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# Shopping for Services

*Non Retail Uses*



*George Street, St Albans*

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

9.1.1 There have always been non-retail uses in the centre of historic towns, with coaching inns reminding us of a service industry pre-dating the arrival of the railways. In recent years, the number and variety of service outlets has expanded significantly. Estate agents increased their presence in the 1980s as owner occupation and house prices rose. The number of financial institutions requiring a pitch on the high street remains high as the number of people with bank accounts rises. Demand for space has also come from fast food operators and other restaurateurs, especially in town centres that attract large numbers of visitors.

9.1.2 Technology is now having a major impact on the financial sector, many of the high street banks are restructuring and moving functions away from the town centre. Consequently the banks' property requirements are changing. The branch network is being rationalised with a significant number of closures; but at the same time some banks are looking to reposition themselves in town centres as they move towards becoming retailers of financial services.

9.1.3 Technology is also having an effect on retailing itself. In the 1970s and 1980s the spectre of tele shopping was heralded as a new phenomenon which would revolutionise retailing - it didn't. However, a number of tele shopping

experiments are now in progress and the explosion of the internet has made it possible to shop internationally from your own living room (e.g. the highest proportion of internet inquiries to the Bodleian Library's shop come from North America). While these developments will continue and may affect conventional retailing (e.g. ordering groceries from home) the greatest impact of electronic retailing, from the planning perspective, is likely to be in the field of 'hole in the wall' (ie. the super cash point) purchasing of goods, information and services.

## 9.2 CONCERNS

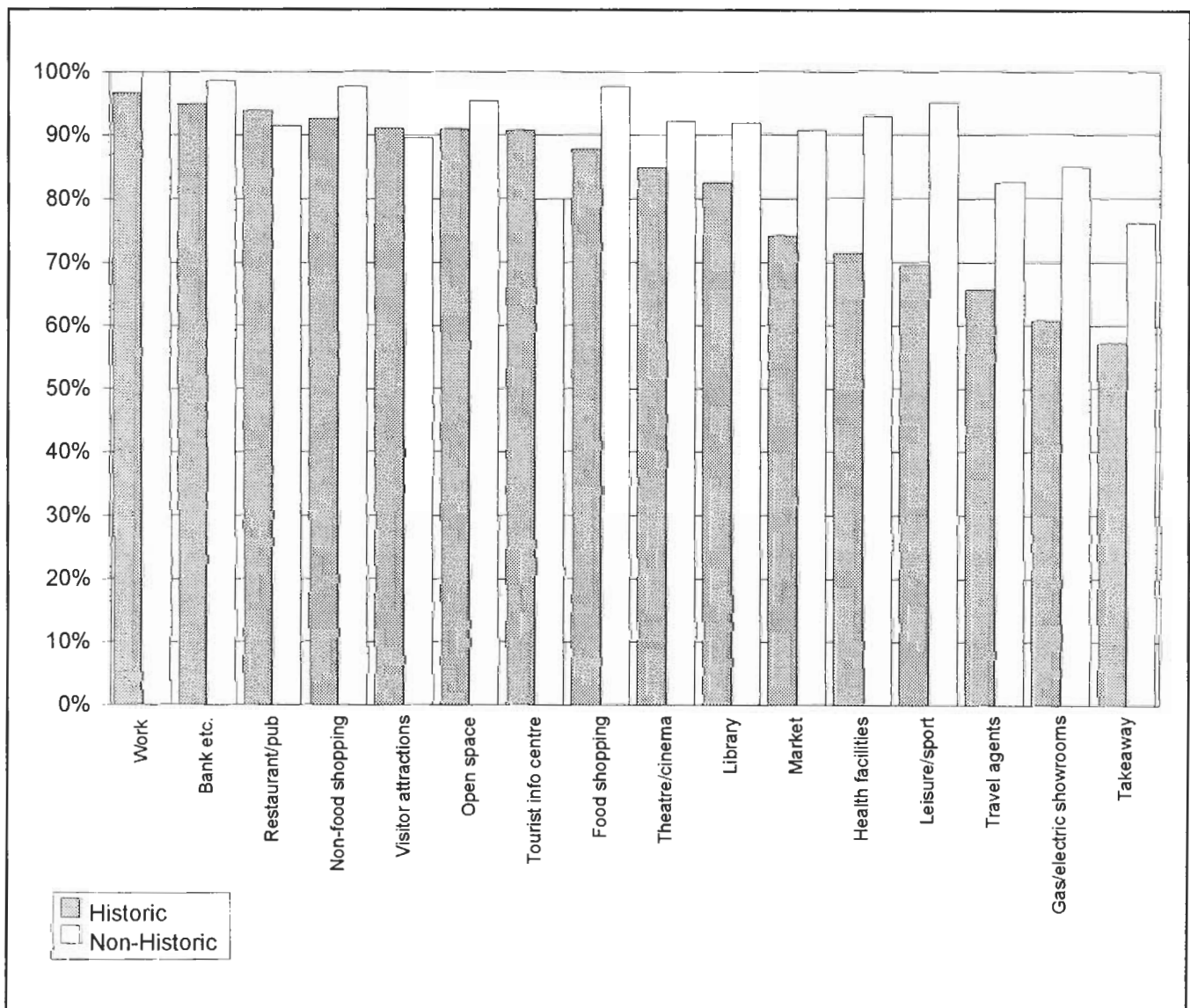
9.2.1 While non retail uses clearly satisfy important needs, a number of concerns have been expressed about their impact on historic towns. These include:

- 1 uninteresting or non-existent displays, making the streets in which service uses are located visually unattractive, especially to the browsing shopper visiting historic towns
- 2 non retail uses may attract fewer people than shops and thus reduce pedestrian flows and vitality/ viability
- 3 if streets become dominated by non retail uses this may fragment the retail integrity of the centre
- 4 rents may increase in some frontages and this could force out local traders
- 5 some non retail uses have shorter trading hours than shops and this could create dead frontages at certain times
- 6 more fast food outlets, restaurants and pubs may change the character of a town centre and could cause litter and some out of hours disturbance. There may be conflicts and problems associated with the 24 hour city
- 7 some traders do not like to be located adjacent to non retail uses
- 8 hole in the wall facilities can have a detrimental impact on historic buildings



9.2.2 Visits to town centres are made for a variety of reasons. Many people need to visit their bank or building society regularly, at least to use a cashpoint. They may meet friends at a cafe while shopping or before visiting the theatre. Pubs and restaurants attract people into town centres in the evenings and at weekends, contributing to vitality out of normal trading hours. In historic towns, many visitors will judge the quality of the centre on the availability and quality of food and drink establishments as part of the range of retail and non retail facilities they are seeking when visiting an historic town or city.

9.2.3 The EHTF's own study on Mixed Uses in Historic Towns concluded that the majority of respondents found that a balance of retail and other uses such as restaurants, banks, etc. was important in historic towns. However, the Study also demonstrated that an over-emphasis on uses such as take-aways detracted from the attractiveness of centres. In historic towns these were one of the least important uses in the centre.



Uses considered important in town centres (extract from *Historic Towns - Mixed uses and vitality and viability*, EHTF, 1995)



9.2.4 The Donaldsons Study, 'Retailing In Historic Towns' concluded that while retailing is the dominant activity in historic town centres, the report noted that 60% of visitors consider catering to be important. This demonstrates the importance of striking a balance where non retail uses do not detract from the retail character of centres, and at the same time are accommodated to meet user's needs. This is confirmed by Government Guidance set out below.

### 9.3 THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW

9.3.1 Government advice is set out in Planning Policy Guidance PPG6 (revised June 1996) "Town Centres And Retail Developments". A key theme of the guidance in PPG6 is the importance of the diversity of uses in town centres and it urges local planning authorities to encourage diversification of uses in the town centre as a whole. However, it notes the concern that changes of use, whether in town, district or local centres, can however sometimes create new concentrations of single uses, such as restaurants and take-away food outlets, where the cumulative effects can cause local problems. It recognises that whilst proposals should be assessed on their positive contribution to diversification the cumulative effects on issues such as the loss of retail outlets, traffic, parking and local residential amenity, also need to be considered.

9.3.2 PPG6 sets out The Town and Country Planning Use (Classes Order) 1987 defining the Class A uses generally to be found in shopping areas, and these are:

- Class A1 Shops*
- Class A2 Financial and professional services*
- Class A3 Food and Drink*

9.3.3 Planning permission is required for change of use from Class A1 to Classes A2 and A3, and A2 to A3. Planning permission is not required to change from Class A3 to either Classes A1 or A2, or from A2-A1. Both the legislation and the advice enable and encourage planning authorities to properly plan for and control the level of non retail premises in key areas of town centres as part of a town centre strategy.

9.3.4 Advice on the location of amusement centres is set out in Annex D of the guidance. This concludes that amusement centres are most appropriately sited in secondary shopping areas, or in areas of mixed commercial development. The advice points out that they are unlikely to be acceptable in primary shopping areas, close to housing or near schools, churches, hospitals and hotels.

### 9.4 TOWARDS A POLICY FOR NON RETAIL USES

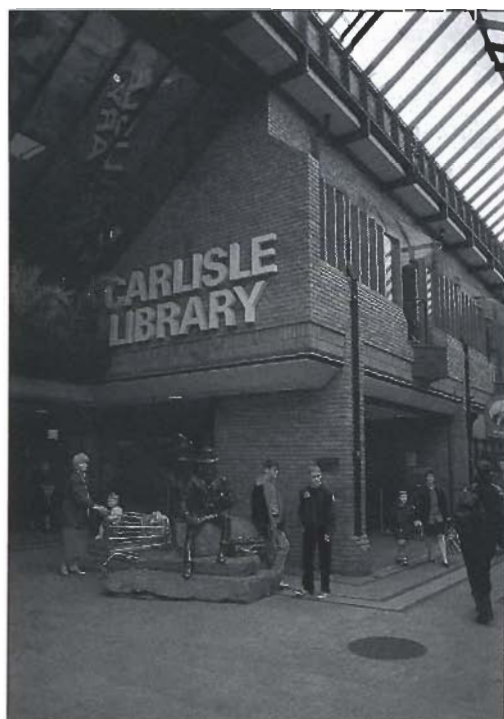
9.4.1 A policy for non retail uses is an important part of both a town centre strategy and a Local Plan. The overarching objective of the strategy should be to achieve and develop a vital and viable town centre with an appropriately diverse mix of retail and non retail uses as a key objective. The policy for non retail uses should steer such uses to appropriate locations in the town centre and enable the local planning authority to properly consider the implications of such proposals.

9.4.2 The first stage of developing a policy for non retail uses is to carry out an assessment of the relevant issues which include:

- \* Attitudes of shoppers and visitors to be established through surveys including personal interview.
- \* Attitudes of shopkeepers and non retail operators.
- \* Survey pedestrian flows and circulation.
- \* Types of users.
- \* Map retail and non retail uses in shopping frontages noting shop front lengths and floor areas. The type of shop is relevant, e.g. multiples and independents. Uses above/below street level should also be recorded.
- \* Pedestrian and trafficked streets.
- \* Assessment of diversity of uses.
- \* Assessment of character.
- \* Proposals for pedestrianisation and environmental enhancement.

9.4.3 The information gathered will enable a profile of the town centre to be developed illustrating how the town centre works in terms of retail and non-retail uses. The town centre's main or primary frontages will be identified together with the pedestrian routes used by shoppers and visitors to access the retail core and the historic attractions to be found in historic town centres. Shopper and visitor perception of the retail/non-retail mix will also be measured, this is an important indicator of vitality.

9.4.4 Retailing should normally be considered to be the main function of shopping frontages in the identified retail core of town centres. Non-retail uses should normally be considered to be more appropriately located around the retail core in what are generally known as secondary areas. Nevertheless, it is not desirable to exclude non-retail uses from the retail core as shoppers and visitors require and expect to find facilities such as cafes and banking facilities. The key must be to achieve the right balance allowing for the provision of non retail uses while maintaining the attractiveness of the centre as a place to shop.



*The library within The Lanes, Carlisle*

## 9.5 A LOCAL PLAN POLICY FOR NON RETAIL USES IN TOWN CENTRES

9.5.1 The aim of the policy, set out in the local plan for the town centre, is to provide for non retail uses while maintaining the vitality and viability of the town centre. In order for a policy to be effective in judging individual proposals it is important to have gathered and analysed the information outlined above.

9.5.2 The policy should describe the town centre identifying the primary and secondary shopping areas. Each of the shopping frontages within these areas should be defined in the policy and shown on the proposals map or similar diagram accompanying the strategy.

9.5.3 A decision needs to be taken over what proportion of retail uses in a frontage should remain in retail use in order to maintain vitality and viability. It is widely considered that 90% of the built up length of a primary frontage and 60% of a secondary frontage should remain in retail use in order not to compromise the retail function of the street and the shopping centre as a whole. Planning applications breaching these figures will normally be refused. Nevertheless the policy should be flexibly applied and take other factors into account (such as the character, diversity and vitality of a particular street).

9.5.4 Concentrations of non retail uses is a significant consideration. Long stretches of non retail uses can lead to a loss of coherence in a centre. In primary centres no more than two adjacent non retail units should normally be allowed. In secondary frontages more latitude may be applied and normally no more than three adjacent units should be normally allowed.

9.5.5 Prominent units are especially important. Retail units at the entrances to the shopping core, especially on routes from car parks and bus stations can demonstrate to shoppers the character of an area they might be about to enter. Browsing



shoppers especially need to be drawn into the retail core. For this reason it is important to keep such prominent units in retail use.

9.5.6 A3 uses can present their own particular problems. In addition to assessing whether a non retail use is appropriate, restaurants and take-aways should be assessed against the following criteria:

- a) *traffic and parking;*
- b) *noise, fumes, smell and general disturbance;*
- c) *residential amenity;*
- d) *impact on the character of conservation areas.*

Over concentration can cause problems and should be avoided.

9.5.7 Application of the policy should take account of the original survey information and the nature of the proposal. In some cases it may be appropriate to attach a personal condition to a permission for a change of use, for instance where an A2 use such as a certain bank has the retail characteristics that would be complimentary to the centre.

## GUIDANCE

1 Identify hierarchy of shopping streets (primary, secondary, tertiary) by survey of:

- types of shop (multiples, independents, prime retailers)
- levels of non retail use
- pedestrian flows
- levels of vacancy
- uses above/below street level
- rental levels

2 Determine whether the centre falls into different identity areas taking account of the above factors as well as:

- character of street (e.g. historic buildings, townscape, architectural styles)
- historical factors
- traffic flows and patterns
- presence of other relevant functions (market, library)
- pedestrian/vehicle access
- user perceptions
- types of users (e.g. areas used mainly by visitors)

3 Consider what might constitute a 'material interruption' and adverse impact to the retail frontages of differing streets taking account of:

- opening hours
- access to the public at large (as opposed to just bank customers for instance)
- customer flows
- joint trips
- visual interest and continuity

4 Undertake perception studies of what might be an acceptable level of non retail uses in a street frontage by interviewing:

- shoppers
- shopkeepers
- non retail operators

5 Identify appropriate quotas for different types of frontage (e.g. primary, secondary).



*A3 uses are important within shopping areas*

6 Take an innovative and flexible attitude to all possible non-retail uses which can provide diversity, e.g. museum, ticket office. This should include upper floors to allow for Living Over the Shop (LOTS) which can add to vitality of street.

7 Monitor the effectiveness of policy.



## CASE STUDY : ST. ALBANS

This case study shows how new uses have been found for a bank which have added to the vitality and viability of St Albans City Centre.

Barclays Bank's main branch in St. Albans was previously located in an early 18th century Grade II Listed Building in High Street, St. Albans, known as The Vintry. The Vintry no longer met the bank's needs and it moved to more modern premises in a tertiary area of the City Centre. This left a question mark over the future of the building it had vacated. The High Street is defined as a Primary Shopping Frontage by City and District of St. Albans District Local Plan Review, but the building was not considered suitable for conversion to retail use, mainly as it did not have a shop front. A proposal was made by the brewers Bass to convert the building to a pub with the upper floors converted to offices and to refurbish outbuildings for use as staff accommodation. An added benefit of the proposal was that the garden to the rear could be opened up as a pub garden. The scheme included restoration of some of the features lost during the building's life as a bank and lighting for the exterior.

The proposal was received favourably by the Council and after approval of planning and listed building applications the conversion and refurbishment work was carried out. The Vintry was reopened as a pub in Autumn 1994. The pub has proved to be popular both during the daytime and in the evenings and makes a significant contribution to the level of activity in the High Street. In the summer the new pub garden provides a pleasant tranquil place in the City Centre to enjoy a drink.

## Further Reading:

1. *Retailing in Historic Towns*, Donaldsons, 1992
2. *Historic Towns - Mixed uses and vitality and viability*, EHTF, 1995
3. *Non Retail Uses*, National Westminster Bank. 1995
4. *LOTS Leaflet*, Chester City Council.
5. *City of Norwich Local Plan Topic Paper 4*, Norwich City Council. 1992
6. *Halifax in Calderdale*, Civic Trust. 1984
7. *Policy for Safeguarding Retail Frontages*, City of York Policy Document. 1993

Contact: Mike Dunton  
City and District of St. Albans  
District Council Offices  
Civic Centre  
St. Peters Street  
ST ALBANS AL1 3JE  
Tel: 01727 866100



DONALDSONS



SIMONS