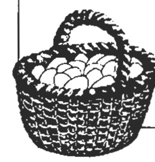
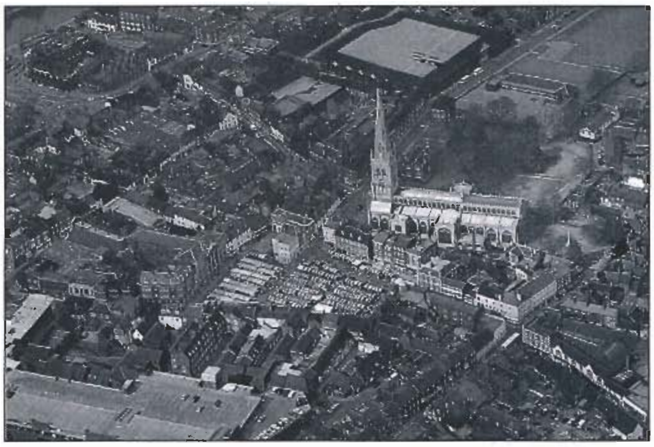
Getting All Of The Eggs In The Basket

11



A Strategic Approach



Strategic view of Newark

11.1 INTRODUCTION

11.1.1 This Guidance attempts to explore WHAT historic towns can do to sustain and enhance their retail base. It also needs to touch on the 'HOW' dimension. Perhaps the key ingredient of 'HOW' is strategy and a comprehensive approach to retail planning. The essential point is that while all of the initiatives covered in the Guidance can help to promote vital and viable centres, none can operate in isolation. Without good vehicle access, the well designed new shopping centre will not operate to its full potential for instance while an edge of centre food store will remain essentially car based without convenient and safe pedestrian links to the main generators.

11.1.2 The second key element of 'HOW' is a pro-active approach. It is not sufficient to produce a 'cunning plan' then sit back and wait for the market to respond. Now, more than ever, it is necessary for local authorities to develop a range of partnerships with developers, retailers and other town centre organisations and to publicise and market their assets and attractions.

11.2 THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW

11.2.1 The revised PPG6 sets out the importance of producing a town or city centre strategy and involving the private sector, property owners and the community. This can ensure that the development or diversification of the centre in retail terms can meet the needs of the community in the future.

The town or city centre strategy may form part of the process of Development Plan Review, in particular through the allocation of sites.

11.3 A STRATEGIC APPROACH

11.3.1 The starting point is that all of the functions in the centre operate not in a series of sealed compartments but as a complex matrix. Consequently, if plans recognise this and seek to accommodate the diverse needs of the centre by facilitating these relationships they are more likely to be successful than a series of well intentioned but ad-hoc initiatives.

11.3.2 The most obvious context for this relationship is the development plan and within this it should be possible to develop a fuller City Centre/Town Centre Strategy. A component of this would be a retail strategy which should attempt to address all of the issues covered by the Guidance, in a co-ordinated way, but also to recognise the linkings with other corporate strategies (e.g. transport, employment, conservation, housing).

11.3.3 The first step in formulating a retail strategy is establishing an awareness of the current situation both in terms of how the retail centre works, and indeed how it does not. On street, shopper surveys will provide some core information about shopper behaviour and attitudes as well as a preliminary idea of catchment penetration. This will provide a basis for a more detailed postal household survey of the catchment and probably beyond. Interviews and discussions with local traders, traders' organisations and other bodies (amenity societies, employers) can then supplement this and other (e.g. floorspace survey) information to provide a snapshot of the retail centre and how it functions today. Although providing an important and extremely thorough foundation for the process, this step offers relatively little assistance in terms of performance. Shoppers' attitudes will be of interest but may often be formulated without the benefit of comparisons or any idea of financial realities. If, for instance, respondents have little experience of certain retail environments (e.g. major department store, significant pedestrianisation, factory outlet centre) they may well think that their current centre is fine - 'what you've never had you've never missed' syndrome. If taken at face value this could mean that the centre falls behind to competition from other centres. Conversely, the shopper may demand retail formats which they have seen in much larger centres, or even abroad on holiday, which their town is not capable of sustaining. Finally, surveys within the current catchment will not provide information on why potential shoppers beyond that catchment do not use the centre now. In either event it is necessary to develop the information base to provide more objective, performance information. This can include a range of exercises including:

- health checks as promoted in PPG6 and detailed in a number of recent publications (see sources)
- comparative assessments with similar towns and reference to national 'retail league tables'
- discussions with agents, retail organisations and developers about retailer representation
- impact and need studies (see Guidance Note 3, Retail Need and Impact)
- scientifically conducted shopper interviews, panels and round tables

11.3.4 This process should provide a set of strengths and deficiencies which can form the basis of a co-ordinated approach not only to address the deficiencies but also to sustain and build upon the strengths. It is important to stress that solutions to assist the retail economy will not be solely retail solutions. Resolving parking difficulties, for instance, is often seen to be a vital component in achieving a healthy retail economy while, less obviously, an effective Buildings At Risk programme backed by an English Heritage CAPS initiative may be the key to regenerating a declining secondary shopping area. To advance the process it is suggested that the strengths and deficiencies be cross tabulated in a matrix with a broad range of potential solutions. It should then be possible to combine solution initiatives into a series of packages which together may form a retail strategy or, indeed, elements of other strategies integrally linked to retailing.

Paving, landscaping, historic building regeneration and L.O.T.S. scheme co-ordinated

11.3.5 While the strategy should be seen as a coherent whole, this integrity should be regarded as a positive mechanism to underline how the component initiatives are related and can be supportive - it should not be seen as a monolithic process which has to grind forward in a pre determined sequence. Pressures on related strategies, the economy, the changing policies of retailers and developers and the opportunities and constraints of funding sources will all affect different elements of the strategy at different times and in different ways. Consequently, the strategy should be sufficiently flexible to allow the components to advance when conditions are most appropriate. In advancing the strategy, resourcing will be a key element. To ensure that the process is proactive it is vital, consequently, to identify not only WHAT should be achieved but HOW the initiatives can be delivered. Mechanisms for bringing forward strategy elements can include:

- the use of local authority land in partnership with developers/retailers
- the use of compulsory powers for land assembly
- transport initiatives geared to securing Transport Supplementary Grant or Supplementary Credit Approvals

- establishment of broad based partnerships (e.g. City Centre Management)
- applications for Challenge Funding (e.g. SRB, Capital Challenge)
- applications for other funding sources (e.g. English Heritage, PFI, Lottery, Sponsorship)

11.3.6 Finally, it is important to realise that the strategy never has an end state - it is a vehicle on the road to improvement and although it will have many (successful) conclusions on route it will never be finished wholly. People's habitats, tastes and patterns of consumption will vary and change over time, and retailing - the most dynamic sector of the economy - will change with them. The key to a successful strategy is to monitor and update continually - never be complacent, there is always more to do if historic centres are to reach a position of vitality and viability then stay there.

GUIDANCE

1 Assess overall retail needs - food and non-food capacity, impact, etc. as in sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10.

2 Develop solution appropriate to the character and function of the historic town.

3 Co-ordinate individual solutions into a strategy There may be an inter-relationship and inter-dependence particularly looking at the role of speciality, and secondary areas to the core; capacity and transportation in relation to new demand and need; relationship with historic buildings.

4 Incorporate strategy into Local Plan so that it has statutory status.

5 Produce SPG as appropriate and other corporate guidance as necessary.

6 Implement proactively through dialogues and liaison with retailers and developers. Town Centre Management may be one route (see 12).

7 Work with public and private sector agencies to implement policies.

8 Don't stop at strategy document. Retail opportunities need to be marketed to achieve implementation.

CASE STUDY : NORWICH

1 The strategic approach in Norwich began as far back as the 1980s when the following pressures combined to prompt the Council into taking action:
- an out-dated shopping centre losing trade to regional competitors
- pressure for out of town retailing
- lack of progress in transport planning due to the County Council becoming Highway Authority

A series of inter connecting strategies were directed to span a broad range of inter-related pressures and opportunities.

2 The Retail Strategy was a key to this approach, which, over a decade before the latest PPG6, recognised the importance of sustaining the whole centre by spanning a range of specific retail and other connected initiatives. Elements included:

Improvements to the Existing Centre:
- pedestrianisation of the main shopping street
- creation of a pedestrian priority core in the historic shopping centre
- pedestrian signing strategy
- a design approach to street furniture
- shop fronts design policy
- promotion of street entertainment to add to vitality

New Development - Castle Mall:
A new covered shopping mall of 26,000 sq.m. net which provided new floorspace:
- for unrepresented traders and expansion
- to integrate a dispersed retail core
- to provide additional shopper parking
- to include a 4 acre park

Out of Town Pressure:
- promoting food shops in or adjacent to the centre
- 42 acre retail/leisure allocation on Riverside
- continued resistance to out of town development
- SPG agreed with neighbouring authorities to restrict out of town retailing to bulky goods

Speciality:
- identification of sites for speciality retail to help to integrate new developments

Secondary areas:
- improvements to secondary areas, related to other strategies

3 This strategy was linked to transportation initiatives. Having achieved some success with persuading the Highway Authority to allow the City to undertake further pedestrianisation, the Council then implemented a number of initiatives including:
- traffic calming in areas where pedestrianisation was not feasible
- car park control policies to adjust tariffs in favour of shoppers/visitors
- improvement of parking for major shops
- introduction of Park & Ride
- introduction of controlled parking zones

Castle Mall Shopping Centre, 5 levels of shopping beneath a 2 HA. park

4 Approximately one-third of shops are in historic buildings in Norwich, so there was a clear relationship between the retail strategy and Conservation. Good relationships had been established with English Heritage and the City had a long running Town Scheme programme. The strategic approach included:
- a regular historic buildings condition survey and a buildings at risk programme identifying priorities for action
- extensive work with trusts to achieve partnership schemes, including LOTS
- development of heritage interpretation policies and initiatives
- development of an innovative facades painting scheme with a Dutch paint company

5 The strategic approach has also incorporated tourism initiatives through the Tourism Development Action Plan and green initiatives via the Green Plan (Norwich adopted the first Green Plan in the country in 1985) and other corporate policies. The strategic approach is now embodied in the City of Norwich Local Plan.

6 The success of the approach has been recognised in a number of ways:
- the House of Commons Select Committee on the Future of Towns Centres commended the Norwich Retail Strategy
- prime rents in Norwich are now among the highest in the country (£150 per square foot) and the improvements to retailing have elevated the City from 43rd to 18th in the league table of shopping centres nationally
- Castle Mall has been awarded the accolade of Britain's Best Shopping Centre by the British Council of Shopping Centres and the development and planning process was honoured by the Royal Town Planning Institute by the award of the Jubilee Cup for best Planning Achievement nationally.
- the Mall Park has also received a number of awards
- Norwich won a RICS "Greening the City" award in 1996.

Pedestrianisation of the main shopping street before and after

7 The situation is continually monitored and the strategies will be reviewed in order to strengthen the City's retail position, particularly with the Local Plan Review and when other corporate strategies are re-evaluated.

Further Reading:

1. ***Bridgnorth Shopping Centre Study,*** *1996. Chesterton plc*
2. ***Chester Shopping Study,*** *1994. Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners*
3. ***City Centre Audit, York City Council.*** *1993. Hillier Parker*
4. ***Draft Canterbury City Centre Initiative,*** *Canterbury City Council/Canterbury & District Chamber of Trade/Dean & Chapter of Canterbury*
5. ***Planning Guidelines for Letchworth Town Centre,*** *North Hertfordshire District Council*
6. ***Retail Development - A New Stimulus?*** *Conference Papers, Clifford Chance. 1995*
7. ***Town Centre Health Checks,*** *1995. Donaldsons*
8. ***Vital & Viable Town Centres,*** *URBED*
9. ***Counter revolution: out of town shopping and the future of town centres,*** *Montgomery J. in J Montgomery and A Thornley, 1990*
10. ***Radical Planning Initiatives:*** *New Directions for Urban Planning in the 1990s, Aldershot: Gower*
11. ***A Vision for Whitehaven,*** *Whitehaven Development Company, 1992.*

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