At the Grocers

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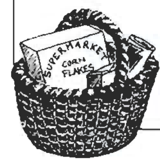

Food Shopping In Historic Centres

Corn Exchange, Leeds

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 If historic towns were born out of a need for people to trade then the foundation of that trade was the buying and selling of food. Originally this would have been the sale of rural produce to urban populations rapidly evolving to provide foodstuffs from further afield (e.g. fish from coastal areas and wine/spices etc. from overseas). Even at this time, retailing was a dynamic sector.

5.1.2 For many hundreds of years, the street market provided an extremely effective and flexible medium for the exchange of goods and food in particular. In times of boom and prosperity more stalls appeared, extending into neighbouring spaces and streets while in depression the number of stalls contracted. However, this was not a laissez faire process, but rather a 'controlled flexibility'. The City or town bailiffs exercised a degree of management much more complex and comprehensive than anything within modern retail planning controls. Perhaps this helps to explain the durability of historic markets in the face of major retail change.

5.1.3 Historic centres remained the repository of food retailing until the last two decades when superstores and hypermarkets, driven by economies of scale, sought large, cheap sites, invariably in out of centre/out of town locations which could be easily reached by car owners. Between 1970 and 1990 the number of large food stores increased from 14 to 638 (URPI Register of Hypermarkets and Superstores) and between 1980 and 1990 the market share of superstores rose from 9% to over 50%. Consequently the level of in-centre food provision has fallen markedly as a result of the direct closure of in-town outlets by retailers opening new out-of-town stores or by impact of other food retailers. This process has been felt particularly in the larger historic cities and towns. Thus in Cambridge, convenience goods shops now account for only 7% of total City Centre floor space while in York there is only limited convenience floor space remaining in the centre. However, it is interesting to note that both cities still have important historic markets.

5.1.4 Now that the food market is reaching saturation in the major population centres there is a real concern that retailers are turning their attention to out of town locations at smaller market towns where food currently provides an anchor for the town centres and accounts for a high proportion of overall floor space. As an example of the pressure, in 1996 Durham received three proposals for large out of centre food stores. All these were resisted by the local authority.

5.1.5 The appearance of supermarkets selling low cost, own brand goods ("discounters" - often continental chains) has provided a new component in the convenience goods market which offers both opportunities for improved local shopping provision and concerns over what might be an appropriate level of food shopping.

5.2 DIFFERENT NEEDS

5.2.1 There is no single 'right' answer for all historic towns, all have different functions, have suffered to a greater or lesser extent as a result of the 'superstore revolution' and will consequently need to address the food retail issue in different ways . It is even too simplistic to suggest solutions based on a hierarchy of size. York and Norwich may be similar in size but they differ materially in terms of their tourism functions and profiles, their levels of City Centre employment and housing and their regional catchments. Similarly, smaller historic towns will probably have more functional or geographical differences than their size similarity might suggest.

5.2.2 Consequently the guidance offered will not provide a bespoke solution but rather a range of pointers which may help historic towns to find the best solution for their individual needs.

5.3 THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW

5.3.1 Government guidance on retail development, now gives greater weight to sustaining the town centre. PPG6 acknowledges that in smaller towns and district centres large foodstores and supermarkets often play a vital role in maintaining the quality and range of shopping.

5.3.2 In spite of the difficulties of local authorities responding to the needs of shoppers and retailers in historic towns, PPG6 does make specific reference to their special situation. It advises that edge of centre foodstores with parking facilities enable car borne shoppers to walk to the centre and promote linked trips.

5.3.3 PPG13 also reinforces this advice.

5.4 THE CASE FOR IN-CENTRE FOOD

5.4.1 Superstores have brought clear advantages to the food shopper including greater ranges of goods, the ability to buy all convenience needs under one roof, lower prices and more convenient access for car users. Advocates of the out-of-town superstore argue that these benefits outweigh any loss of food shopping in traditional centres. If we are to argue for the retention and, indeed, the regeneration of food shopping in historic centres then we must be clear that there are benefits and that these benefits outweigh those of further decentralisation.

5.4.2 Linked trips are an important consideration. Sainsburys told the Common's Environment Committee that 'the linkage between food shopping and other durable shopping is very remote indeed' but the Committee felt that this understated the position pointing to Sainsburys own figures. These revealed that 38% of that company's in-town customers combined their food trip with other shopping. The Committee also heard from the Association of Town Centre Managers that 'a strong link' existed between food and non-food shopping, based on its 1993 survey. Major food stores are increasingly diversifying their range of goods, for example, Asda is increasing their clothes range.

5.4.3 Donaldsons have also undertaken studies in over 40 centres which demonstrate linkage. In a study for Mendip District Council (June 1993) they stated:-

"Linked trips are generally considered to be particularly significant for lower order centres, which have a greater proportion of their floor space devoted to convenience goods retailing in relation to their total stock than do higher order centres".

5.4.4 In Wells, which has a Tesco supermarket (23,000 sq. ft. net) within walking distance of the town centre, 50% of food shoppers combined that task with other shopping on the same trip. In Bridgenorth a study by Freeman Mawson Associates found a similar pattern. 90% of respondents interviewed within the town centre stated that they had or would buy food on their trip and 55% stated that they had or would buy non-food goods on the same trip.

St Albans Market

5.4.5 Surveys also confirm that food purchases at town centre supermarkets are frequently combined on the same trip with expenditure in town centre specialist food shops or visits to traditional markets. A survey by Hillier Parker in Newark in January 1994 found that 60% of those people whose prime purpose was to visit a Morrison Superstore in the town centre also intended to shop at the traditional outdoor market.

5.4.6 There is also evidence that if food stores move out and linkages are broken, people will shop less frequently within town centres as a whole. In Winchester a study in 1989 found that following the opening of an out-of-town Sainsburys 15% of people used the town centre less frequently and fewer linked trips occurred within the town centre.

5.4.7 This evidence is endorsed by the EHTF's Vitality and Viability Study undertaken in 16 towns in 1994. It revealed a strong relationship between food shopping and other activities and suggested that if the main trip purpose could no longer be accommodated in the centre then respondents would no longer visit the centre for the linked purposes.

5.4.8 The evidence for linked trips is, therefore, significant and the advantages can be summarised as:

- greater convenience for shoppers able to buy a range of food and non-food goods on one trip as well as undertaking related activities (e.g. library, restaurant, exhibition)
- reduction in journeys as a result of multi-purpose trip and thus less pollution, resource waste etc.
- support for more marginal (specialist) shops and other facilities (museums, galleries, craft centres) through joint trips and, consequently, ability to sustain the buildings (possibly historic) which they occupy
- a more diverse and interesting range of activities to attract customers to a centre and to enhance their experience while they are there.

5.4.9 A related issue is that of catchment and the degree to which the centre is regarded as a focus for a large rural hinterland. Some cities/towns have a specific day, often 'market day', when there is a regular influx of the rural catchment predominately to undertake a multi- purpose trip. Again, if the food element of the trip disappears this could seriously undermine the principal function of a 'market town'. The recent DOE/URBED report "Vital and Viable Town Centres - Meeting the Challenge" highlights the fact that market towns have now become particularly susceptible to the development of food retailing out of town. The pressure for development of new food stores is increasing:- "whilst in the 1980s nearly all foodstores over 20,000 sq. ft. were developed in towns with population above 30,000 since 1990 a quarter of new stores have been developed in smaller towns". Furthermore half of the market towns who answered a survey question on the effects which an out-of-town food superstore has had on their centres said it "had a negative or major adverse impact compared with 13% who thought it had been beneficial". Another implication to be borne in mind is that bus dependent shoppers from the rural hinterland will suffer the greatest disadvantage from the closure of 'market town' food stores since there is also a serious decline in the "village store".

Food store, Horsham

5.4.10 A further consideration is the size of the current and potential future population living in or close to the centre and their ability to access car based stores (i.e. levels of car ownership/access). Many historic towns are actively engaged in the re-population of their centres through LOTS/FLOTS schemes, infill, historic building conversions and new build. This fosters lower car ownership/use as endorsed by PPG13, and often caters for groups who have lower car accessibility (elderly people, students). Consequently, it is important to ensure that these expanding populations have an adequate range of choice of food shopping.

5.4.11 A related factor is the level of in-town employment where workers will often shop in lunch breaks or after work, obviating the need for a separate food shopping trip. Again, improved in-town food shopping will support this process and may even change the way people shop (e.g. move away from weekly bulk purchase to more regular food shopping, particularly for fresh foods).

5.4.12 Finally, tourism may also be a material consideration. While 'main line' convenience goods stores will only be relevant to self catering visitors, markets and speciality food stores will provide a significant draw for tourists. These more specialised food outlets are more likely to flourish and be sustained if they are supported by regular local patronage which also uses ordinary convenience stores (see para. 2.4.5).

5.4.13 As a post script it is important to address some key elements of the case against in-centre food which not only resists new investment but often accelerates the loss of food stores from centres.

5.4.14 An often quoted, but rarely substantiated, argument for out-of-town stores is that they relieve congestion in historic centres, the corollary being that in-town food stores contribute to congestion. This argument was used to justify an out-of-town store in Winchester in 1986. Subsequent monitoring revealed that the anticipated relief had not occurred. In contrast, a Sainsbury store of 60,000 sq ft. opened adjacent to the centre of Norwich created no additional congestion but rather a redistribution of trips. Additionally, 35% of trips to the store were non-car based suggesting a reduction in the use of cars from the situation prior to the store's opening.

5.4.15 A further argument runs that it is not possible to accommodate large food stores with their associated extensive surface parking sensitively in fine grain, historic centres. The fundamental flaw in this argument is that it assumes that, the only alternative to the standard out-of-town superstore format being 'shoe horned' into an historic town is to locate it out of town. Some of the following points should be considered in addressing this point:

* Out of town parking standards are never required in-town because of greater non car use and linked trips therefore a smaller parking area is needed (in Norwich, 30% reduction on out of town parking standard in centre)
* Parking need not be surface but can be decked or on the roof (e.g. Newark Morrisons, King's Lynn Sainsburys)
* Stores do not have to be so large because 'just in time' servicing reduces the level of storage areas
* Sunday trading is spreading the same number of food shoppers over a longer shopping period, as is extended opening, so there are fewer people at traditional peaks and therefore less demand for so much space
* Large food stores do operate already in historic centres without damaging them (Tesco in Leamington Spa) and new trading format/ reduced floor space stores can assist this process (Tesco Metro, Sainsbury Central, Waitrose)
* Food stores do not have to be poorly designed nor do they have to come out of the 'toytown design guide'
* Smaller scale formats such as discounters provide an alternative to keeping food shopping in town centres or may be an appropriate size for district or local centre in larger cities
* In-centres usually provide a focus for different modes of travel
* Trends towards sustainable development and restraint of car use may in the short term favour in-centre development, and not out of centre developments

5.4.16 Finally, superstore operators say that people prefer them to shopping in town centres and if they didn't they wouldn't use them. A survey by the Consumers Association for the Commons Environment Committee revealed a more complex picture. When asked if they preferred town centre or out of town shopping only 16% favoured out of town with 45% supporting town centres (remainder had no preference). Respondents were then asked if they were generally in favour of out of town shopping - 39% were and 27% were against. When asked if they would be in favour of out of town shopping if it resulted in town centre facilities being reduced only 12% were in favour with 39% against.

GUIDANCE

Major New Floor Space

a) establish need and impact

- assess whether the need exists for more convenience floorspace. This should take account of:
  - state of current facilities
  - facilities offered by competing centres
  - evidence of catchment loss
  - existing facilities over-trading therefore cramped and overcrowded
  - unserved catchment population
  - future population growth levels and locations

If results are positive proceed to (b). If negative frame Local Plan/Structure Plan policies to resist further development until the situation changes (monitoring procedures will need to be established).

b) Produce broad specification of store requirement in terms of site footprint and locational needs - consider possibility of discounter co-existing with conventional large convenience outlets.

New formats for historic town centres

c) Identify site in centre or edge of centre

If site identified proceed to (e).

If no suitable site identified reassess requirements/ locations considering:

- potential for a smaller store (different format - Metro, In town, Discounter)
- reduced or alternative parking
- conversion potential of existing buildings
- slightly more remote site with opportunity to enhance non car links to centre

d) Allocate site in Local Plan and support with policies stating that no other sites will be approved unless they offer equal or greater advantages than the allocated site (to take account of sites which may become available after adoption).

e) Prepare brief including:

- footprint consistent with street pattern, grain etc.
- design and landscaping consistent with local character allowing opportunity for innovative modern designs if this is appropriate locally
- parking requirements (taking account of need to keep overall level to a minimum and to avoid excessive surface parking) and servicing
- provision for public transport, cycle users and pedestrians, people with disabilities
- vehicle access including any off-site works and calming measures etc.
- physical and functional linkages to centre
- mixed use development potential
- energy efficiency measures, recycling banks etc.
- range of goods to be sold to avoid later slippage into comparison goods

f) Package supporting information justifying need and location.

g) Publicise brief and supporting information and begin dialogue with retailers/developers.

h) Avoid a reactive response in the face of a rush for representation by new chains such as discounters.

CASE STUDY : NEWARK ON TRENT

1 Newark-on-Trent is a medium sized market town with a strong convenience goods sector. It has a notable absence of out-of-town retail development. The vitality and viability of the centre has been maintained partly through locating modern food stores on edge of centre sites which are well integrated with the historic town centre.

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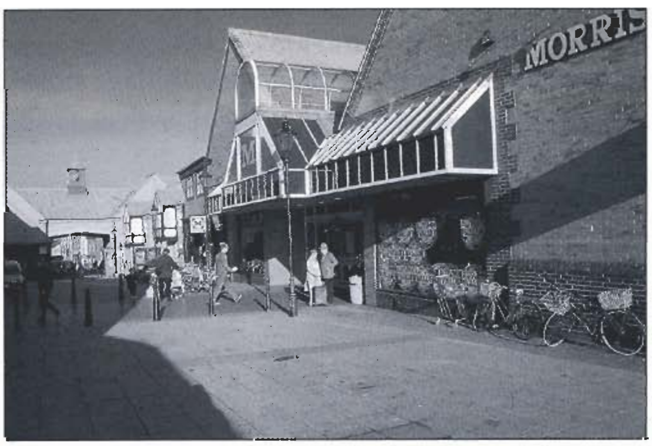
2 The historic core of the centre is the Market Place in which open markets are held on four days a week. To the south of the Market Place a 1970s redevelopment scheme contains an 18,000 sq.ft (net) Somerfield supermarket, recently refurbished, and an extension to Marks and Spencers to provide a food hall. On the northern edge of the town centre the Bargate development, which was completed in 1989, contains a 37,500 sq.ft. (net) Morrisons supermarket served by a split level short stay 490 space car park which is available to all town centre users. The supermarket is linked to the historic centre by a pedestrianised court of unit shops. Previously under-used and semi-derelict, the site, which lies within the Conservation Area, was assembled by Newark and Sherwood District Council. The redevelopment was promoted through a developer's brief and competitive submissions. Recent surveys have found that a high incidence of linked trips now occurs between main food shopping and other shopping in the town centre, particularly on the traditional market.



In-centre food store, Newark

3 The latest addition to food shopping in the town will be a 25,000 sq.ft.(net) Waitrose supermarket to be constructed on a formerly derelict site adjacent to the Castle Station to the west of the town centre. Served by a 350 space surface car park which will be available to all short stay town centre users, the scheme was approved following a Public Inquiry in which a competing scheme was rejected partly on the grounds that it would be less likely to generate linked trips to the town centre.

Further Reading:

1. ***The Effect of Major Foodstore Developments in Six Market Towns.*** *Rapleys on behalf of Safeway Stores plc. 1996. South Shropshire District Council*
2. ***Tesco Redevelopment of Town centre Land For a Supermarket.*** *Hereford District Council*
3. ***Food Retailing in the UK,*** *in A. Treadgold, The City View of Retailing, LongmanBrown, A. 1991.*
4. ***Food Stores: A Taste of the Future:*** *Chesterton Consulting 1991, London.*
5. ***Post-saturation competition in UK grocery retailing,*** *Journal of Marketing Management 7:63-75,Duke, R 1991.*
6. ***Funding Food Superstores: An Emerging Option,*** *Goldman Sachs 1989, London.*
7. ***Food Retailing: A Review of Food Retailing Structure and Trends, Watford:*** *The Institute of Grocery Distribution 1989*
8. ***Food Retailing: Survival of theFittest,*** *Kleinwort Benson 1991, London.*
9. ***Significant issues in UK food retailing,*** *Smiddy P. in A Treadgold, The City View of Retailing, Longman, London, 1991.*
10. ***Newark Shopping Study.*** *Hillier Parker, 1994.*
11. ***Winchester Retail Impact Assessment.*** *Chestertons for Winchester C.C. 1993.*

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EHTF

DONALDSONS

SIMONS