

UK Top Towns for Business

A nationwide competition to celebrate the UK's local businesses and the towns that allow entrepreneurial spirit to flourish.

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Introduction



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the UK's most active small
business network

The UK's towns have long been central hubs for business, leisure and commerce, but never has this been more apparent than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To celebrate local businesses and the towns that allow entrepreneurial spirit to flourish, Enterprise Nation and Dell Technologies, in partnership with Intel, ran a nationwide competition to find the UK Top Towns for Business. The ultimate aim was to shine a spotlight on those places that have given entrepreneurs and business owners the best possible opportunities to succeed.

What might that involve? How would a town be considered a Top Town for Business? As judges, we assessed towns on five main aspects:

- **Connectivity:** This includes transport links, quality of wi-fi services, and availability of technology.
- **Dedicated space:** Are there out-of-home workspaces available?
- **Retail space:** Are there premises or spaces available that allow online businesses to test or sell their products in a physical environment? This includes pop-up shops, markets, street food areas and so on.
- **Networks:** To what extent are there small business networks and/or organisations in the town?
- **Leadership:** Does the local council support small business? If so, how?

We were looking for towns and cities that go the extra mile to support enterprise. We need to better understand why some towns flourish while others fail. Top Towns for Business is important in lifting the lid on what works and what doesn't and celebrating the places that get it right.

In this e-book, that's exactly what we do – recognise those UK towns that, over time, have demonstrated that they make every effort to create environments where businesses and entrepreneurs can thrive.

Top Towns: We salute you!



Despite a number of superb nominees, Camberley has been adjudged the UK's Top Town for Business!

But what makes Camberley such a special place for business in the eyes of the judges? Let's see how it performed in the five key categories:



Camberley

Winner

Connectivity

Though Camberley does not boast a direct train service to London, its local bus network means that main line trains can be reached in 20 minutes.

The town centre is easy and accessible to visit, with numerous car parks dotted around for additional convenience.

There is Wi-Fi available throughout The Square and Atrium shopping centres, with solid 4G and 5G coverage elsewhere in the town.

Camberley is gearing itself towards becoming a digital playground for technology developers working within retail, who are looking to create products to support the future of the sector.

Dedicated space

Camberley plays host to a brand new co-working space, the Login Business Lounge, which comes complete with a street food café, licensed wine bar and a spectacular entertainment space complete with a stage and six metre video wall.

This three-floor facility provides Camberley's 'part-time commuters' with a vibrant, social workspace to combat the mental health challenges of working from home.

There is also a full calendar of weekly networking events, meaning there are plenty of opportunities for business owners to connect with one another and find new ways to thrive.

Retail space

Surrey Heath Borough Council, along with its delivery partners, enable new businesses to take on vacant spaces within the town centre at a good rate for at least the first six months.

The Pop Up Shop Project supports short-term tenants to try out opportunities in the town centre, which currently supports multiple businesses, such as Designer Exchange, Willow & Nutmeg and Squish.

During 2018, a competition was run to win a free shop unit for six months. The winner, The Clever Cactus, moved their business from online to brick and mortar and ended up taking the unit on commercial terms.

In the summer of 2022, electricity points will be activated throughout the whole town, which will enable street trading to thrive.

Networks

Collectively Camberley is the town's Business Improvement District and the key networking group in supporting businesses through events.

The Rotary Club of Surrey Heath is a newly established Rotarian club, but is going from strength-to-strength, and many business leaders in the area are members.

Elsewhere, the Highcross Church community meets monthly for lunch, bringing together many local people and organisations to sell themselves and support each other.

CMPP is also a presence within the town, which is a membership organisation promoting corporate social responsibility to businesses and organising volunteering throughout the borough.

Leadership

The Council operates an Open for Business programme, helping all businesses across the borough to flourish.

Working with the operators of the town's shopping centre, which is under the council's ownership, they host wonderful programmes such as the Pop Up Shop Project, enabling businesses to get a taste for each plot before committing to a longer-term lease.

Success stories include The Rock Box (a record shop), The Cabin (a start-up to support businesses through funding and business planning) and Willow & Nutmeg (an ethical online trader turned brick and mortar shop).

While missing out on the top prize, our Top Town in Northern Ireland is none other than Derry/Londonderry!

A city that faces plenty of its own unique challenges, Derry has built a reputation for itself as a brilliant hub for business, scoring well in all of our categories.

Connectivity

With an airport providing daily trips to London, Manchester and Edinburgh within an hour, Derry/Londonderry is one of the best-connected cities in Northern Ireland. There is also an hourly direct train to Belfast, leading onwards to Dublin.

Looking further afield, Derry/Londonderry is within easy reach of two international airports, enabling direct flights to the US, Europe and the Middle East.

Interestingly, the city boasts one of the fastest internet connections to North America from Western Europe, meaning it's 'digitally closer' to the East Coast of the US than California.

Dedicated space

There are eight co-working office spaces located across the city, containing approximately 50,000 square feet for businesses to function in.

Every nut, bolt, brick and piece of furniture has been sourced locally, with the building designed in a way to help entrepreneurs and high-growth SMEs to flourish and grow.

Retail space

The Derry/Londonderry council operates monthly 'Walled City Markets', which provide opportunities for traders to promote their goods.

Markets are also held during all major international events and festivals that occur within the area, shining an additional spotlight on many exciting businesses.

A Start Up Accelerator Programme is additionally delivered in Derry/Londonderry, which has been funded by the UK Government and is hosted within The Fashion and Textile Design Centre, where six ambitious entrepreneurs have the opportunity to pitch their ideas to a panel of judges, all for a chance to display their merchandise in the top two trading locations in the city.

Networks

The Derry Chamber of Commerce and Strabane Business Improvement District offer support for companies of all sizes.

A dedicated enterprise agency (Enterprise NW), along with the Northwest Regional College Business Support Centre and Derry City and Strabane District Council Business support team, supply dedicated mentoring and support to small businesses from across the region.

Leadership

The local council has a dedicated business support team, issuing mentoring and support to SMEs to help them establish themselves and grow.

For companies facing skills-based challenges, the council also have a skills development team that works with employers and higher education institutions to provide free training and mentoring in specific areas.

Small businesses can also apply to travel on council-led trade missions to the USA, City of London and Dalian in China, to test the market and showcase their products.



Derry/ Londonderry Regional Winner



Kirkcudbright

Regional Winner

Flying the flag for Scotland is Kirkcudbright – a friendly town which has become increasingly popular with tourists, and indeed businesses.

How has the healthy and supportive atmosphere about the place earned itself a place as one of the UK's Top Towns for Business?

Connectivity

A small harbour town, Kirkcudbright lies just off the main A75 route between Dumfries and Stranraer.

The town is served by a regular bus service, connecting it to smaller towns and villages, as well as the main town of Dumfries 30 miles to the east.

The town enjoys 4G reception and many of the businesses offer free Wi-Fi to customers.

Dedicated space

Known as the artists' town, Kirkcudbright has dedicated artist studios available for rent.

Furthermore, a local school, which closed in 2012, has been completely renovated, and reopened in 2021, housing start-up businesses and a nursery.

Retail space

Kirkcudbright boasts a monthly local producer's market and a regular arts and crafts markets, with many of the local businesses stocking products made locally.

A majority of the town's shops are also independent, with no empty premises anywhere.

Networks

There are established business networks, such as the Business Commerce Group, and also smaller, less formal groups, which specialise in supporting certain retail sectors.

An example of this is the Kirkcudbright Art Map, which highlights local arts and crafts businesses to town visitors.

Leadership

The Kirkcudbright community council does a fantastic number of things for the town, such as organising events throughout the year which bring people in from across the entire country.

The Kirkcudbright Development Trust co-ordinate with smaller organisations, who arrange markets, art events, street parties, as well as renovations of abandoned buildings.

Representing Wales in our UK Top Towns for Business competition is Monmouth.

In 2018, Monmouth was crowned the third-happiest place to live in Britain, where the beautiful scenery within the Wye Valley delights the locals and tourists alike.

But how does it benefit small businesses?

Connectivity

The quality of Wi-Fi around the town is mixed, though the council has encouraged private company Ogi to install their ultra-fast, full-fibre broadband infrastructure.

Dedicated space

Monmouth is applying for a levelling-up grant in order to turn an empty building into a hot desking facility, which could potentially benefit many small businesses.

The council has also serviced two office buildings with a capacity to host 60 businesses.

Retail space

As a small market town, Monmouth have regular weekly outdoor markets, with more niche events with specialist stallholders occurring at regular points throughout the year.

Pre-pandemic, Monmouth was also a hotbed for wonderful street food markets, enabling many producers and small businesses to showcase their wares.

Networks

Monmouth has a very strong Chamber of Commerce, run voluntarily by local business owners, championing the town and its businesses.

They established a popular Shop Local campaign five years ago, which is still going strong! Since the pandemic began, they have supported the business community.

The Chamber funded a tourism leaflet, distributed by shops, to promote the town as restrictions were relaxed.

These leaflets were delivered to 30,000 homes around the area, listing every Monmouth shop, while featuring a competition to win £100 in shopping vouchers by spending £5 in any local outlet.

Leadership

Pre-2020, the town council awarded the Chamber a grant to help support a Christmas competition for a Shop Local Campaign.

During the pandemic, the town council increased their funding for leaflet distribution and also updated the town maps.

The county council have been equally supportive since the onset of the pandemic. They created a Business Resilience Forum to provide information to business leaders throughout the county and were especially keen to ensure grants were paid quickly.



Monmouth

Regional Winner

Acknowledgements

Meet the three organisations that joined forces to run the Top Towns for Business competition.



Enterprise Nation is the UK's leading small business network and business support provider, delivering support to more than 50,000 small businesses every month. Its aim is to help people turn their good ideas into great businesses – through expert advice (including a comprehensive resources library), events, support and networking. Its community of active members and subscribers is now more than 120,000 people strong, with 10 per cent made up of professional advisers from a range of sectors who offer strategic support to small firms. The adviser platform sees hundreds of connections every week, as small businesses reach out for advice.

www.enterprisenation.com



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