Developing ideas for Huntingdon

2/9/19

Metro ——— Dynamics

Key aims of today's session

- Agree a shared view of the strengths and challenges facing the town

- Discuss emerging ideas and develop new ones – being **ambitious** and **creative**.

- Get contacts for those who can help us take this further.

- Heading towards a few big ideas which will be **transformative.**

Process and Progress

Completed:

- Data analysis across the towns

- First engagements with town stakeholders

- Development of initial ideas

- Sessions with HDC and Combined Authority officers

Ongoing:

- Further engagement with stakeholders, especially business

- Refinement of ideas, and testing with town teams

Still to come:

- Production of reports to Combined Authority

Portrait of the town

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Town centre

- Town as a whole is very well connected including Thameslink to London
- Good retail mixture of value brands and higher-quality chains – limited number of independents
- Recent investment by Marks and Spencer suggests confidence in the future
- Footfall has been declining gradually since 2017 – better than many other places but still declining
- Somewhat incoherent layout and style – unpopular signage
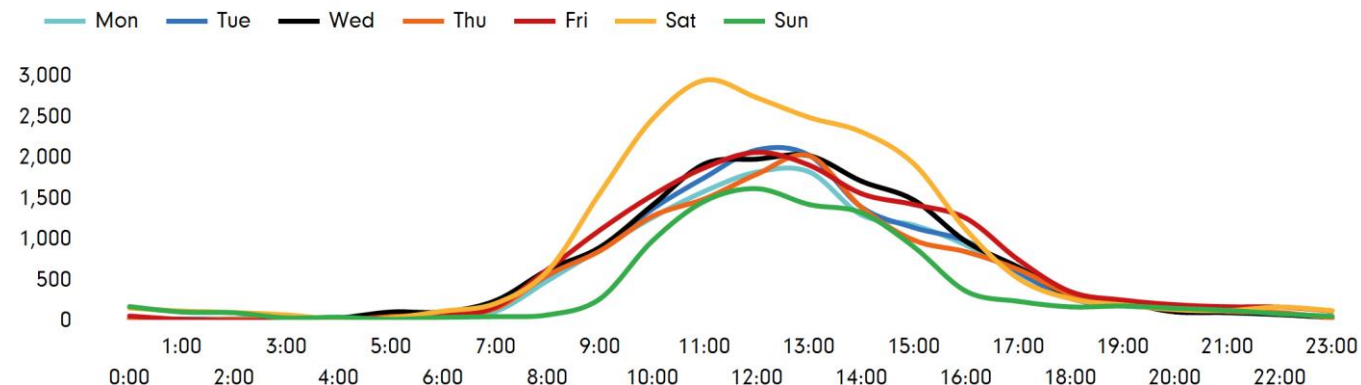
Town centre (2)

- Some parts of the town centre e.g. Benedict's Court St look old and "a bit sad" compared to newer developments

- BID focused on street scene, events and business engagement (fairly small scale)

- Little evening economy – "it's dead at night"

- Inner ring road – a collar limiting development, creates unattractive gateways (river feels outside of town centre)

- Leisure and retail focus around St Peter's Road – makes it harder to develop town centre offer

Heritage and culture – scope to do more?

- Historical and architectural assets including the Cromwell Museum – recently £160k for improvement

- Annual programme of well-attended events including BID events

- Cultural activities including Shakespeare at the George

- Potential to develop a distinctive culture and heritage offer – Huntingdonshire's culture hub.

- An offer that would build on existing assets and generate new ideas – pop-up uses, additional events, high street animation, re-use of empty spaces.

- The river is not used as an asset – is there realistic scope to develop café / bar / other leisure uses at Old Bridge Viewpoint?

Deprivation

- Huntingdon has higher level of deprivation than Huntingdonshire and England and Wales as a whole

- Poverty is concentrated in Huntingdon North and the northernmost LSOAs of Huntingdon East.

- IMD domains with worst outcomes relate to education. Primary school performance is worst at Huntingdon Primary, where 31.3% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.
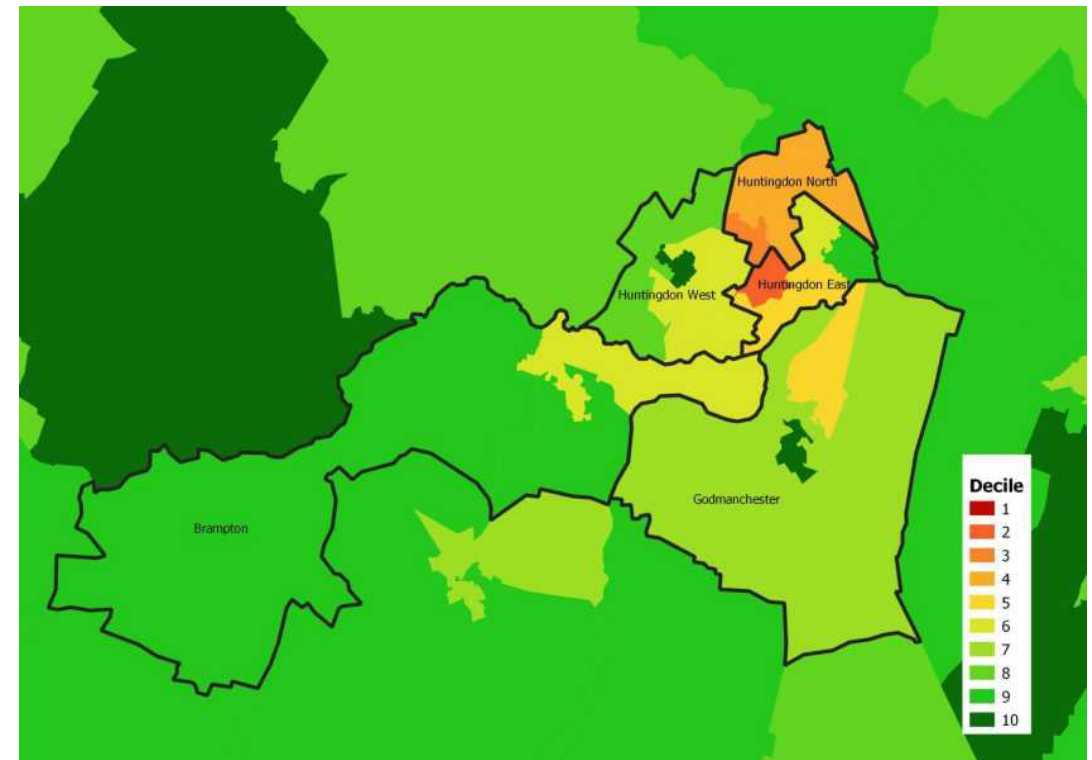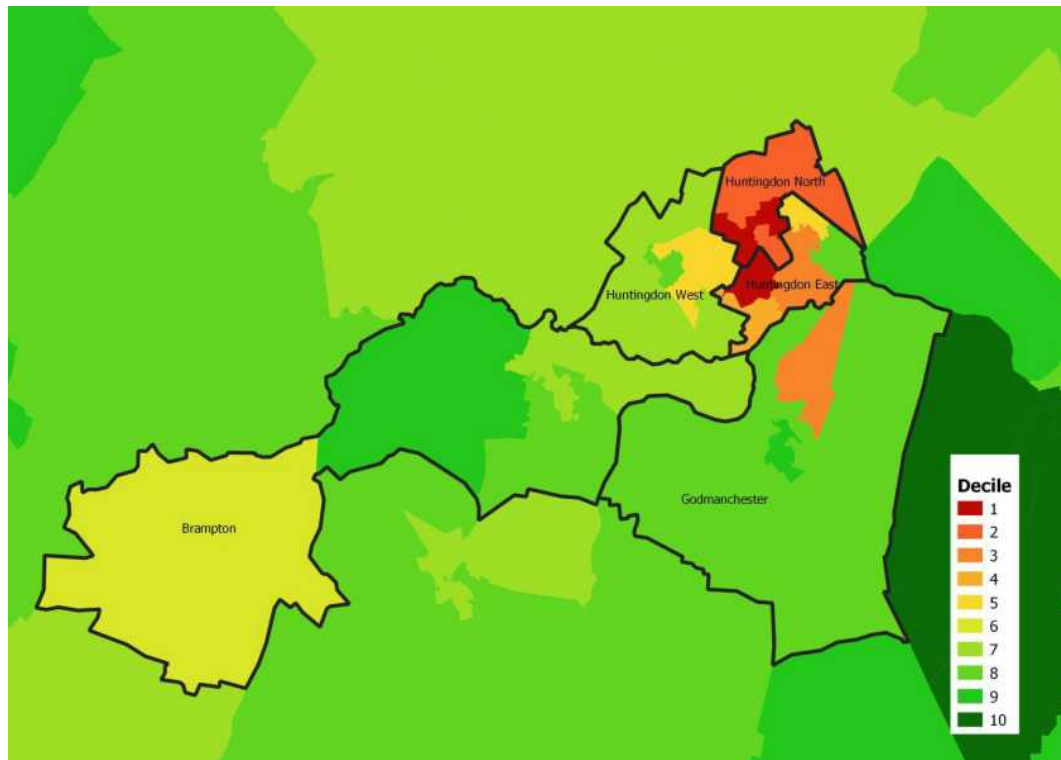
Source: Metro Dynamics Analysis of MHCLG Data

Focus on Oxmoor

- Huntingdon North Ward, including the Oxmoor Estate (population nearly 7,000) , is recognised as a priority for attention:

  - The area is an outlier for the district in terms of employment, health and qualifications of work force
  - Crime estimated to cost in £8.7m Huntingdon North Ward;
  - 83/1000 population receiving 'Early Help' compared to 58 for the rest of Huntingdonshire;
  - 36% social housing compared to 13% across Huntingdonshire;
  - 8% of houses are overcrowded – Huntingdonshire = 3%;
  - 58.65% of Oxmoor residents are financially stretched compared to 18.75% for the rest of Huntingdonshire;

Work ongoing to scope what further multi-agency communication and collaboration is needed to address problems at source.

Outline plan has 15 workstreams across four high-level objectives (good start; good work; a place where people want to live; and lifelong health).

School and skills

- School performance at primary and secondary level is mixed – exam results are in line with or below county averages.

- Huntingdon has fewer residents with no qualifications than England and more residents with a level 4 qualification.

- However, there is a gap in the middle of the skills market
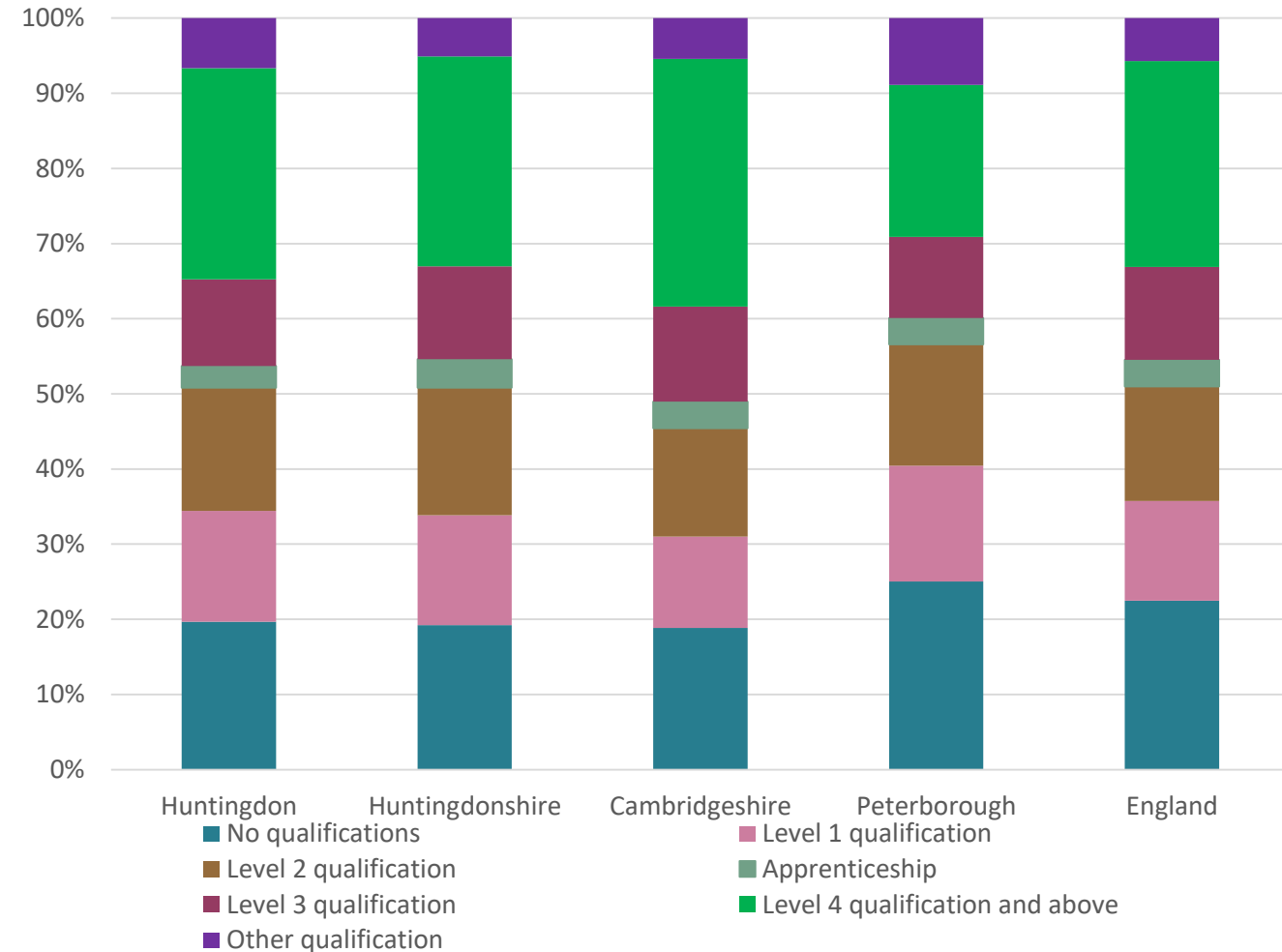
Employment

- The health and public administration sectors are the biggest employers. Health alone accounts for 22% of jobs, although the majority of these are part time.

- Manufacturing and professional and technical are also significant

- Key question: How do we create opportunities for lower-income residents?

Housing and development

- House completions had plateaued and declined in recent years

- House **sales** reached their 2014 peak in 2018

- Significant number of development opportunities identified in the Local Plan – especially to the North

- A14 improvement scheme will lead to removal of the A14 rail viaduct over the East Coast main line and Brampton Road. On completion, the existing A14 will be 'de-trunked' between Huntingdon and Swavesey and between Alconbury and Spittals interchange

Net Housing completions (within town boundary)

Huntingdon

Perception and engagement

- Some strong and active local associations including local history groups and the Rotary Club

- However, reported tendency toward negativity and scepticism locally

- In the 2015 local elections, turnout was 74% in Brampton compared to 45% in Huntingdon North

- BID reports that its biggest challenge is tackling apathy – this may be rooted in the perceived unresponsiveness of local services to tackling street scene issues

"People who live here tend to be much more negative"

Alconbury Weald – a potential gamechanger

- **Really important that Huntingdon sees AW as part of the wider town**

- A key part of Huntingdon's employment market

- Forthcoming road connections to North Huntingdon will make AW feel much more "part" of the town

- Key demographics moving in – young professionals and young families – creates more demand for evening economy offer in town if Huntingdon can successfully pitch for this (general view among new residents that Huntingdon doesn't yet offer this). If Huntingdon doesn't respond, this may all end up on AW site.

- Creates more obvious high-value opportunities for residents on Oxmoor

Questions

- Does this feel like the right picture?

- What's missing? What needs to be sharper?

Key components of a vision

Key components of a vision for Huntingdon

- A cultural hub, which people choose to visit at weekends and evenings

- A pleasant and welcoming environment – with a real sense of "arrival".

- Opportunity for all in the town, particularly those living in more deprived areas

- Alconbury Weald as a flourishing hub of high value business, providing quality jobs

Developing ideas

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Basic principles for developing the ideas

- Be ambitious, then work back through the challenges

- Build on things already happening, but use this to expand, develop, sell to the Combined Authority

- Just a focus on town-level here… but in some areas District-wide approaches may be needed for the level of ambition required (e.g. on skills and education – which are not picked up in this pack)

- Ideas below are a starting point, to be added to/developed further with officers and town teams.

The challenge: Giving Huntingdon a unique selling point

- A **Huntingdon Cultural Hub** could build on existing cultural capital to increase what's going on in the town, combined with Arts Council England etc. Would help to challenge sense town is too "functional"

- Cromwell connection an underutilised element. **Improvements to the Cromwell Museum/move to Wykeham House**

- A **Civic Trust** with senior partners all having "skin in the game" to manage and promote key assets in the town. This could have a particular focus on the town square.

The challenge: Improving the feel of the edge of the town centre

- **Masterplanning with a focus on gateways** – including:
  - Making more of the river and park by the Bridge Hotel – expand town centre across the river by Tyrell's Marina
  - Improving the experience of arriving at the train station (particularly with the removal of the old A14)
  - More radical approach – use arrival of A14 to **remove inner ring road**
- Other key sites on edge of town centre – bus station, car parks, St Benedicts Court – opportunities for new uses?
  - Hotel (to cater for evening economy)
  - Care home (to cater for ageing population)
 - Other?

Totem signage

- Can improve legibility/navigability, highlight heritage and cultural assets.

- Would link into Huntingdon First app

- A quick and easy way to lift the "feel" of the town centre

On-street Wi-Fi

- Can support market traders to accept contactless payments (has significantly increased earnings of market traders in Ely)

- Allows for promotion of cultural events, along with links to shops, cafes and restaurants

- Can also provide detail of footfall and usage of the space to inform approaches and monitor success
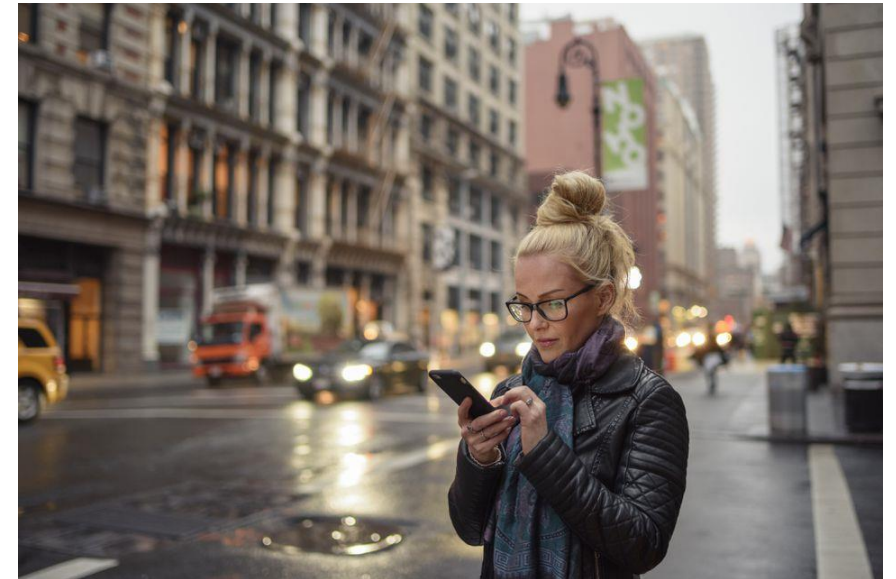
The challenge: Boosting/creating the evening economy

- Positive signs – e.g. arrival of Lounges – but footfall still lagging in the evening

- **Encouragement to pubs and cafes to use street space for outdoor space** – especially in town square – which might require changes of use (currently largely low value retailers here)

- **Agreement with retailers** to be open late one night a week, in return for promotion of the offer – (example – Sheffield's "Alive after Five")

- **Does BID need to up its game with events?** Perhaps require more funding to do this.

Average weekly footfall (May 2019)
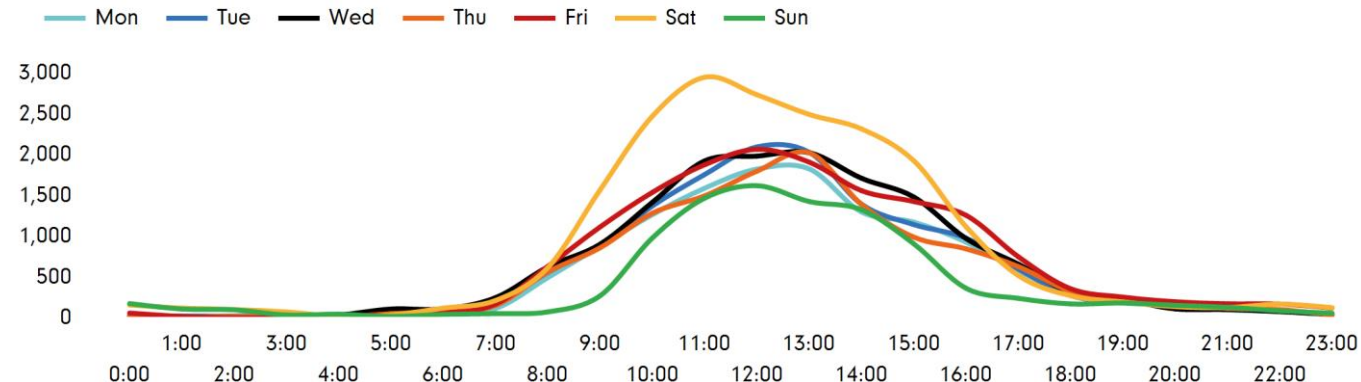
Source: Huntingdon First

The challenge: driving improvement on the Oxmoor

- This area is generally acknowledged to have improved a lot over the decades – but still outcomes are among the worst in Huntingdonshire

- A recent workshop has started to move things on with multi-agency working, but **more clarity needed around the structure/responsibilities of the partnership**

- Attempts to bring agencies together may require **physical spaces** for hubs, which could help make a **One Public Estate programme** a reality – e.g. Community centres

- Digital focus here (open access Wi-Fi) could improve public service provision

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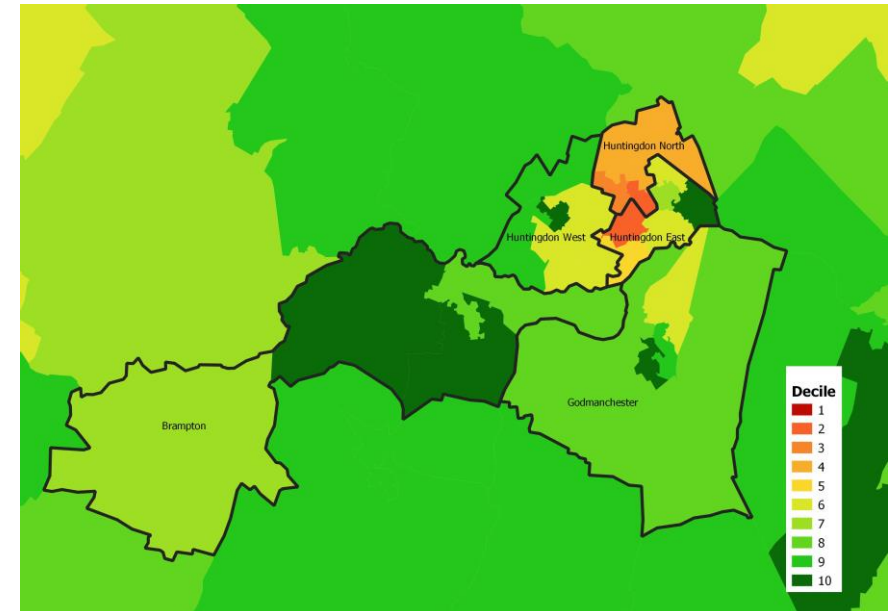
Source: Metro Dynamics presentation of Home Office data

The challenge: Ensuring Alconbury Weald keeps growing

- AW needs to put itself on the map. From marketing strategy: "Host major investment conferences to showcase the Enterprise Zone to property and land agents, entrepreneurs, UKTI's sector leads and overseas officers". **Improved conference facilities (or even full-blown conference centre?) and a focus on attracting conferences in key industries (composites, digital, advanced manufacturing)**

- In addition, **attraction of a hotel** to support short courses and conferences

- Use this to strengthen links with the University of Cambridge, IfM, etc.

- Closer links to Huntingdon will help develop a compelling proposition/complimentary relationship

- **Express Guided bus** to call only at a few places – AW, Central Huntingdon, St Ives

People to speak to next

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Businesses identified

- Polygon

- RR Donnelley UK Limited

- Mole Solutions

- Enval

- EncoCam

- Luminus

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