retail FORUM

Ten Years of the NRPF

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The Newsletter of The National Retail Planning Forum

Putting retail into the new planning

Ten years on from its founding, the NRPF is operating in interesting times, and is presented with new challenges and opportunities, says Forum Chairman Chris Brearley

I took over from Paul McQuail as Chairman of the NRPF Board in January 2005. Like him, I am a former civil servant who spent my career in what was then the Department of the Environment (and is now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). I was Director of Planning in the late 1980s and subsequently, as Deputy Secretary, had planning among my responsibilities for most of the 1990s. Since retiring I have maintained my interest in planning matters and am delighted to have this opportunity to become more involved.

The National Retail Planning Forum is ten years old this year, and we are intending to hold a conference in the autumn to look back at what has happened to retail and to planning over this period, at what the Forum has achieved, and at the priority issues for us over the next few years.

The Forum has successfully made a role for itself – as a partnership between local government, the retail sector, developers, and funders – in providing factual and research underpinning to the retail planning debates and in facilitating discussions. This has been of real value both to the private sector and to government, and there is an excellent base on which to build. However, we need to ensure that we remain fit for purpose in a world where both the retail environment and the planning system are very different from ten years ago.

I am at once struck by a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge is that the plan-making part of the planning system has changed almost beyond recognition. Where there were PPGs, regional planning guidance, structure plans, and local plans, there are, or soon will be, PPSs, regional spatial strategies, and local development frameworks. And these are far more than mere changes in name. While it may be significant that 'plan' is the one word no longer used, there is certainly going to be a ferocious amount of plan-making over the next few years. There is much work to do to make sure that these plans do not contain policies that are inadequate or inappropriate for retail.

The opportunity arises out of last year's report of the DTI's Retail Strategy Group. One of its recommendations was that the ODPM should consider *'how key planning policy makers, retailers and other stakeholders can be brought together on a regular basis to develop a partnership at national level and to explore improvements to the planning process'.* Discussing this with the ODPM, we have found little enthusiasm for a new body which might become another talking-shop but considerable willingness to build on what already exists. There is an opportunity here for the NRPF to live up to its name and provide a good forum for the ODPM to meet with to carry this forward. To do this well, we need to widen our membership and raise our profile.

This is a really interesting time for me to join NRPF. I am particularly looking forward to the autumn conference. ■

***Chris Brearley** is Chairman of the National Retail Planning Forum.*

Retail planning's unique resource celebrates ten years

The National Retail Planning Forum (NRPF) is celebrating its tenth year. Created in 1995 in response to the intense debate surrounding the publication of PPG6: *Town Centres and Retail Development*, the NRPF counts among its membership many of the main players from the public and private sector interests involved in the retail planning field.

One of the main aims of the NRPF – in addition to providing a vehicle for a frank exchange of views – has been to improve the information base which underpins the decision-making process. The *Bibliography of Retail Planning* (the brainchild of the late Russell Schiller), launched in conjunction with the RTPI in 1999, has just been updated. Along with news, topical articles, and the research output of the NRPF, it can be found on Forum's website, at http://www.nrpf.org.

The latest NRPF initiative, undertaken together with University College London, is a three-year, ESRC-funded project aimed at updating the 1971 Census of Retail Distribution and tracking retail trends over the intervening period.

As George Nicholson – founder and current Secretary to the Forum – has said: *'After ten years of intense activity, the NRPF has secured its 'niche place' in the retail planning world.'* With the recent publication of PPS6, the Forum will be staging an event in November to plot a programme of research and ongoing work to meet the challenges that lie ahead. ■

Retail Forum is the Newsletter of the National Retail Planning Forum, a registered charity promoting private-public sector understanding of planning's impact on retailing through research, seminars, and conferences

Visit the website – http://www.nrpf.org

'Forum Comment'

Prescott trumpets retail reversal

The ODPM technical report on retail trends, released in July, showed an upward trend in town centre retail development. The report was hailed by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, speaking at the recent TCPA retail conference 'Accessible Town Centres – Sustainable Communities', as evidence of the success of PPG6. Indeed, the figures in the report do show that there has been an upswing in the percentage of retail development taking place in town centres relative to the mid-1990s. To that extent, the claim made by John Prescott is correct.

However, as with most statistics, there needs to be a certain amount of caution applied to the findings. First and foremost, taken at its baldest, these figures show that over 70 per cent of retail development is still taking place outside town centres. Even if one adds in the concept of a 300 metre buffer zone around the town centre, the figure still remains at over 60 per cent. One further qualification that also needs to be applied is that the figures do not include out-of-centre regional shopping centres, nor development which has occurred in centres that are not designated town or district centres in development plans.

While the Government is undoubtedly sincere in wanting to see the town centre revival continue, the less than complete reporting about the results set out in the technical report confirms what some commentators have also been saying: that the Government's approach as set out in PPG6 and now in PPS6 is really a policy for 'town centres', and remains silent on the true picture of what is happening in the retail development world as a whole. For example, you will not find the word 'hypermarket' in PPS6 – nor indeed find the word 'retail' on the cover of the document.

What is now becoming clearer is that the Government does not have a 'retail policy' – something touched upon by the articles by both Cliff Guy and Geoff Steeley in this newsletter, and given a boost by the recent report by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) on *Clone Town Britain*. Whatever your response to the NEF report – and there have been strong arguments put on both sides – the fact is that it is not clear what the Government's approach to the retail industry as a whole is. Given that the sector now employs over 10 per cent of the UK work-force, this is a policy gap that cannot for long be left unfilled. ■

■ ***Technical Report: Using Town Centre Statistics to Indicate the Broad Location of Retail Development – Initial Analysis*****. ODPM, London, July 2005. Available online at http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_planning/documents/page/odpm_plan_039018.pdf**

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Recently I examined a sample of 19 English local authority retail planning policies, as set out in recent local plans or UDPs. Almost invariably they simply repeated ODPM advice, as in PPG6 and subsequent Ministerial statements.

The need to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres was foremost, not only in statements of general policy, but also in the amount of attention given to specific town centres. While these were usually considered in detail, referring to specific sites for new development or redevelopment, far less attention was given to district and local centres, or to off-centre development (existing or proposed).[1] Other official criteria for retail planning policy – including reduction of vehicle mileage and emissions; encouragement of clustering of retail and other commercial uses; allowing innovation and competition between retailers and types of retailing; using retail development to serve urban regeneration; and promoting social inclusion[2] – were downplayed or ignored in these plans.

Policies for assessing proposals for retail development were, in this sample of plans, all very similar, relying upon the sequential approach, the requirement to show 'need' for development, and tests of impact upon vitality and viability. I can understand that busy local authority planners would wish to save time by simply repeating official policy, but it is dispiriting to find so little recognition of the requirements of retailers and shoppers in these policies. Nor is it clear to me why policies should be so similar up and down the country in very different economic and social situations – a point raised in the DTI's Retail Strategy Group report.[3]

There seem to be two main problems underlying this state of affairs. The first is that retail planning is being used as an instrument for broader official objectives, including competition, sustainable development, regeneration, and social inclusion. There is no common thread underlying these broad policy agendas; hence the implementation of policy is problematic. Different parties at public inquiries can always find some element of official policy to support their case, and the outcome rests on (unstated) judgements about which element is

Rethinking retail strategy – A SHOPPER PERSPECTIVE

It is time to move away from the outdated and illogical 'town centres first, come what may' policies that dominate current local authority planning, says Cliff Guy

actually the most important. Local authorities clearly think that maintaining the vitality and viability of town centres is the most important, but this was not stated in official advice until the emergence of PPS6 (para. 1.3).

The second problem is that policies at the local level are essentially based around particular places ('centres'), often framed in a hypothetical retail hierarchy. Places such as town centres are in fact very complex constructs, difficult to manipulate through planning policies which can do little more than set out criteria for new development.

It might be more sensible to start from a position that retail planning should seek an arrangement of shopping opportunities which benefits the shopper as much as possible. In this way it would be analogous with public sector services such as health and education. This broad aim would of course have to be constrained in two important ways: firstly by the need for retailer profitability, and secondly by generally accepted town planning criteria such as countryside protection and 'neighbourliness' in the built environment.

In order to examine what best suits shoppers as a whole we could start from a classification used in recent years by some property consultants – into 'trolley', 'basket', and 'leisure' shopping. The latter could be divided further into personal/aspirational shopping and 'day out' family activity. The table above suggests ways in which these types relate to shopping opportunities and modes of travel.

While there is clearly some simplification of reality here, the table does suggest that a variety of opportunities and travel modes are routinely used. The current official expectation that all shopping ought to take place within the traditional retail hierarchy, preferably without using the car, is shown to be unrealistic. The car is so clearly suited to certain types of shopping trip – such as regular food shopping or a family day out – that it is silly to pretend otherwise. A retail strategy for any area could be devised using this outline. The principal aim would be to ensure that all of these types of opportunity were accessible by the preferred mode(s), within constraints as suggested above. So, for example:

Relationship between shopping 'types' and modes of travel

Type of shopping	*Type of retailing*	*Typical travel mode*
Basket	**Corner shop** **Local centre** **City centre convenience**	**Walk, Bicycle**
Trolley	**Supermarket** **Hypermarket** **Retail park**	**Car**
Leisure – Personal/Aspirational	**City centre** **Regional mall**	**Public transport, Car**
Leisure – Day out	**City centre** **Outlet centre** **Speciality centre**	**Car, Public transport**

- An urban area of 100,000 people or more should include several supermarkets and/or hypermarkets such that every person has at least one available within a short journey from home.
- The city centre should include lower-rent areas to allow convenience shopping to be viable, and/or to attract innovative leisure-oriented shops and services.
- Within a larger sub-region there should be at least one major shopping mall containing department stores and high-quality fashion outlets.

This approach can be compatible with existing policy. For example, transport models could be used to suggest a locational pattern of supermarkets or retail warehouses which minimises aggregate car travel. New supermarkets or retail parks would be located in areas of deficiency, thus facilitating social inclusion. However, the approach clearly violates the current 'town centres first' policy, in that 'trolley shopping' destinations would be located to allow easy accessibility by car. Town centres (except in very small towns) are not necessarily the most accessible point by road, and tend to be congested. It can also be argued that valuable town centre space is wasted if used for large single-storey buildings with surface car parks.

These thoughts are not particularly original; indeed they reflect informed opinion among many people in the retail planning industry. It is a pity, however, that PPS6 wasted the opportunity to take a more radical stance. By relating retail policy to the needs of shoppers, we could move away from outdated and illogical 'town centres first, come what may' policies which dominate current local authority planning. ■

Cliff Guy is a Professor in the School of City and Regional Planning at Cardiff University. He is currently holder of an ESRC Research Fellowship award, 'An Evaluation of Retail Planning Policy in the UK'.

Notes

1 Cliff Guy: 'A long road to retail revival'. *Planning*, 21 May 2004, p.8

2 The last two criteria have only recently emerged in official policy, in PPS6, but were signalled in earlier Ministerial statements

3 Available online at http://www.dti.gov.uk/retaildoc/main.pdf

Secondary shopping – the antidote to 'clones'

Successful secondary shopping areas can complement prime high-footfall locations and help prevent town centres as a whole falling foul of 'clone town' accusations, says Jonathon Baldock

A recent report has characterised many town centres as 'clones' because of the preponderance of the same multiple retailers in their high streets and shopping centres. But that was a partial analysis applying only to the prime retail areas.

The major national research project on 'The Role and Vitality of Secondary Shopping – A New Direction', commissioned by the NRPF, has shown that the secondary shopping areas of large town centres, and small town centres as a whole, are not clones. They comprise a much wider range of shops and services – mainly run by independent businesses – than prime retail areas do. Many are specialist 'destination retailers', selling goods which cannot be obtained anywhere else in the town. Together, they complement the high-footfall prime areas, with their narrow emphasis on fashion goods retailing, so that each town centre *as a whole* is not a clone of other towns, but provides a diverse range of shops and services.

The *Role and Vitality of Secondary Shopping – A New Direction* report is based on detailed case studies of large and small town centres and district centres. It contains detailed analysis of national and local trends over the last ten years, and a review of the responses by local authorities and the experience and attitudes of businesses. The report draws conclusions on the reasons for the observed trends and suggests good practice guidance for improvement of secondary shopping areas.

The report makes a number of key points. Secondary shopping needs to be better linked to prime retailing through comprehensive environmental improvements, by the creation of new footfall generators, and by breaching barriers to easy pedestrian movement. Independent businesses need more low-cost support and encouragement to become involved in town centre management. More sophisticated planning policies are needed in secondary shopping locations. Land-owners need to take a more proactive approach to management of their properties. The sequential approach of PPS6 needs to be rigorously applied to new developments.

These and other suggested measures will help to ensure a prosperous future for secondary shopping, with quality of life benefits for all town centre users. ■

__Jonathan Baldock__ is Partner – Planning at Donaldsons LLP. He is an NRPF Board Member and author of the Secondary Shopping *report.*

The Role and Vitality of Secondary Shopping – A New Direction

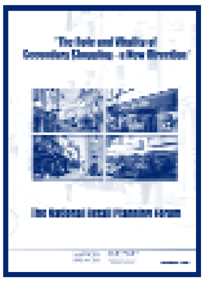
By CB Richard Ellis for the NRPF

Price: £25.00 inc p&p

Available from George Nicholson, NRPF, 6 Copperfield Street, London SE1 0EP

Tel./Fax: 020-7633 0903. E-mail: Gnicho6499@aol.com

Website: http://www.nrpf.org



Now that PPS6 has been around for some time, and most of us are familiar with bits of it, and with the many criticisms (not all well founded), there is a general view that it is pretty good. I feel so, too. However (what a lovely word that is) it is time to look at the small print, in particular Tables 1, 2, and 3, in Annex 4, entitled 'Typologies'.

These deal with the definitions of:

- types of centre;
- types of location; and
- types of development.

All three need to be read together, but in reverse order, for types of development are embraced within types of location, which are confined to types of centre. Any other interpretation leaves the policy as a lawyer's free-for-all.

Table 3 distinguishes 'convenience' from 'comparison' shopping. This disturbs me. The retail world is changing so fast under the pressure of customer demand and growing personal expenditure, let alone mobility, that this distinction is incapable of being defined or administered for more than a couple of years at a time. The fact is that comparison goods are becoming convenience goods so rapidly that the planning distinction is doomed.

Table 2 defines the 'edge of centre' as being up to 300 metres from the town centre boundary, which is a moveable feast. 300 metres! In all except the large city, that is out in the older suburbs. The appropriate word should be 'adjacent', unless 'edge of centre' and 'out of centre' are to evolve into each other, and have very little to do with the prime shopping centre in the town or district.

Table 1 lists types of centre, but omits the places that contain retail warehouses, retail parks, factory outlets, and regional and sub-regional shopping centres. Are these to be banished or used *ad hoc* for urban regeneration or brownfield resurrection wherever housing will not go?

Taken together, these loopholes could emerge as a serious challenge to the overall town centres policy. Maybe it would arise not from a big-bang mega-appeal case, but as a creeping emasculation of the overall intent. However, there is a case for welcoming some of that emasculation. Not as an

PPS6 NIT-PICKING

Greater integration of retail development is needed in the planning of suburban servicing and sustainable transport plans, says **Geoff Steeley**

insidious weakening of both town centres and sustainable suburban living – which it otherwise would be – but as a means of fitting retail development much more closely into redesigned and sustainable suburbs where most of the population live and work, and from where unsustainable traffic flows emerge. To achieve surburban revitalisation, a vision of the well-serviced suburb needs to be prominent in town centres and retail policies.

Currently we are doing no such thing, although there are notable exceptions. We are now using the suburb and its legacy of brownfield opportunities to accommodate the left-overs and escapees from the centres as well as newly emerging formats and social regeneration programmes. Many are clearly desirable, and sometimes unavoidable, but a rag-bag of 'exceptions' and 'opportunities' is no basis for servicing suburban areas and the outer parts of sub-regional catchments, nor is it a secure basis for retail and property investment funds.

I would like to see greater integration of retail development in the planning of suburban servicing and sustainable transport plans. That will require more small print at the ends of PPS6's Tables 1, 2, and 3. Is anyone doing a pipeline study of existing and emerging brownfields in and around suburban centres? If so, enter it on the NRPF's website. What are local transport plans showing about suburban mobility potential? Website please. Is there any work on the growth of 'comparison' goods and services outside centres? We should be so lucky!

Many questions. That is what small print stimulates. ■

***Geoff Steeley** is Chair of the NRPF Research Group.*

Taking the long view

A new research project will analyse spatial trends in retailing since the 1971 Census of Retail Distribution, as **Miles Davis** explains

There's no question that the retail sector has changed dramatically in its organisation in recent decades: from new outlet locations and formats to globalisation and revolutions in distribution and IT. Increasing pace of change only makes it harder to get a clear picture of just *how* the sector is changing. Meanwhile, retailing has become more deeply embroiled in planning and transport policy debates, from out-of-town shopping to congestion charging, but especially town centre issues.

The last official Census of Retail Distribution occurred in 1971. In the years since then, the need for unambiguous statistics to inform retail planning policy has grown more urgent. Commercial data sets (see the NRPF Data Catalogue) are often too specific or expensive for most users. The ODPM's new Town Centres Statistics project[1] is a step forward. Statistical boundaries generated from data on economic activity give a consistent approach to defining town centres. Information on individual town centres in England and Wales is available for the years 2000 and 2002. Future releases will allow subsequent retail trends to be understood, but they won't shed light on the major changes that occurred between 1971 and 2000.

Now the NRPF has teamed up with University College London's Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) and the Economic and Social Research Council to fund a three-year research project aiming to analyse the spatial trends in retailing during those 'missing years'.

CASA has been involved in the Town Centres Statistics project from the outset, developing the techniques used. This research builds on that expertise.

The 1971 retail census will be compared with the modern statistics. Previously, the 1971 data existed on paper only; CASA has already started scanning and digitising,[2] although over 1,000 pages remain before the whole country can be modelled. More limited, qualitative data sets from intervening years will then be integrated using data modelling to produce one large, geographically-referenced database. This will be analysed for changes over time, identifying trends. It should also be possible to use the model to help predict how different towns might fare in future.

The project should result in new data sets relating to the retail hierarchy over the last 30 years; new software models for town centres; and a detailed analysis of the spatial dynamics of retailing. All are relevant to the NRPF's mission to develop new retail statistics and a better understanding of the country's retail hierarchy. As the PhD student researching this project, I'm also working with the NRPF Research Group, and am currently contacting all NRPF board members. Any advice, data sets, or assistance in digitising facilities will be gratefully received! ■

Miles Davis** is a PhD student at the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at University College London. He can be contacted by e-mail on **m.davis@ucl.ac.uk

Notes

1 Details are available online at http://www.iggi.gov.uk/towncent/

2 M. Thurstain-Goodwin and Y. Gong: 'Mapping long-term retail trends in London'. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement & Analysis for Marketing*, 2005, 13 (3), pp.220-233

Retail-led regeneration works!

It is not widely reported that over 90 per cent of new Tesco developments are on brownfield land. Katherine Edwards of Tesco Stores outlines the company's approach to regenerating a range of derelict urban sites

In Kensington, Tesco worked with the Notting Hill Housing Trust on a mixed-use scheme including 80 shared-ownership flats

The new Tesco Extra in Coventry is a good example of a mixed-use scheme. Built on a former gasworks site and including a sports facility and a new stadium for Coventry City FC, the development also provided over 1,000 jobs.

Tesco is also part of a comprehensive developer-led regeneration project in Dartford town centre, working with Dartford Borough and Kent County Councils and Kent Thameside to restore the town centre as a modern, thriving public space. As well as providing new cafés/bars and a new market square, old buildings will be restored and some of the area will be pedestrianised. The emphasis is on a community approach and creating a modern space that also embraces the past. By employing local people and developing links with community groups, the Tesco store also becomes a hub of neighbourhood activity.

Two recent schemes have also contained a sizeable amount of housing. The first was in Hammersmith, where together with the local planning authority Tesco developed a scheme incorporating low-cost accommodation for over 100 households in partnership with the Peabody Trust. The second was in Kensington, where Tesco worked with the Notting Hill Housing Trust on a mixed-use scheme including 80 shared-ownership flats.

But it's not just about the built environment. Since 1999 Tesco has opened 12 stores in some of Britain's most deprived areas through its 'regeneration partnerships'. These have created 3,000 jobs and helped over 2,000 long-term unemployed and disadvantaged people back into work through the job guarantee scheme. In these areas the company works particularly closely with government agencies, community groups, and the people who live in these areas to make the stores happen. The most recent examples have been in Dumfries and Stockport.

Regeneration partnerships focus on training and employing people who may have been out of work for a long time, as well as individuals who face many different barriers to employment. Tesco invests in basic skills training and offers a job guarantee – as long as people finish the training programme, the company guarantees them a job at the end of it.

The company's regeneration partnerships bring clear benefits to the communities themselves. They are usually poorly served in terms of local shops and services. Demonstrating commitment to an area usually brings its own returns – people respond in kind and give the company their loyalty as customers. Regeneration empowers communities. Jobs give people money to spend, more self-respect, and more control over their lives. There is less crime, a better environment, and an improved quality of life.

As the UK's biggest private-sector employer (with 250,000 employees), Tesco's business has a direct impact on local communities. We are mindful of our responsibility as the country's number-one food retailer. We have always understood that what is good for our customers is good for our business. Our customers tell us that they want us to use our size and our success to be a force for good. So when we meet local planners to talk about a new development, the discussion is also about how Tesco fits into the wider community and how we can contribute to its needs.

Retail-led generation has an important part to play in creating the sustainable communities of the future. ■

***Katherine Edwards** is Corporate Affairs Manager with Tesco Stores Limited.*

Getting to grips with the retail revolution – ten years of the NRPF

'I hope that I live long enough to see the time when retailers, developers, and planners are all on the same wavelength.'
Councillor Jean Yates, Lancaster City Council. Talking Shop Conference, February 1994

Paul McQuail, the first Chairman of the NRPF, introducing the first Forum meeting at Marks & Spencer in 1995, set out the main reason for its existence – then as now. There was, he said, no vehicle for serious and ongoing dialogue between retailers, local and central government, and others with an interest in the industry.

Coupled with the lack of suitable data and the acknowledged gaps in research, those on both sides of the decision divide were often shrouded in fog. While in 1995 the representative from local government could announce – at the same meeting – that they had been making retail policy for ten years and never spoken to a retailer, such a situation, shocking then, would be regarded as absurd today – and rightly so.

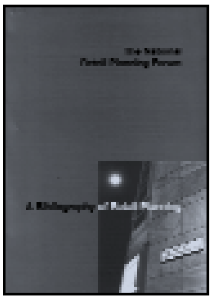
Where are we with retail policy now? In 1995, what often seemed like a battle was raging over the draft of PPG6. Today, following the publication of PPS6, if much of the sting has been taken out of the 'in-town/out-of-town' debate, public policy has not made the progress hoped for in other ways, particularly in the regional planning arena. RDAs, too, gave scant recognition to retailing in their early strategy documents. Indeed, given its importance in providing employment and its sheer scale in relation to the national economy, retailing still occupies a less strategic position in public policy than its significance demands – something commented on in last year's DTI Retail Strategy Group report. More still needs to be done to raise the flag of the retailing industry.

Progress of a kind has been made on the data front – something that an early NRPF initiative in conjunction with the Statistics Society focused on. Following work by University College London (UCL), there is now in place a nationwide set of identified town centres into which statistics can be set. Problems still remain to be resolved, however, with the long-awaited turnover data, but floorspace and employment data are now being published by the ONS. The NRPF itself is just embarking on a three-year project with UCL to draw out the trends in retailing over the last 30 years.

The NRPF's research agenda

Over the past ten years the NRPF has published a number of well-received research reports. Co-ordinated by a research committee chaired throughout by Geoff Steeley, they were intended to fill in gaps in knowledge rather than seeking too ambitious an agenda. This process has produced reports on implementing published policy instruments such as the 'sequential test', or more recently one (the first of its kind) making the case for 'secondary shopping'. Other reports have focused on access to town centres, the importance of shopping centres, and the implementation of health checks.

All these reports and the scoping studies that were undertaken prior to their commissioning can be found on the NRPF website. Another feature of the website is the *Bibliography of Retail Planning*, a unique and entirely free resource aimed at raising the knowledge base of those (particularly in the public sector) who struggle to source information, primarily because of a scarcity of resources – an ongoing and repeated concern of the NRPF and others in the planning field.



None of the research would have been possible without the generous assistance of the ODPM and bodies such as the BCSC Educational Trust.

What next?

Ten years ago, George Wallace of Management Horizons set out his top-ten future developments. Some, such as new formats, have spread in more dramatic fashion than anticipated. Others, such as e-tailing, are only now starting to mature. At the next Forum event in November, in addition to scanning back over the past ten years, Professor Cliff Guy will also look ahead, in the process setting out a new agenda for the NRPF. One thing is clear. The next ten years promise to be as challenging as the last. ■

George Nicholson *is Secretary of the NRPF.*

Online Data Catalogue – growing bigger and better; and driven by you

Last year the online Data Catalogue developed by the NRPF, the Society of Property Researchers, and Geofutures went live at http://www.sprweb.info.

Behind a simple interface is a valuable, searchable source of information on the wealth of digital data sets available to retailers and planners. Currently these include base mapping; geodemographics/ demographics data; property data; and others – retail and shop locations, travel-to-work areas, drive times, and town centre analysis, for example. Since its launch there have been changes behind the scenes, with more planned. Now we want to enhance the appearance and, more importantly, to expand the content of the catalogue.

We are very interested to hear your views on which extra data sets should be added and how the site can be made more relevant to you and your colleagues.

Please take a moment to look at the website and e-mail your comments to m.davis@ucl.ac.uk ■

READ ALL ABOUT IT...

In many respects 2004 was a watershed year for retail planning, write **Anne Findlay** and **Leigh Sparks**. Reports on the effectiveness of NPPG8 and PPG6 were published and digested. Retail planning was one of the priority issues identified by the DTI Retail Strategy Group. The new draft PPS6 in England received an airing, and then early in 2005 the final version of PPS6 was published. On the policy side, therefore, much seems to have happened.

The NRPF aims to increase awareness of ongoing retail planning research. The 2004 *Bibliography of Retail Planning* update offers planners ready access to the new research literature. It enables them to see which topics have been covered and which have not. The update includes almost 100 entries from a range of literatures, including retailing, planning, academic, and practitioner. A substantive commentary on retail planning in 2004 is also provided. The *Bibliography* and commentary can be accessed from the NRPF website (http://www.nrpf.org), where users can download the document or search online for specific items.

The *Bibliography* and associated commentary reflects the developing policy documents, discussions, responses, and situation. PPS6 requires planners to take a more proactive role in retail planning as part of a plan-led system. A reading of the *Bibliography's* research subject matter would, however, suggest that the research base remains problematic. The research base planners would need to fulfil this more proactive role is simply not there. Much academic research is too eclectic. Many relevant and practical issues are simply not covered.

In some ways the *Bibliography* is a statement of the dilemma facing planners. They have increased scope to make decisions, but perhaps many lack the essential decision-making tools and resources to underpin the decisions they might make. The *Bibliography* fills in a gap by identifying the current literature, but perhaps points to a bigger one in the types of research being undertaken. ■

***Anne Findlay** and **Leigh Sparks** are with the Institute for Retail Studies at the University of Stirling.*

Spotlight on retail markets

The report of the first national survey of retail markets was launched at Borough Market in London in July. A collaborative venture between the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA), the National Market Traders' Federation (NMTF), and the Association of Private Market Operators (APMO), the survey findings make interesting reading.

Currently there are over 1,100 retail markets in the UK. Over 150,000 stalls are available each week, at which over £1.1 billion is spent annually. It is estimated that over 420 million shopping visits are made to markets each year, and the industry offers employment to more than 96,000 people.

The picture the report paints is mixed when it comes to anticipating future trends. Some markets operate to full capacity, while others have seen a reduction in occupancy, leading overall to a small decline in recent years. However, the arrival on the scene of farmers' markets and other markets such as Borough Market has started to reverse the downward trend, indicating that there is scope to attract new customers and, importantly for the industry, those who might never have considered visiting a market previously. Car boot sales are also very popular, providing a growing source of income.

PPS6 for the first time contained a section on markets, setting out a very positive prospectus that called for local authorities *'to ensure that their markets remain attractive and competitive by investing in their improvement'*. At a time when there are a number of town centre schemes being promoted that either could or already do contain markets, it will be interesting to see if the challenge is met by local authorities and developers alike. ■

■ **Further information is available online at http://www.nabma.com/**

Ross Davies – an appreciation

It was with sadness that we learnt of the recent illness and death of Ross Davies, retired director of the Oxford Institute of Retail Management (OXIRM). Ross served on the NRPF's research committee from its earliest days and was instrumental along with Russell Schiller in developing the idea of the *Bibliography*. He always offered sound advice on developments in the retail world, particularly on international experience, in which he had developed a speciality. He also was very keen in pursuing the idea of promoting a more business-focused approach to planners' education. This flowed from his concern that none of the planning schools currently stages a retail planning module. A dedicated chair at one of the planning schools would be a fitting memorial to his work. He will be missed by all who knew him. ■

NEW NRPF WEBSITE – OPEN FOR DEBATE

If you've visited the NRPF website recently (at http://www.nrpf.org), you'll have noticed it has undergone a major redesign. The most obvious change is the fresher, more modern look, but it's below the surface that the real changes have occurred.

The site gives access to plenty of relevant information for the retail planner, and there are frequent short news updates, so it's worth checking the site often. Older items are archived. Recent NRPF publications and research papers may be downloaded from the 'Literature' section. For further reading, the Planners' Bookshelf and annually updated *Bibliography* are also available in this section.

A selection of links are provided to the websites of NRPF members, to the online Data Catalogue, and to other websites of relevance, including those of major retailers and property investors. If you aren't included in this list and think you should be, let us know – there's a contact form on the site for this and any other feedback. A fast, efficient search function is also provided.

The most exciting feature of the new website is the 'Discussion Forum', allowing users to participate in discussions and to chat individually with members 'live' online or by e-mail. Regular 'Hot topic' articles, intended to provoke online debate, will take a deeper look at key issues; and forum users can easily start new discussions of their own. To participate in discussions a simple registration process is required – instructions are on the site.

Finally, we are looking for people willing to write monthly columns on issues at the heart of the NRPF. If you would like to become a regular columnist for the site, please contact the editor on *andrew.walkern@ntlworld.com* or the NRPF Secretary, on *Gnicho6499@aol.com* ■