VibeStreet: Live High Street Navigator

Deep Innovation Report

Executive Summary

VibeStreet reimagines the high street experience by bridging physical shops with real-time digital visibility, helping independent businesses capture immediate foot traffic.

By transforming static directory listings into a live, merchant-driven map of active storefronts, opening hours, and flash promotions, this platform gives BCP residents and visitors a reason to explore their local neighbourhoods year-round.

This dossier outlines how a collaborative, low-cost pilot could test the underlying demand for real-time local discovery and build a resilient digital infrastructure for BCP's unique town centres.

The Better Everyday

What if physical town centres vibrated with the same real-time responsiveness as digital social feeds, guiding residents to active local discoveries just steps away?

- The participant's core idea is VibeStreet, an interactive, live-updating digital directory and map designed to bring real-time visibility to independent high street merchants. By allowing local shop owners to instantly broadcast their active hours, live foot traffic, and spontaneous flash promotions, it transforms static storefronts into a dynamic local feed.
- Imagine a damp Tuesday evening in November in Westbourne, where a resident opens the app and sees that a nearby independent bookshop has just announced a cozy, late-night opening with warm cider, while a nearby deli has flagged two remaining artisan toasties at half-price. Instead of heading home to order online, they walk five minutes down the street to support two local traders who would otherwise have closed their doors early.
- This meets the enduring human need for local connection and spontaneous discovery, which is currently poorly served by static online search engines or outdated social media pages. Today, people rely on fragmented workarounds like checking individual Instagram stories or walking past dark windows hoping a shop is open, only to find locked doors and wasted journeys.
- By making the physical high street feel responsive and alive, VibeStreet establishes a new expectation that local commerce should be transparent, immediate, and community-centric. This shift in expectation could soon influence how people interact with public libraries, pop-up community health clinics, or mobile creative workshops, making municipal and social services feel just as accessible and dynamic.

Who It Could Matter To

Connecting independent merchants who need visible local footfall with residents seeking authentic, spontaneous neighbourhood experiences.

The Independent Retailer

- A passionate shop owner in Boscombe running a boutique zero-waste grocery and homeware store, operating on thin margins with limited time for digital marketing.
- They experience a sudden mid-afternoon lull in foot traffic on a rainy Thursday and want to quickly draw in nearby buyers before fresh stock expires.
- The ability to broadcast a flash sale on organic sourdough to local screens instantly, filling their shop with neighbors and reducing daily waste without complex ad campaigns.

The Hybrid Professional

- A remote software developer based in Lansdowne who works from a home desk all day and craves a reason to step outside and connect with the community.
- They decide to take a screen break at three in the afternoon and need to know which nearby independent coffee shops have available seating and a lively atmosphere.
- Finding a welcoming local workspace with reliable internet and active social energy, giving them a sense of belonging and keeping their spending in the local neighborhood.

The Seasonal Visitor

- An out-of-town academic attending a creative arts conference at Arts University Bournemouth, keen to explore local culture but unfamiliar with the geography beyond the seafront.
- They have a spare two-hour window between afternoon panels and want to find authentic, locally-owned craft shops or galleries operating nearby.
- A trustworthy, live-updating map that steers them away from generic chains and directly into unique, open creative independent businesses, ensuring their visitor spend supports local makers.

What This Could Change for BCP

Strengthening the unique identities of BCP's distinct neighbourhoods by turning local footfall into a shared, year-round economic asset.

- The proposed service directly aligns with BCP Council's stated regeneration ambition to support inclusive, sustainable growth and strengthen town centres outside of the peak summer tourism months. By focusing on the distinct characters of areas like Poole Quay or Christchurch, VibeStreet helps merchants capture local resident spend during the quieter autumn and winter seasons.
- The direct effect would be a measurable shift in local purchasing habits, as residents bypass dominant online delivery giants in favour of immediate, walkable high street alternatives. This keeps wealth circulating within the regional economy, directly supporting independent livelihoods and keeping storefronts active and occupied.
- An exciting ripple effect is the potential creation of collaborative high street micro-clusters, where neighboring shops coordinate joint flash promotions to draw crowds to a specific block. For instance, a local plant shop and a nearby bakery could co-promote a 'plants and pastries' Saturday morning event, turning solitary shopping trips into rich social outings.
- However, a key trade-off lies in the digital divide, as less tech-literate merchants or those without dedicated smartphones might struggle to update their status, potentially leaving them less visible than tech-savvy competitors. Addressing this requires a clear decision on how to provide simple, low-friction update methods, such as SMS-based status changes or volunteer-led onboarding support.

Who Must Connect

Aligning creative technology talent, local merchant associations, and community advocates to build a cooperative digital high street.

- Delivery of the core digital platform would be led by a local creative technology agency or start-up from the established digital and tech sector, partnering directly with a localized Business Improvement District or merchant association. This partnership ensures the digital design remains highly practical, intuitive, and tailored to the day-to-day operational realities of busy shopkeepers.
- Active participation must come from local resident groups and neighborhood ambassadors, who would help map initial businesses and shape the platform's features through direct feedback loops. Rather than being passive consumers, these residents act as neighborhood advocates, validating the accuracy of listings and welcoming new merchants to the network.
- Enabling access and initial momentum would rely on digital design students and researchers from Bournemouth University or Arts University Bournemouth, who can provide hands-on onboarding support to non-technical merchants. This arrangement gives students valuable real-world experience while lowering the entry barrier for independent traders who lack the confidence to manage a new digital tool.
- Sustaining the platform long-term could be achieved through a shared-benefit model where merchants pay a modest, tiered subscription fee based on their usage, alongside a potential corporate social responsibility sponsorship from a major local financial employer like JP Morgan. This diversified funding ensures the service can be continuously maintained, updated, and promoted without relying on temporary public sector grants.
- The missing link is a structured connection between the tech developers building the platform and the traditional high street trade associations, as these two worlds rarely intersect organically. To bridge this gap, a neutral local network facilitator like Silicon South would need to host an initial co-design workshop to align technical capabilities with real merchant needs.

Why This Fails

Anticipating the structural, behavioral, and technical points of friction that could stall local adoption.

- **Merchant fatigue** occurs when already overworked shop owners find the daily task of manually updating their status or posting promotions too time-consuming amidst their busy routines, leading to outdated listings. The early warning sign of this failure would be a steady decline in the frequency of live updates, resulting in users finding 'open' shops locked.
- **Silent high streets** happens if the platform launches with too few participating shops in a specific neighborhood, leaving the digital map looking sparse and unenticing to everyday shoppers. The early warning sign of this coordination failure would be high initial app download rates followed by a sharp drop in daily active users within the first fortnight.
- **Inaccurate live data** occurs if merchants forget to turn off their 'active' status or flash promotions at closing time, leading to frustrated shoppers arriving at dark, locked storefronts and losing trust in the service. The early warning sign of this operational friction would be a rise in negative user reports or social media complaints about incorrect business hours and expired deals.

One Experiment to Start

Testing the core assumption of merchant engagement and resident interest through a low-tech, highly focused neighborhood trial.

- The single most important uncertainty to resolve is whether busy independent merchants will actually update their live status regularly and whether residents will change their walking routes based on that real-time information. If merchants find the update mechanism too burdensome or residents ignore the live alerts, the entire digital infrastructure becomes obsolete.
- To test this, the proposed experiment involves a two-weekend pilot on a single block of Westbourne, utilizing a simple, dedicated WhatsApp broadcast group and physical, color-coded A-boards outside ten participating shops. Merchants will text a central coordinator when they open, have a quiet hour, or launch a flash deal, and the coordinator will immediately update a public, mobile-friendly webpage and post the physical A-board signs on the pavement.
- Keep going if participating merchants post at least two real-time updates per weekend and residents explicitly mention the digital alerts or physical A-boards when entering the shops. Stop or rethink if merchants express frustration at the messaging process or if foot traffic to the participating shops shows no change compared to previous normal weekends.
- **Next step:** A local merchant association representative in Westbourne should contact ten independent business owners on their high street within the next 90 days to secure their agreement to participate in a two-weekend physical and WhatsApp discovery pilot.