

retail FORUM

The Newsletter of the National Retail Planning Forum

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GET TALKING!

The 'F' in NRPF stands for 'Forum' – and there's nothing we like better than to stimulate debate. Here are some questions we reckon retail planners and the public at large should be discussing right now...

■ *Is PPS6 working? DCLG figures reveal that 70 per cent of retail development is still going out of town.*

Although there's finally been an upturn in town centre retail development, Government figures show that the vast majority of new retail is still being built off-centre. Have ten years of 'town centres first' planning guidance made anything more than a minor difference? Would this have happened anyway?

■ *'Clone Town Britain' – truth or fiction?*

The New Economics Foundation's 'Clone Town Britain' campaign gained great swathes of publicity; but are all our high streets really becoming indistinguishable rows of bland multiples? If so, is this necessarily a bad thing, and where do the other shops go?

■ *Farmers' markets – what next for Britain's markets?*

Farmers' markets have been one of the retailing success stories of recent years. But many markets occupy a very different niche – municipally owned and frequently suffering from years of under-investment. Will the new upmarket style be their salvation? And are there alternative ways to re-invigorate this most traditional form of retail?

■ *Stratford and White City – threat or opportunity for Central London?*

Travel from London's Oxford Street a few stops in either direction along the Central Line tube and you'll find a huge new retail development in gestation. Much closer than previous out-of-town regional centres built on the capital's

periphery, will the combination of these two giants be enough to finally knock the West End from its position as Britain's top shopping location? Is there really enough demand for all three to get along? Or will Oxford Street seize the chance to evolve into a very different retail offering?

■ *Retail productivity – is the Treasury right to be concerned?*

It's almost ten years since the McKinsey report on competitiveness suggested that the UK's retailing sector was less productive than that of the US or France – the source of much Treasury heartache. The finger was pointed at the planning system, the apparent cause of too many small and inefficient stores. But are things quite so simple, and did McKinsey compare like with like? And if so, are the big sheds of the US the only answer?

■ *The Barker Review – how will retail planning benefit?*

It hardly seems like yesterday since the last shake-up of the land use planning system, but over the past few months Kate Barker's independent review has been looking at how the system can better deliver economic growth and prosperity. We've already submitted our initial comments and responded to the interim report (see www.nrpf.org), but what will the imminent final report bring? Changes to the planning process bringing clarity and certainty? Or just more change and more chaos? And how will this affect productivity and competition?

■ *Unfair competition – myth or reality?*

Along comes yet another competition inquiry into the grocery market. But will

this one prove any more conclusive than those that have gone before? Are a few big players really using the retail planning system to block competition? Would making supermarket development easier do more than simply adjust the balance between the retailing giants, and would this really benefit the consumer?

■ *Is the internet killing the high street?*

Some seem to be riding the wave, some drowning; but after so many false prophecies, what impact is the internet really having on traditional retailers? Will websites truly replace the real-world shopping experience? Can retailers be successful in both environments, or do they have to choose? How can non-virtual retail planners deal with the changing demands for retail space that result?

■ *If we build it, they will come... does retail really lead regeneration?*

The idea of retail-led regeneration is big news at the moment, especially in the context of deprived areas and under-served markets. But are the best places for retail development the best ones for encouraging wider regeneration? Does that wider regeneration actually occur? Can redevelopment be done so as to benefit the existing communities and businesses, or is it only outsiders who gain? And if so, does that matter?

We'd like to hear your answers – and your own questions too. Send us your opinions for inclusion in the next NRPF newsletter by e-mailing info@nrpf.org, or log onto the discussion section of the NRPF website at www.nrpf.org and air your views. ■

Retail planning's unique resource – the NRPF website

The NRPF website has evolved to become a remarkable one-stop shop for the busy retail planner, as **Miles Davis** explains

Since its foundation over a decade ago, the NRPF has always had the aim of acting as an arena for frank discussion between all parties in the retail planning process. But to ensure that this is *informed* debate, the Forum has also aimed to improve the quality and availability of the information underpinning that process. Indeed, with the requirements of PPG6 and now PPS6 to demonstrate need, retailing is the sector of planning where good-quality information has been most necessary.

The Forum has gone about this mission to inform in a variety of ways – organising conferences, commissioning research, and producing reports, articles, newsletters and the *Bibliography of Retail Planning* (of which more on the facing page). The challenge has been to make sure that these resources have reached their target audience.

At the same time, the internet has caused a wider information revolution. In theory, the internet should provide access to a great wealth of information, but in practice it's not always easy to find what you're searching for – or to trust the quality of what you do find.

But the internet does provide the ideal platform for the NRPF to make information available to time- and resource-pressed retail planners, or at least to point them in the right direction. The NRPF website (at www.nrpf.org) has evolved over several years to become a one-stop information shop for everything relating to retail planning. There is a remarkable depth of detail on the site; we believe it is a unique resource in the planning domain, and notable in being free and available to all.

The website has undergone a complete redesign and overhaul over recent months, with all the content

being updated and substantial new material added. If you haven't visited the site in a while (or indeed ever), we strongly recommend that you take a look. Here is a brief guide to what you'll find at www.nrpf.org.

Resources

- The *Retail Planning Knowledge Base* (see the facing page).
- The *Planners' Bookshelf* – the definitive list of retail planning 'must-reads', updated annually.
- *Research* – details of the NRPF's commissioned research activities, including scoping papers, which may be downloaded.
- *Publications* – details of all NRPF publications. More recent publications can be downloaded; all may be ordered online.
- The *Data Catalogue* (see below).

Articles

- The new *Briefing Notes*, written for the NRPF by the Institute for Retail Studies (again, see the facing page), along with recent think- and discussion-pieces.

News

- The website front page is regularly updated with relevant *news items* and links, including conference presentations. These are later stored in the searchable archive section.

Newsletters

- Catch up with the most recent *NRPF newsletter*, along with back issues.

Useful links

- *Links to the websites* of:
 - NRPF members;
 - top retailers and property investors; and
 - Government departments, industry bodies and associations, including contact details.

In addition there are links to a wide range of other useful websites, as selected by the Institute for Retail Studies.

Discussion

- An *online forum* to discuss anything related to retail planning. Anyone can view posts, but a quick and easy registration is needed before you can join in.

As you would expect, there is also background information about the NRPF, along with forms for contacting us or to join our mailing list. And the whole website, including the downloadable documents, can be searched quickly and easily using the simple search box on every page. ■

Miles Davis is a PhD student at the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) at University College London.

The Data Catalogue

The NRPF has now taken full control of the Data Catalogue, which it developed jointly with the Society of Property Researchers. Currently the Catalogue contains searchable details of nearly 500 datasets and details on where to obtain them. Although not all of these datasets are relevant to retail planning, the vast majority certainly are; and over the next few months we intend to integrate the Catalogue more fully with our other online resources and sharpen its focus.

The Data Catalogue can be found on the NRPF website (www.nrpf.org) in the 'Resources' section. If you have any comments about the Catalogue, especially suggestions for datasets which you think should be included, please contact Miles Davis at m.davis@ucl.ac.uk ■

New Retail Planning Knowledge Base – beyond a Bibliography

The *Bibliography of Retail Planning*, the brainchild of the late Russell Schiller, was first produced in 1999, with updates being issued annually. Commissioned by the NRPF, it has been compiled and maintained by Leigh Sparks and Anne Findlay at Stirling University's Institute for Retail Studies.

For 2006 the *Bibliography* has been revised and expanded to form the core of the new NRPF *Retail Planning Knowledge Base*. This is intended to provide an accessible but comprehensive starting point for anyone conducting research in the retail planning field – practitioner or academic alike. The *Knowledge Base* is made up of several elements:

- *The Comprehensive Knowledge Base – developed from the original Bibliography and all the previous updates:* This contains bibliographic details, keywords and an abstract for nearly 900 references. The abstracts are specially written with a retail planning slant, but do not critique the material. All the items are available in the public domain, including books, journal articles and conference papers.

The references cover general texts, theoretical work, retail formats, retail locations, retail planning practice, consumer culture, urban environment, and retail planning 1980-1990; mostly these have a UK focus, but there is also a selection of literature relating to retail planning in the USA and Europe.

- *Annual Update and Commentary:* Material from the most recent year is also listed separately, but in a similar fashion to the main listing. This is prefaced by a commentary drawing out the trends in this recent research and highlighting the links with current practitioner concerns.

- *Planners' Bookshelf:* The annual list of the books, articles and reports that every retail planner should read.

- *Web links:* A fully annotated list of the websites where the data and reports most relevant to retail planners may be found (with links, of course).

- *Briefing Notes:* Concise briefings on particular key topics – see the box above.

The whole *Knowledge Base* can be found on the NRPF website at

The *Knowledge Base* is nothing if not comprehensive – even the compilers, Anne Findlay and Leigh Sparks of Stirling University's Institute for Retail Studies, confess it can appear daunting at first glance! So to make research easier for the retail planner in a hurry, they have also been preparing a series of concise **Briefing Notes**, each focusing on a topic of current relevance.

Every Briefing Note comprises a short listing of abstracted references, a list of useful websites, a list of researchers to contact, and a key findings section. The key findings section provides a context for the references, giving insight into the papers that have contributed to different parts of a specific debate and which are based on original research.

Topics covered so far are farmers' markets, food deserts, clone towns, neighbourhood retailing, and competition in food retailing – briefings on mixed-use developments and the sequential approach will be available in the next few months. If you have suggestions for other topics that would be of value, please contact Anne or Leigh at a.m.findlay@stir.ac.uk and Leigh.Sparks@stir.ac.uk. ■

www.nrpf.org in the 'Resources' section. To make searching and printing easier, the Comprehensive Knowledge Base, Annual Update and Commentary

and individual Briefing Notes can be downloaded and saved as PDF documents. They can also be supplied on a CD-ROM if required. ■

Where are all the academics when you need 'em?

Longstanding NRPF research partners the Institute for Retail Studies at Stirling University and UCL's Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis are just two of the research centres and groups at universities throughout the country currently working on retail planning issues. Below is a more comprehensive list (links are also on the NRPF website). If we've missed anyone out, please let us know on info@nrpf.org.

- Cardiff University School of City and Regional Planning – www.cf.ac.uk/cplan/res_plan/index.html

- Lancaster University Management School Department of Marketing – www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/Departments/Marketing/Research

- University of Leeds School of Geography – www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/research/index.html

- Manchester Metropolitan University Business School Marketing and Retail Research Group – www.ribm.mmu.ac.uk/marketing

- Oxford Institute of Retail Management – www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/oxirm

- University of Southampton School of

Geography – www.geog.soton.ac.uk/public/research/ecs.asp

- University of Stirling Institute for Retail Studies – www.irs.stir.ac.uk

- University of Surrey School of Management Retail Research Group – www.som.surrey.ac.uk/research/groups/retail.asp

- University of Wales Swansea Department of Geography – <http://geography.swan.ac.uk/pgrdinfo/socjustpubpol.htm>

- University College London Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis – www.casa.ucl.ac.uk

- Professor Cliff Guy's new book *Planning for Retail Development* (Routledge, 2006, ISBN 0415354536) evaluates critically the ways in which central and local government in Britain have attempted to control changes in the retail environment. It offers the first thorough critical review of retail planning policy in Britain, explaining key events and debates in the evolution of retail planning policy since the 1960s, and providing a framework for future policy development and evaluation. For further details, see www.taylorandfrancis.co.uk/

NEW RETAIL POLICIES FOR WALES

Cliff Guy examines the latest retail planning guidance for Wales

In December 2005, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) released a Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS), which amends the policy for retailing and town centres (sections 10.1-10.3 of the 2002 version of *Planning Policy Wales*). This short article explains why policy needed to be updated, and describes the main changes from the 2002 version.

The background to this revision lies in the publication of Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 6: *Planning for Town Centres* by the ODPM in February 2005. This replaced PPG6: *Town Centres and Retail Developments*. Although PPSs apply only to English planning practice, they do 'set out the Government's national policies and principles on different aspects of planning' and 'complement, not replace or override, other national planning policies'.¹ Therefore it is expected that WAG's statements of policy should conform broadly with the evolving set of PPSs.

PPS6 differs in many respects from the earlier PPG6.² The forward planning of retail and leisure provision is specified in much greater detail, both at regional level (through Regional Spatial Strategies) and local level (through Local Development Frameworks). Proposals for new development of all 'town centre uses' (including retail, leisure, offices and entertainment/cultural facilities) are now subject to many tests, which aim, overall, to ensure that such developments do indeed take place in city, town or district centres. One of the most controversial changes lies in the requirement that potential developers must demonstrate a 'quantitative need' for their proposal. Developers are also required to show 'flexibility' in adapting their 'business model' to the town centre environment.

The new Welsh guidance incorporates some additional wording which largely follows the English changes, although in less detail. There is no equivalent to the guidance on forward planning of retail provision at

regional level. However, it is made clear that 'quantitative need' is a major concern, firstly when local authorities are considering whether to identify sites for retail and leisure use in their development plans (para. 10.2.10), and secondly in assessing proposals (outside town centres) for new development (paras 10.3.1-3). 'Quantitative need' is not defined, so both sides will probably have to refer to PPS6 for more detail, at least until TAN4: *Retailing and Town Centres* is revised.

There is also a more detailed treatment of the sequential test, including advice that the boundaries of existing centres could be extended so as to allow new edge-of-centre development (para. 10.2.11). However, advice in PPS6 that local authorities should use compulsory purchase powers where necessary is not clearly repeated in the MIPPS.

So, is the revised policy just a shorter version of PPS6?³ Certainly, the overall objectives and the main instruments by which policy should be carried out are similar. WAG should be criticised for not encouraging local authorities to make joint strategies for town centre growth and change across sub-regions. However, I find the Welsh guidance (as in previous versions) more direct, less complicated and less prescriptive than the English, and this opinion seems to be shared by practitioners with experience of both sets of guidance. ■

Cliff Guy is a Professor in the School of City and Regional Planning at Cardiff University.

Notes

- 1 ODPM: PPS6: *Planning for Town Centres*. Introduction
- 2 See Cliff Guy: 'Town centres first?'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2004, Vol. 73, Feb., pp.48-50
- 3 3,507 words, compared with 12,028 in PPS6!

Practitioner event

Regenerating deprived areas through retail-led investment

The successful Under-Served Markets project run by Business in the Community (BitC) has been developing four pilot schemes around the country to demonstrate the positive impacts that can be achieved by encouraging new retail investment in deprived areas.

To ensure that the lessons learned from the project are shared widely, BitC and NRPF are producing a short, focused, practical guide to maximising the benefits of retail-led investment in

deprived areas. We are hosting a workshop, jointly sponsored by BitC, the DCLG and the Local Government Association (LGA), to provide an opportunity for practitioners to feed in their views and contribute to the guide.

The workshop takes place on 27 November at the LGA offices in Westminster. Contact George Nicholson (Gnicho6499@aol.com) for last-minute places, or watch out for the guide in the new year. ■

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