

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**

Centre for  
Regional Economic  
and Social Research

# SHUTTING UP SHOP? HARDSHIP AND HOPE ON BRITAIN'S HIGH STREETS

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RYDER...

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TUES - SAT - CLOSED  
SUNDAY - CLOSED

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# IN A NUTSHELL



**High streets are in crisis**, but this isn't new: we need to understand the context



**Place attachment** helps us to understand why high streets matter to people and policymakers



**Community businesses can make a significant difference** in high streets that have fallen on hard times



There are long-term, **entrenched challenges** to overcome, and community businesses are not a quick fix



## OUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

CRESR was commissioned by Power to Change to look at how community businesses can help to meet the challenges of UK high streets. The research, completed earlier this year, builds on my previous work on high streets and town centres and considered three questions:

- How can community businesses succeed in high street contexts?
- How can community businesses contribute to high street regeneration?
- What long-term difference can we make by supporting community businesses in high streets?

## DEFINING THE HIGH STREET

*'A named street predominantly consisting of retailing, defined by a cluster of 15 or more retail addresses within 150 metres'* (Office for National Statistics, 2020)

*'Streets or small collections of streets which act as the physical centre of a local community'* (Brett and Alakeson, 2019)

High streets have a threefold centrality within communities:

- **Physical:** they contain a cluster of buildings and public spaces
- **Economic:** they contain a cluster of activities (not just shops) that generate income or provide services
- **Social:** they are a focus for people who gather to work, access services, and relax – and who may live there



**HAS THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE  
ALREADY HAPPENED?**



movies, EXCEPT that the unlikely saviour was a corporation of all things, Harvertech. Now to keep the Zombie Infection under control citizens are advised to participate in the Harvertech vaccination program. Your closest vaccination outpost is **The Complex** in **Basingstoke**. What could go wrong?!

- 2 hrs of epic zombie action!
- Gruesome movie quality zombie make up and effects
- An explosive story driven, immersive zombie adventure!
- No hidden costs, ammo & weapons provided
- Free photos with cast & crew!
- Venue in **Basingstoke, Hampshire**.

BUY NOW

# BLOODBATH IN BASINGSTOKE

## BLOOD BATH IN BASINGSTOKE

### KILLERS IN THE COMPLEX

As a solution and method to keep the Zombie Infection that has already swept the nation and weeded out the weak, under control the monolithic and somewhat mysterious Harvertech corporation has quite charitably put together a vaccination program for those who remain. The nearest outpost for receiving your free shots containing the live (or should that be undead?) virus is in the middle of what used to be a Shopping Centre in the middle of Basingstoke.

The medical outpost is a re-purposed leisure centre. It seems like everything in the post-apocalyptic world has been re-purposed and redesigned. Shopping centres have become fortresses, fences have become barricades and ordinary citizens have become weapon wielding warriors! Unfortunately for visitors to the outpost though the new nurse at the outpost didn't really get the memo about lifting one's game and following quarantine procedures is not her forte...

### ON THE DAY



### WEAPONS

### KEY INFO

Upon arrival at the 'The Complex' you will immediately be swept up into an immersive horror story line based in a zombie apocalyptic world! You will be welcomed as a guinea pig, we mean, as a sensible citizen willing to do your bit to protect yourself and the rest of humanity by having your Harvertech injection.

That be said, as is often the case in Zombie Apocalypse scenarios nothing ever does go as planned and word is that the quality and quarantine standards at this particular medical facility are not exactly world class. What could go wrong when the



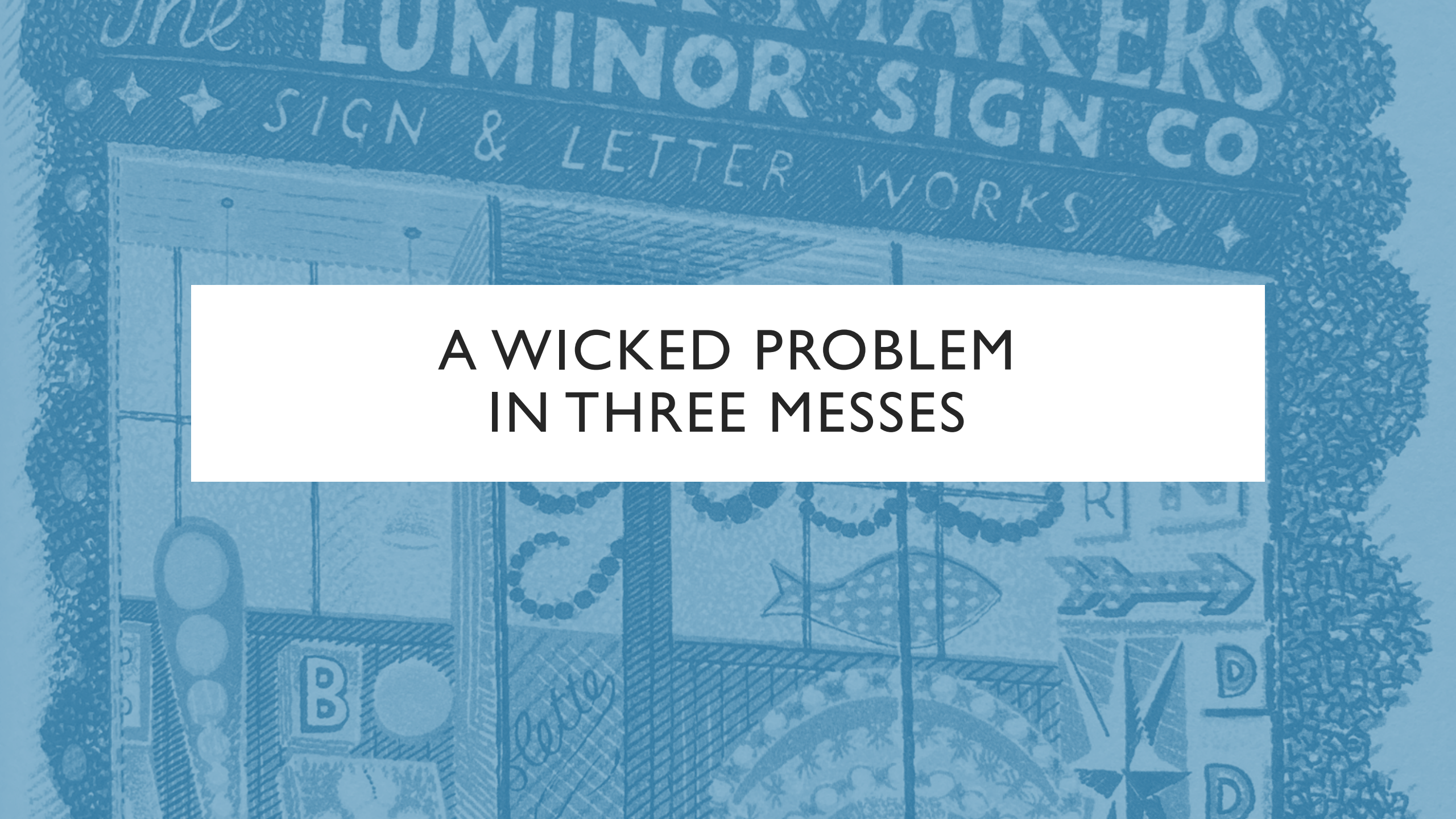
‘...There is a concern that the high street shopping environment to which society has grown accustomed ... is changing and we are not sure whether we will like either how it will change or what it will be changed to.’

Dawson, J. (1988). Futures for the High Street.  
The Geographical Journal, 154(1), 1-12.

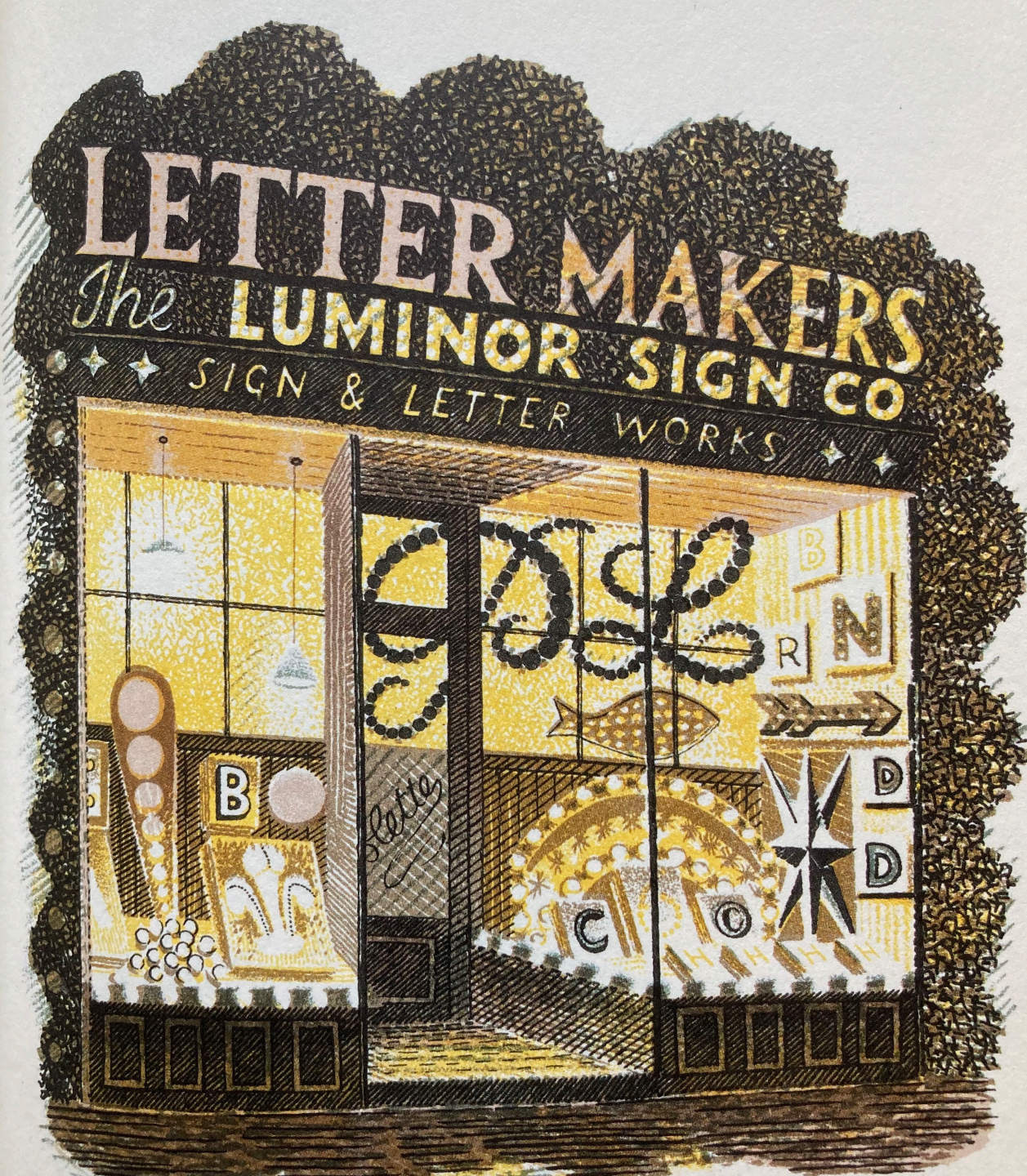


‘The “crisis” has been pretty much perpetual since the 1950s when the supermarkets first arrived, and the high street has been in supposed crisis pretty much constantly ever since, so this is not new ... because people aren’t really diagnosing what’s happening they are proposing superficial solutions, all things which do no harm, improvements and tree planting and pop-up businesses and all those sort of things, but actually what they’re not doing is understanding the depth of the issues facing the high street.’

Interviewee, 2022

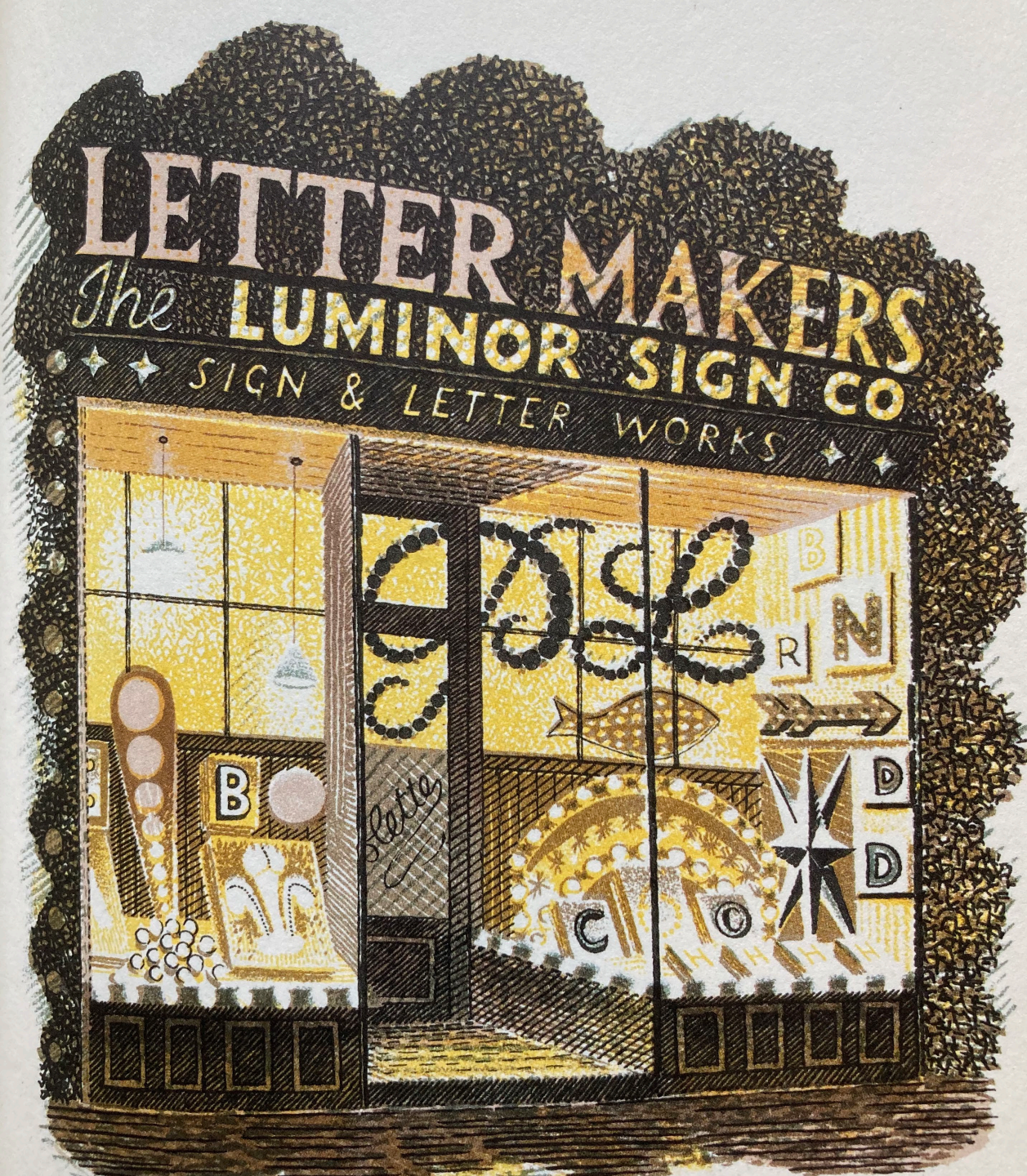


# A WICKED PROBLEM IN THREE MESSES



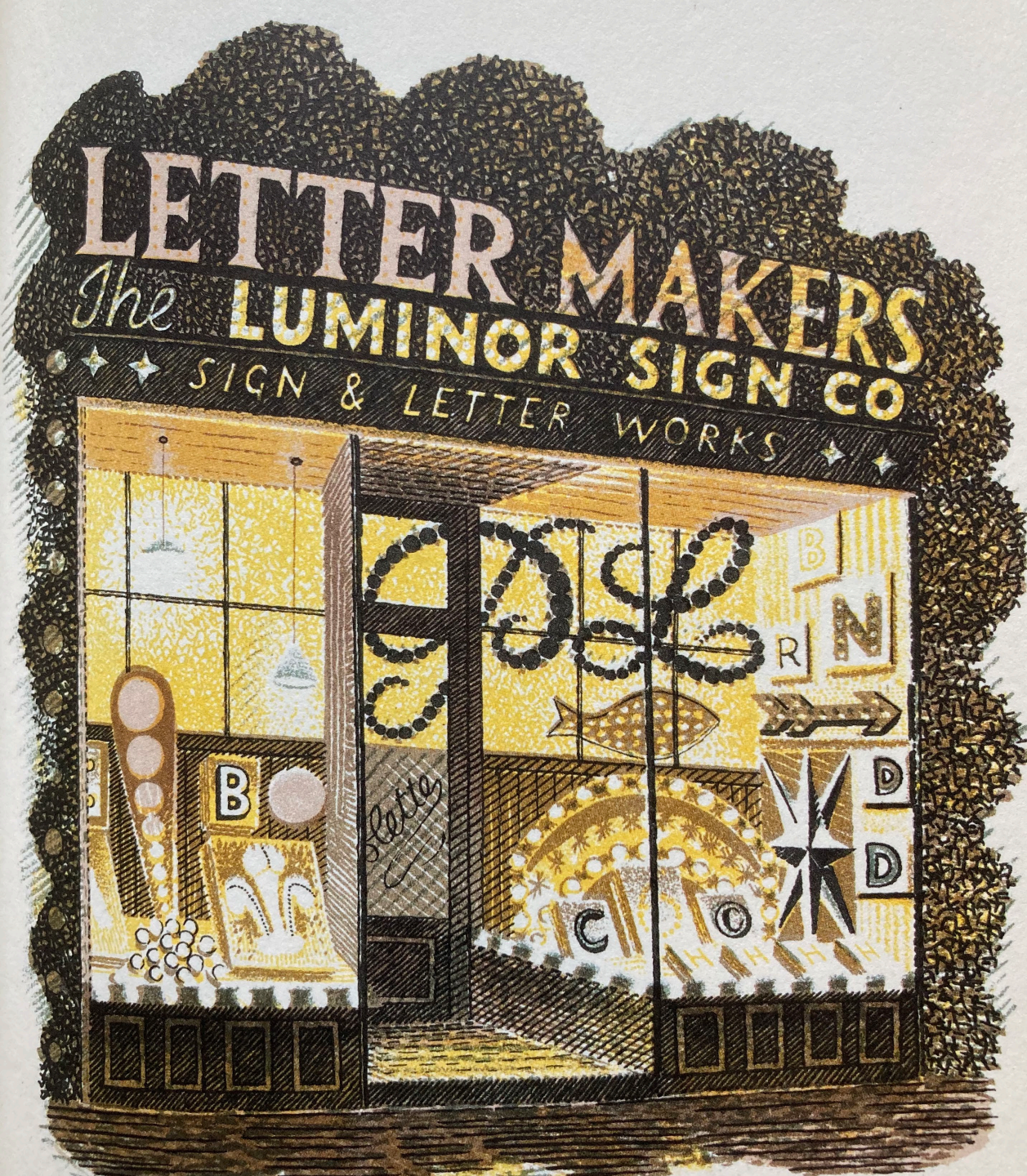
## MESS ONE: CHANGING RETAIL TRENDS

- Changing social and leisure habits: pubs, places of worship in decline, fast food, vape shops and tattooists up
- The rapid demise of the department store: 388 stores closed between 2016 and 2021, 83% of space (Jahshan, 2021)
- Digital transformation: internet sales now account for 27% of retail spending (ONS, 2022)



## MESS TWO: DYSFUNCTIONAL PROPERTY SYSTEMS

- Increasing involvement of private equity investors seeking to 'flip' assets (Grimsey, 2012)
- Distant landlords are concerned with capital value and lack local market knowledge and connections
- Neglect has become a feature of declining local markets: assets have higher book values than use values
- Business rates do not reflect the real costs or value of high street activities



## MESS THREE: PUBLIC SERVICE DECLINE

- Public services have increasingly vanished from local high streets (post offices, courts, health services, council offices)
- Austerity has stripped local government of much knowledge and capacity, especially in planning
- Local government spending power has fallen 26% since 2010, while social care now accounts for 61% of spending (NAO, 2021)

# LOVE AND LOSS ON THE HIGH STREET



**Place attachment: a bond between people and places, comparable with the bond between children and their carers. Such bonds have ‘a strong positive effect in defining our identity, in filling our lives with meaning, in enriching it with values, goals and significance.’  
(Guiliani, 2003: 137)**

**Place identity: 'The symbolic meanings given to a place as an individual becomes psychologically invested in it.'**

**Place dependence: the ways in which a place meets a person's physical, social and economic needs.  
(Anton and Lawrence, 2016)**



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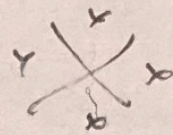
Emotional -  
key links  
moments to  
Happy memories  
and close  
friendships  
xxx



I remember shopping for  
school shoes here. My dad  
would buy me a toy  
when we came as well.  
My grandma also has  
special memories. Will  
be such a shame to  
see the store go. A  
real hub of the  
community  
xxx

So sorry you have left  
Sheffield. Many thanks to  
all the staff for their  
friendship, knowledge of  
products and after sales  
service. The town centre  
will not be the same.

Glyn Turner



A Shopper

miss John Lewis  
was Head cook  
the old  
coffee

on the field  
Shopping  
map !!

I remember getting my first present  
for my girlfriend from John  
Lewis.



## AFFECT AS SITE AND STAKE IN POLICY

Levelling Up White Paper: a mission 'to restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging' (HM Government, 2022)

Pride in place as an empty signifier: an expression that points to an absence that political actors then compete to fill (Norval, 2000)




‘... A high street is something that’s an important marker of how we feel about that place in a way that other things in town might not be ... seeing that decline is something that can really impact on people’s feelings of a place, so community businesses see it as their role to say we’ve had enough and we want to revive this in a way that makes us feel good to be from this town, or this bit of town.’

Workshop participant, 2022

‘Nostalgia is adaptive: it helps to put together broken parts, builds a bridge between past and present, increases self-esteem and life satisfaction, and reinforces social ties.’

Lewicka, M. (2014). In search of roots: memory as enabler of place attachment. In: Manzo, L., & Devine-Wright, P. Place attachment: Advances in theory, methods and applications. New York: Routledge



**IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE?  
NO, IT'S SUPER-COMMUNITY!**

‘Local people must be empowered to redesign their own high streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it, with increased CPO powers if necessary’

Grimsey, W. (2020) build back better: covid-19 supplement for town centres.  
[Http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/](http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/)

EVERYTHING MIGHT BE OKAY.



SYSTEM CHANGE OR URBAN  
ACUPUNCTURE?



## SYSTEM CHANGE?

Systemic place-based approaches are usually regarded as comprehensive efforts to tackle locational disadvantage, bringing together strategic partners to address inequalities (Public Health England 2019, Crimeen et al., 2017, Taylor and Buckley, 2017). They often rely on the catalytic role of community-based organisations (Crisp et al., 2016) and work across multiple themes.

## URBAN ACUPUNCTURE?

Urban acupuncture is a term coined by Jaime Lerner, the former mayor of Curitiba, Brazil, to describe rapid, targeted changes in the urban fabric or in the animation of space (Lerner, 2011) and defined as ‘a hyper-localised healing treatment through place activation to enliven and recreate cities’ (Houghton et al., 2015).



## THE OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITY BUSINESSES

- restoration of **symbolic spaces** that are regarded as locally significant;
- re-use of **available spaces** left vacant by their owners;
- repurposing of **adaptable spaces** that can meet community needs;
- **attracting new customers** who can bring new activities into high streets; and
- creating **new constellations of interests** to drive change.

## HOW COMMUNITY BUSINESSES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO WIDER REGENERATION

**Regeneration concerns the wider economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the high street.** Community businesses can occupy niches in the high street economy where change can be catalysed. These include:

- A niche in **time**, occupying and animating buildings on a temporary or 'meanwhile' basis while the private market recovers;
- A niche in **space**, bringing landmark buildings back into use or occupying a cluster of buildings that can create wider ripple effects;
- A niche in **the market**, bringing new economic activities into a high street to complement and expand the existing offer.



## CASE STUDY: HASTINGS COMMONS

**A focal point:** community activity has mobilised around acquiring and repurposing a landmark building, the Observer newspaper office

**An evolving coalition:** several organisations and social entrepreneurs have come together to repurpose a cluster of buildings and spaces, all within walking distance, for arts, learning, housing, business and community space

**A long term vision:** it has taken 15 years of community engagement, planning and fundraising to reach the point where the Observer building is now being converted for community use



## PERILS AND PITFALLS

affordability  
and  
accessibility

funding

inappropriate  
policies

poor planning

loss of local  
government  
capacity

insufficient  
community  
capacity



‘... Everybody’s taking a percentage, you’ve got four sets of people so by the time you’ve finished, that’s why you have to have 20% viability because that person’s taking 12%, that person’s taking 3%...’



Interviewee, Hastings, 2022



‘What you get from funders never works the way it ought to work. We’re treated like beggars all the time - the rules we experience all the time are so stupid. We have to come up with stupid solutions all the time because of the stupid rules.’



Interviewee, Hastings, 2022

In Lake'ch  
is Dedicated to the  
Community, serves  
as a seed of harmony,  
joy and peace "armonia  
y paz" In remembrance  
of Edward & Cesira  
by Diana & Patricia.  
We thank, Le damos  
gracias por su apoyo  
a la Banda Entera en  
especi



'Treasury metrics are land value uplift which we don't care about, and labour supply which is based on tax revenue. It just doesn't capture any of the good things we do.'

Catalina Gonzalez  
contributions by Ena  
Abarca, Bob Olivo,  
Marco Paredes, Sleepy  
Henry Sultan, Hector  
Maya, Puebla, Oscar  
Carmen, Pelon, Kamal,  
lettering by  
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June 29th  
1998  
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for mural info



Interviewee, Hastings, 2022



## WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT IS NEEDED?

help in getting **access to property** at the right price

**financial support**, including at-risk seed funding

supportive **governance and regulation**

help in building **skills and networks**

# CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SYSTEM CHANGE: A LONG TERM DIFFERENCE?

Community businesses can **create clusters of activity** with a focus on social purpose and the common good.

They can **support new or emerging forms of economic activity**, including hybrid commercial and social businesses

They can help to **slow down or prevent gentrification**, keeping value within communities. Community asset ownership, supported by appropriate finance, can help to prevent boom and bust cycles.





‘We have to build in that connectivity between the things that we’re helping to create, that’s why we focus heavily on training, opportunities for volunteering, jobs and connecting everybody up, you put people together and the magic happens.’

Interviewee, Huntly, Aberdeenshire, 2022



‘People don’t want to be embarrassed about where they’re from. They want a vehicle to express pride in where they live.’

Council officer, Wirral, 2022

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