outside of the defined Town Centre Area for Benchmarking purposes.*

Public

- Houghton Regis Town Council

Religious Offer

- All Saints Church

Leisure

- Houghton Regis Village Green

Education

- Houghton Regis Library
- Bedfordshire College at Bedford Square Community Centre

Public Transport Link

- Direct Bus Services to Luton Airport, Luton, Dunstable, Thorn Turn, Toddington, Leighton Buzzard, Harlington, Woburn, Ridgmont, Tingrith, Flitwick, Ridgmont, Toddington.

MOVING FORWARD

A successful 21st Century Small Town must be a blend of a commercial offer suitable for locals and visitors, a place of employment, have a strong culture and events-based offer and provide leisure and recreation opportunities both during the day and in the evening.

Houghton Regis is one of the smallest localities on the Town Benchmarking System which is reflected in the comparisons to the National Small Town averages. Houghton Regis is a town which services local residents and does not draw in significant numbers of visitors. The town centre is based around the rather tired looking Bedford Square but has benefitted from the development of All Saints View.

The following section highlights potential projects/ areas for improvement in Houghton Regis Town Centre:

Improving the Physical Appearance of Bedford Square

Built in 1966, Bedford Square currently looks very tired and unappealing. Driving through the Town Centre, it would be easy for first-time or infrequent visitors to drive through without knowing that there was a commercial offering in Bedford Square. Without physical regeneration of the site it is essential that projects are developed to make the Square more enticing for Town Centre Users. Recent examples in similar sized towns where physical improvements have taken place include Shepshed in Leicestershire. The £2.9 million public realm improvement project targeted widening pavements and realigning carriageways, creating new public open spaces, introducing more trees and planting, providing new street furniture and community information and improving street lighting. The project has been a success with increased footfall, customer spend, business confidence and performance.

Catering for Homeworkers

‘Homeworking’ is on the increase in Britain. Before the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, over 1.5 million people worked from home, up from 880,000 in 2010. ‘Homeworking’ is prevalent in Houghton Regis with the 2021 Census indicating that 20% of employed Houghton Regis residents work from home. Recent studies have highlighted that despite increased productivity from being home-based there are negative aspects such as social isolation leading to mental health issues. People and Places Insight conducted a study in 2017 in Bidford on Avon, Warwickshire on the use of empty premises in town centres and the key feedback from home-based workers was that vacant commercial units should be used as shared office space. Respondents stated that by having the opportunity to use shared office space on a regular basis they would also increase customer spend in the town centre by also using the local coffee shops, cafes, pubs for lunches and meetings.

In Swadlincote, South Derbyshire a vacant ex furniture store and cafe was successfully transformed into a shared office space called In Hub. The commercial unit has been transformed into separate work pods, informal meeting space and a meeting and training room which can be booked. The inhouse café offers the opportunity for catering whilst free Wi-Fi is available with printing, scanning and mailbox services. Clients simply need to register to become members of the In Hub and can rent a desk for £20 a day or make longer term commitments for £87 for 5 full days a month or £147 for 10 full days a month. Customers include homeworkers, freelancers and SME’s across a range of sectors.

Whilst commercial units suitable for the sole purpose of accommodating ‘Homeworkers’ may not be readily available in Houghton Regis ensuring that this essential cohort have the opportunity to visit and work in the existing premises in the town centre at points during the week is hugely important. Local Businesses should be looking to offer incentives for ‘Homeworkers’ to visit the town centre. ‘Homeworkers’ both increase footfall and spend in individual businesses but may also spend money during their visit in other businesses and engage with the wider leisure and cultural offering.

Disability Inclusivity

On the High Street, £249 Billion is being lost across the country every year due to the barriers that disabled people face. Considering these startling figures, People and Places Insight have built an audit that specifically looks at disability and access to good and services within a defined town centre area.

We have noticed from our reviews that there are multiple barriers that disabled people are facing when trying to buy and access goods and services in town centres. The aim of the audit is to highlight the barriers that people face due to their disability and celebrate what Local Authorities are already doing well to remove those barriers.

The Single Equalities Act 2010 was introduced to update and replace all existing equalities legalisation. All areas are covered including gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion and ethnicity. As a result of the Act, all providers of goods and services are legally required to make reasonable adjustments to enable a disabled person to be able to access and use your good and services. A reasonable adjustment is something that removes a barrier for a disabled person to be able to access goods and services. Reasonable means is the adjustment practical, within a reasonable cost and will it benefit disabled people.

Example of Council’s working with businesses and organisations to improve town centres for disabled people include town accessibility maps, business advice service around making a business more accessible, making sure car parking spaces are in the right place, providing drop kerbs, making sure footpaths are accessible and free of street clutter, providing support for people, induction loops for hearing impaired people and having well developed shop mobility services.

The Disability Access Audit covers:

- Public Transport
- Public Toilets
- Changing Facilities
- Street Furniture
- Highways and Pavements
- Car Parking
- Access to Shops and Services
- Mystery Shop of a sample of Shops and Services reviewing the experience for a Disabled User
- Digital Review

APPENDIX

COMMERCIAL OFFER

NAME	STREET	USE	TYPE	TYPE	NOTES
MORRISONS	HIGH STREET	A1	CONV	MULT	
JET PETROL STATION	HIGH STREET	SG	N/A	N/A	
GEORGINA SERVICE STATION	HIGH STREET	N/A	N/A	N/A	VACANT
LADY SPENCER RESIDENTIAL CARE	HIGH STREET	C2	N/A	N/A	
GRS ACADEMY/ SHOWROOM	HIGH STREET	B1	N/A	N/A	
GRS	HIGH STREET	B1	N/A	N/A	
TRIDENT HOUSE OFFICES	HIGH STREET	B1	N/A	N/A	
BRIGHTER SOFTWARE	HIGH STREET	N/A	N/A	N/A	VACANT
SANDYS AND KIRSTYS	HIGH STREET	A1	COMP	IND	
WILSON CAR SALES	HIGH STREET	SG	N/A	N/A	
HOUGHTON MOTORS LTD	HIGH STREET	B1	N/A	N/A	
THE KINGS ARMS	HIGH STREET	A4	N/A	N/A	
ALL SAINTS CHURCH	HIGH STREET	D1	N/A	N/A	
EAST OCEAN	BEDFORD ROAD	A5	N/A	N/A	
HAIR.COMB	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	COMP	IND	
POUNDSTRETCHER	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	COMP	MULT	
BEDFORD SQUARE COMMUNITY CENTRE	BEDFORD SQUARE	B1	N/A	N/A	
PHOENIX	BEDFORD SQUARE	A5	N/A	N/A	
LLOYDS PHARMACY	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	COMP	MULT	
TWP FLOORING	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	COMP	REG	
AGE UK	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	COMP	MULT	
D AND S	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	COMP	IND	
PREMIER	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	CONV	MULT	
CINAMON LOUNGE	BEDFORD SQUARE	A3	N/A	N/A	
CHINA HOUSE	BEDFORD SQUARE	A5	N/A	N/A	
LADBROKES	BEDFORD SQUARE	A2	N/A	N/A	
TRANSYLVANNIA	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	CONV	IND	
JEWELS	BEDFORD SQUARE	A3	N/A	N/A	
CAFÉ AND SMOOTHIE BAR	BEDFORD SQUARE	A3	N/A	N/A	
TURKISH CHARCOAL GRILL	BEDFORD SQUARE	A5	N/A	N/A	
GREGGS	BEDFORD SQUARE	A3	N/A	N/A	
RAHMAN FAMILY HALAL BUTCHERS	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	CONV	IND	
BROWN AND WHITE	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	COMP	MULT	
CAKE HAVEN	BEDFORD SQUARE	A1	CONV	IND	
ROSALYN HOUSE	HIGH STREET	C2	N/A	N/A	
HOUGHTON REGIS DENTAL CENTRE	HIGH STREET	D1	N/A	N/A	
AUTOLUSSO	KING STREET	N/A	N/A	N/A	VACANT
HOUGHTON REGIS MEDICAL CENTRE AND PHARMACY	PEEL STREET	D1	N/A	N/A	

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL	PEEL STREET	B1	N/A	N/A	
MAKETIMEFORYOU	ALL SAINTS VIEW	SG	N/A	N/A	
COSTA	ALL SAINTS VIEW	A3	N/A	N/A	
HERON FOODS	ALL SAINTS VIEW	A1	CONV	MULT	
RAZORS	ALL SAINTS VIEW	A1	COMP	IND	
TAN AND GO	ALL SAINTS VIEW	SG	N/A	N/A	
NUMBER 1	ALL SAINTS VIEW	N/A	N/A	N/A	VACANT

CAR PARKING

Name:	Morrisons
On Street/ Car Park:	Car Park
Total Spaces:	168
Short Stay Spaces: (4 hours and under)	152
Long Stay Spaces: (Over 4 hours)	0
Disabled Spaces:	16
Vacant Spaces on: Friday 25 th April 2025	119
Vacant Spaces on: Monday 24 th March 2025	122
Vacant Spaces on: Saturday 24 th May 2025	116
Name:	Bedford Square
On Street/ Car Park:	Car Park
Total Spaces:	34
Short Stay Spaces: (4 hours and under)	32
Long Stay Spaces: (Over 4 hours)	0
Disabled Spaces:	2
Vacant Spaces on: Friday 25 th April 2025	3
Vacant Spaces on: Monday 24 th March 2025	13
Vacant Spaces on: Saturday 24 th May 2025	0
Name:	Medical Centre
On Street/ Car Park:	Car Park
Total Spaces:	54
Short Stay Spaces: (4 hours and under)	52
Long Stay Spaces: (Over 4 hours)	0
Disabled Spaces:	2
Vacant Spaces on: Friday 25 th April 2025	9
Vacant Spaces on: Monday 24 th March 2025	11
Vacant Spaces on: Saturday 24 th May 2025	10
Name:	All Saints View
On Street/ Car Park:	Car Park
Total Spaces:	21
Short Stay Spaces: (4 hours and under)	14
Long Stay Spaces: (Over 4 hours)	0
Disabled Spaces:	7
Vacant Spaces on: Friday 25 th April 2025	16
Vacant Spaces on: Monday 24 th March 2025	10
Vacant Spaces on: Saturday 24 th May 2025	15

Name:	King Street
On Street/ Car Park:	On Street
Total Spaces:	14
Short Stay Spaces: (4 hours and under)	0
Long Stay Spaces: (Over 4 hours)	14
Disabled Spaces:	0
Vacant Spaces on Friday 25th April 2025	8
Vacant Spaces on: Monday 24th March 2025	0
Vacant Spaces on: Saturday 24th May 2025	5
Name:	Bedford Square
On Street/ Car Park:	On Street
Total Spaces:	17
Short Stay Spaces: (4 hours and under)	0
Long Stay Spaces: (Over 4 hours)	17
Disabled Spaces:	0
Vacant Spaces on: Friday 25th April 2025	3
Vacant Spaces on: Monday 24th March 2025	1
Vacant Spaces on: Saturday 24th May 2025	0