

retail FORUM

The Newsletter of the National Retail Planning Forum

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Challenging times

NRPF Chairman Chris Brearley on the challenging economic and policy context. Inside, a range of contributors offer assessments of the new draft PPS4

These are, to say the least, challenging times: for the economy, for the financial system, for the retail and property industries, and also for politics, for Parliament and for government. Not since the 1970s at least has there been such uncertainty.

Whether by coincidence or not, this same time is a challenging one for town and country planning as well. There has been great change in the system for producing development plans, with the move (by no means yet completed) to Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks. There has been significant change too in the presentation and content of planning policy, with the move to a smaller group of broader Planning Policy Statements. So far as retail is concerned, we not only have the revisions to policy following the earlier reviews and consultations, including the abolition of the need test and its replacement with the new impact assessment, but also the grouping of retail policies with other economic planning policies in the new PPS 4 (*Planning for Prosperous Economies*), currently out in draft for consultation.

There is a lot for practitioners to take on board here, and much to discuss. It highlights the importance of what we do. NRPF is a non-partisan partnership between retail, developer, financial and governmental interests with a remit to inform the issues and encourage debate. This regular newsletter keeps you in touch, and our website (at www.nrpf.org/), with its well regarded resource base, is always there for you to

visit. At our conferences and workshops you will hear from excellent speakers and have the opportunity to discuss issues and meet colleagues.

Our next conference, in Birmingham on 17 July, which will be attended by

officials from the DCLG, will be a really useful opportunity to discuss PPS4 during its consultation period. But we are keen to do better – never more so than now – and we greatly welcome your suggestions and input. ■

NRPF & LGA present...

Retailing out of recession – the challenges ahead

10 am - 4 pm, 17 July 2009

The Council House, Birmingham

- **Just what sort of shape is the retail sector now in?**
- **Who are the likely winners and losers?**
- **How should city managers and investors respond?**
- **What new opportunities are emerging?**

With speakers from the private sector and central and local government, this event aims to clarify the thinking behind the new consolidated government policy advice in PPS4 and, crucially, to set out the economic and commercial context against which the new policy will be tested.

Andrew Smith from Aberdeen Investors UK will consider the winners and losers in the present recession, and will present some of the likely scenarios that city and town managers will face in future. A second session will deal specifically with the new PPS4, with speakers from DCLG, before going on to look more specifically at different aspects of the new policy and its associated guidance. A panel comprising retailers, investors, local government, city managers and BiTC will close the day, looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

Visit www.nrpf.org/ for more details, or to book your place now, contact: **George Nicholson, Secretary, NRPF, 6 Copperfield Street, London SE1 0EP**
E-mail: Gnicho6499@aol.com

There is a small charge of £50 to cover the cost of the event. Cheques should be made out to The National Retail Planning Forum.

Visit the NRPF website – <http://www.nrpf.org/>

Promoting private-public sector understanding of planning's impact on retailing

In the following pages, nine contributors give their views on the new draft PPS4. Unless explicitly stated, these are personal views and do not necessarily represent those of their organisations...

Concise and direct, but integration lacking

Cliff Guy, Cardiff University

The new draft PPS4: *Planning for Prosperous Economies*,¹ out for consultation until 28 July 2009, stems from a Government commitment to integrate economic and town centre planning, following the report by Matthew Taylor MP into rural issues. It also reflects commitments to reduce the length and complexity of planning guidance, leaving details to be provided in extra daughter documents.

My initial impression is of a lack of integration between 'economic' and 'town centres' policies: these occupy separate parts of the document and are to some extent contradictory. It is clear that the 'town centres first' policy takes precedence over any encouragement of 'regeneration investment' in off-centre locations, but there is some recognition of the potential role of retail development in creating new employment.

The guidance on 'town centre uses', particularly retail planning and development, has clearly benefited from the consultation process on the draft revision of PPS6 which was issued last year (see *Retail Forum* issue 16). Much paper has been saved through the pruning of homilies and waffle: the draft's length is about 14½ pages compared with 23 in PPS6 (ignoring introductory material and annexes).

The major omission from the original PPS6 is, as expected, the requirement to assess the quantitative need for off-centre retail proposals. Otherwise there appear to be no significant changes in policy. There is no mention of any 'competition test' for supermarkets, following Tesco's successful appeal against the Competition Commission's proposal. However, there is substantial rewriting of detailed guidance, mainly amounting to clarification rather than new policy. This includes:

- Policy EC1 – a useful checklist of evidence that should be assembled to inform development plan policies;
- EC3 on 'regional planning for town

centres', which reinstates advice on supporting second-tier centres (which had been watered down in the consultation revision of PPS6);

- EC 5.1.5, which acknowledges that development plans should consider what to do about 'centres in decline';
- EC6 on 'planning for consumer choice', a rewriting of the much-criticised advice in the consultation revision;
- EC7.7, which states that if development plan policies do not identify sites for retail expansion, then they should set out 'criteria-based policies' for assessing planning applications;
- EC18, which lists the supporting evidence that should accompany planning applications for off-centre development;
- EC20, a rewriting of the criteria for impact assessment, including a statement on carbon dioxide emissions and climate change – this is still very brief, but separate 'good practice guidance' is promised;² and
- EC21, a useful summary of 'consideration of planning applications' which prioritises the sequential test

and/or 'clear evidence' of 'significant adverse impacts' as grounds for refusal, but also instructs local authorities to 'consider proposals favourably' if their 'wider economic, social and environmental benefits' outweigh the adverse impacts.

In conclusion, I still find some of the advice unclear, particularly on 'consumer choice' and support for local or independent traders. However, it is good to see a positive response to comments made by consultees to last year's consultation revision, as well as a much more concise and direct presentation of policy. ■

Cliff Guy, Honorary Professor at the School of City & Regional Planning, Cardiff University

Notes

1 *Consultation Paper on a New Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Prosperous Economies*. DCLG, 2009.

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/consultationeconomicpps

2 A 'living draft' of *Planning for Town Centres: Good Practice Guide on Need, Impact and the Sequential Approach* is available for comment at www.gvagrimsley.co.uk/towncentresgoodpracticeguide.xml

Questions and uncertainty

Ruairidh Jackson, The Co-operative Group

The draft PPS is an encouraging start, but many businesses and individuals will still have a lot to say during the consultation period. The new style, with more specific policies and a clear attempt to provide more definition to the issues, is welcomed; but while it attempts to provide the answers there will always be uncertainty.

There is better advice for plan-makers; but will it lead to more of a plan-led system for retail, rather than the historic use of PPS6 as a

development control tool? There is more recognition of the role played by incumbent retailers and independent shops; but will it deliver a more level playing field? The draft policies do provide a clearer framework; but will they create a more predictable set of outcomes? Only time will tell, but whatever side people may find themselves on, it is essential to get engaged and join the debate. ■

Ruairidh Jackson, Head of Planning and Property Strategy, The Co-operative Group

The new impact test and sustainability

Jonathan Baldock, Consultant

The plan-making policies of the draft PPS4 are very similar to the requirements of PPS6. The main policy change is the new impact test for potential developments. This sets out eight 'key impacts' and (if the key impacts are not significantly adverse) four 'wider impacts' which must be assessed when local planning authorities allocate sites for development and when planning applications are submitted. The most important of the key impacts are the impacts on sustainability – i.e. mitigation of climate change – and the impact on accessibility by a choice of means of transport, on car mileage and carbon dioxide emissions, and on linked trips with existing centres. These are the most important because they are specifically highlighted as a reason why planning permission should be refused, if

the proposal 'is likely to lead to significant adverse impacts in terms of mitigation of or adaptation to climate change...'

These will be tough tests for car-dependent out-of-centre retail developments to pass. If rigorously applied, they may well preclude single free-standing superstores and store extensions and reduce out-of-centre development. However, expect developers to seek opportunities to group new out-of-centre stores with existing ones and claim linked trips and mileage reductions as a result. Clearly, traffic engineers will be much in demand for assessments which demonstrate compliance with these tests! If local authorities are not robust in judging such planning applications, the result could be the establishment of increasingly large

out-of-centre retail complexes by stealth, rather than through the development plan process.

The need test is not dead for planning applications, because trade diversion is one of the key impacts to be assessed. This requires forecasting of available expenditure and its capture by existing stores as the first steps in the process – in other words, forecasting capacity (or need). Before trade diversion can be assessed, it is also necessary to know how well the existing stores are trading – again, an element of need forecasting. It is therefore unlikely that there will be any change in the way that quantitative retail impact assessments are carried out as a result of the proposed new policies. ■

Jonathan Baldock, Town Centres & Retail Planning Consultant

Scope for (mis)interpretation

Stephen Wright, John Lewis Partnership

John Lewis Partnership broadly welcomes the proposals in the draft PPS, albeit with a note of caution. The move towards a more holistic analysis of the positive and negative impacts of a proposal is a welcome development which should enable better consideration of the benefits and disadvantages of a development than the outgoing, and much narrower, need and impact tests of PPS6.

However, the shift from quantitative tests to qualitative evaluations, together with the wording of the draft policies, means that there will be some scope for interpretation (and, potentially, misinterpretation) of the new tests. The text of the policies can be interpreted to maintain the protection and support given to town centres, but the statement by the then Housing and Planning Minister, Margaret Beckett, in launching the document points towards a different interpretation. The Minister noted that the new policies 'provide the flexibility needed to tackle the current economic uncertainty and exploit the opportunities available...'. There is scope, within the wording of the policies, for the new tests



to be applied in such a way as to place short-term economic recovery ahead of medium-term and long-term sustainable growth and place-making.

Town centres have a fundamental role to play in social cohesion, economic and environmental well-being, and place-making. We hope that the new proposals will be clarified to ensure that these key aims are not undermined. In any event, the way in which the new policies are interpreted by local authorities, through

the planning process, is going to be crucial. This will require training and resourcing, as well as a firm and continued commitment to town centre vitality and viability.

The proposals would do away with the unintended consequences of the need test, but the hearings of the CLG Select Committee Inquiry into PPS6: *Town Centres* in May made it clear that some remain to be convinced that scrapping the need test is appropriate. We maintain that it is, provided that the replacement is sufficiently robust to give equal if not greater support to town centres.

We anticipate the proposed tests will result in substantial work for consultants and lawyers, as lengthy impact assessments are prepared and the meaning of terms such as 'significant adverse impacts' is argued with planning officers, at planning inquiries and through the Courts. This would be an unwelcome development, given the Government's devolutionary aims and the ongoing push for a more streamlined planning system. ■

Stephen Wright, Principal Lawyer (Planning), John Lewis Partnership

The importance of the evidence base

Miles Davis, University College London

The new consultation draft guidance certainly looks a very different beast from last year's PPS4 and PPS6 consultation drafts, although supposedly only the format and emphasis have changed. In particular, the importance of the evidence base has been literally brought to the fore. The first policy, EC1, sets out the requirements for a robust evidence base for positive planning, giving the subject much more prominence than the previous draft PPS4 and, particularly, PPS6.

This new emphasis on a sound evidence base is no surprise given the new onus on planning authorities to plan proactively and allocate sites for retail during the plan-making process, first seen in the PPS6 consultation draft. The new, more sophisticated impact test requires consideration of a wide range of impacts, and it is also suggested that impacts of particular local importance can be specified. The concept of hierarchies and networks of centres is highlighted, as is the need to assess potential for growth across them and to manage changes. At the decision-making stage, for proposals requiring an impact assessment planning authorities are recommended to agree the level and type of information to be submitted beforehand.

The new draft PPS provides detail on evidence base preparation, particularly needs assessment. The accompanying *Good Practice Guide* highlights the importance of monitoring the performance of centres over time and of being able to make comparisons with other centres. The town centre vitality and viability healthcheck indicators within the draft PPS are recommended as a good starting point.

The proposed changes are not intended to impose any net additional costs on the private or public sectors, as theoretically all the impacts to be assessed should have been considered under the existing regime. However, consultation responses for the draft PPS6 revision have revealed widespread concerns about the resource and data costs of collecting suitably robust evidence and market information. It is suggested that some of this information will come from the proposed new Local Economic Assessments, and joint working is also encouraged.

In reality the current evidence base varies greatly between local authorities, and comparisons over time and between places are usually difficult. Although the health check indicators first appeared in the mid-1990s, uptake has been slow. Studies^{1,2} have highlighted the lack of comprehensive and consistent data and the understandable tendency of resource-stretched local authorities to use the indicators most easily, quickly or cheaply measured, rather than those most relevant. Meanwhile the list of indicators continues to grow.

Ironically the DCLG's own Town Centre Statistics (available at www.planningstatistics.org.uk) should already provide free annual floorspace, employment and rateable value data on a consistent, comprehensive and comparable basis for town centres across England and Wales, but awareness of these is low and recent updates have been sporadic as the Department's own scarce resources have been focused elsewhere – making it hard to gauge the success of current

policy. The underlying technology is capable of much more, and the NRPF Research Group is investigating alternative ways of using it with Valuation Office floorspace data – another cheap but under-used data source.

Overall, while the prominence given to the evidence base in the new draft PPS4 is a marked and welcome change, the actual information requirements have not fundamentally altered. But this new emphasis does reinforce the need to bring the current evidence base up to scratch. With the tools already in place, the timely provision of basic data by the DCLG, such as floorspace totals for each centre and annual changes, seems a good place to start. ■

Miles Davis, Researcher, Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, UCL

Notes

- 1 J. Cox, M. Thurstain-Goodwin, and C. Tomalin: *Town Centre Vitality & Viability: A Review of the Health Check Methodology*. NRPF, 2000
- 2 *Policy Evaluation of the Effectiveness of PPG6*. CB Hillier Parker and Cardiff University, for the ODFM, 2004

Social exclusion objectives

Bill Boler, Under-served Markets Project

Where relevant, the USM (Under-served Markets) Project has sought to engage in dialogue over public policy in order to promote its goals – specifically recognition of the importance of retail-led regeneration and the need for investment in deprived areas as a catalyst for regeneration.

The USM Project welcomes several positive changes in the new draft PPS and accompanying *Good Practice Guide* – particularly the continued promotion of town centres and the plan-led approach, as well as the acknowledgement of social exclusion and deprivation issues and the role that the retail sector can play in alleviating them through regeneration projects. While recognising that the primary purpose of the draft PPS is to guide planning policy, and in terms of retail policy to

promote town centres first, we also welcome the proposed impact test's reference to the specific needs of deprived areas and the link between retail and wider regeneration and social exclusion objectives.

Overall, we are especially pleased: the revised policy document makes 22(!) references to 'deprived areas', reflected in the objectives, planning approach and impact test sections. This compares with just two references a few years ago, in the old PPG6. In addition, the new impact test – following the sequential test – requires the consideration of 'wider impacts', and three of the four wider impact issues have been key elements of our project work (deprived areas, employment, and regeneration). ■

Bill Boler, Director, Investment & Physical Regeneration, Business in the Community

Competition, vitality and vibrancy

Simon Birnbaum, Tesco Stores Limited

The aim of draft PPS4 is 'to make planning policies clearer, more concise, more businesslike and easier to use'. The draft brings together all the Government's key planning policies relating to the economy. The long awaited *Good Practice Guide* on need, impact and the sequential approach has been published as a 'living draft' to support the implementation of town centre policies set out in the draft PPS.

Tesco has always supported the principle of town centre first and is pleased to see this maintained. Tesco also welcomes the fact that reference is made to looking at the mix and diversity of uses to ensure vibrant town centres – the identity of the proposed operator has never been a relevant consideration in the UK planning system, and this principle is retained in the draft PPS.

The Government's objectives to achieve growth in the economy and productivity and to create prosperous communities are welcomed. However, while 'town centre uses' are referred to as 'economic development' it is apparent when comparing draft Policy EC12 with draft Policy EC20 that a more stringent impact assessment is to be applied towards retail development than to traditional employment uses such as industry and warehousing.

The proposed removal of the need test for planning applications is welcomed. Need is already covered by impact on the vitality and viability and scale tests, and together with the sequential assessment and accessibility criteria of previous versions of PPG6/PPS6 they are designed to protect town centres.

The proposed impact assessment for town centre uses not in accordance with the development plan is a step in the right direction of balancing the positive and negative aspects of a proposed development.

The order of the considerations to be taken into account under the proposed impact assessment should be revised. The draft places the effect on carbon dioxide emissions and climate change first in the 'key impacts' to be assessed. This is a requirement as opposed to an impact.¹ Impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre is seventh on the list of 'key impacts', while matters such as job

creation and economic regeneration should be part of the key impacts as opposed to being cited as 'wider impacts'. Such changes would reflect the current economic challenges and assist in meeting the Government's objective of achieving sustainable economic growth.

The draft PPS recognises that the proposed impact assessment must be applied in a proportionate way in accordance with the scale of development proposed.

Local planning authorities can help create the right conditions for diversity to flourish. It is important that they do so in a way which encourages competition, vitality and vibrancy. The character of a proposed development and the type and range of goods to be sold are correct matters to be taken into account.

In a weak economic climate developers need consistency and efficiency in decision-making – it is important to reduce risk levels and barriers to investment and regeneration. The draft PPS contains clear principles, but the accompanying *Good Practice Guide* is detailed and prescriptive and, while seen as a pragmatic document, would benefit from being streamlined in its final form. ■

Simon Birnbaum, *Strategic Town Planning Manager, Tesco Stores Limited*

Note

1 Supplement to PPS1 – whereby applicants should consider how well their development proposals contribute to the Government's ambition of a low-carbon economy and how well adapted they are for the expected effects of climate change

More work to be done

Phil Morris, Norfolk County Council

The new draft PPS has been more clearly formatted as 'policies'. However, a cursory reading suggests that more work needs to be done to clarify those elements that are genuine national policy (and so do not need to be repeated at the local level) and those that are guidance. The PPS is also a bit muddled on what policies are required at the different levels of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) – a Core Strategy does not include a Proposals Map, so the PPS is wrong to require a Core Strategy to define primary frontages.

As with the last draft of PPS6, the 'need' test has been scrapped for applications (it is still required for forward planning to inform new allocations in LDFs). It has never been entirely clear why this approach has been dropped. It is not additional work as it is the first stage of a retail impact assessment. Of course, needs testing still exists for other aspects of planning. If a local authority can demonstrate an adequate supply of housing to cater for 'need', then non-conforming applications can legitimately be refused. Clearly an abundance of shops is more important than houses!

The 'need test' had the advantage of being relatively simple and has been sufficient to assess some applications without the need for further retail impact assessment. An average, numerate local authority planner, taught some of the tricks of the trade, could understand it and have some chance of judging an application. More importantly, all LDFs should be supported by retail studies, so a local authority will already have a broad understanding of the capacity for new floorspace in each category. Now, lack of capacity cannot be used to filter out a proportion of applications. Retail impact assessments add a significant additional level of complexity. I doubt that there will be many, if any, local authorities with the expertise to judge the kind of assessments that will be required. So if a local authority wishes to properly understand the impact of a retail application, then independent consultants will need to be employed to advise on the applicant's assessment – every time. Do local authorities have the budgets for this? ■

Phil Morris, *Principal Planner, Norfolk County Council*

Evidence base resources

Mike Haines, LGA and Teignbridge District Council

I am sure we all welcome the move towards more streamlined and simplified national policy guidance, and support the principle that the planning system should positively support sustainable economic development.

As a member of a rural local authority I am pleased to see recognition of the importance of the rural economy, following the review by Matthew Taylor

MP. I am well aware of the inter-relationship between economies in rural and urban areas in my own sub-region, and would have wished for more emphasis on sub-regional planning in the document.

Annex B provides a very useful comparison, and I note that it seeks to demonstrate 'the proposal will not increase the overall costs of assessments

or impose additional burdens'; but should we not make every effort to minimise the workload rather than just not increase it? I remain concerned about how resource-intensive putting the evidence base together might be. ■

Cllr Mike Haines, Deputy Chair, LGA Environment Board, and Planning Portfolio Holder, Teignbridge District Council

Knowledge Base update

The update to the NRPF Knowledge Base listing material from 2008 is now available at www.nrpf.org/PDF/NRPF_Biblio_2009.pdf.

Users should note that throughout the reference listing all academic papers have e-mail contacts. Users should contact the authors to obtain papers as authors almost always have pre-publication PDF files which they would be willing to release. The web links have been checked and updated for 2009. The main knowledge base now covers the last ten years, and can be searched using the search function in Adobe Acrobat. It is available at www.nrpf.org/PDF/NRPF_Biblio_All.pdf.

The literature for 2008 includes a range of academic, policy and practitioner material, structured into three main sections: competition and planning; PPS6; and town centres.

The commentary on the literature highlights the contribution of research work and the challenges it makes to policy. For example, the literature on competition challenges the limited definition of the market used by the Competition Commission. It explores different ways in which new market entry and format innovation can take place. Similarly, while town centres remain at the centre of policy, planning policy seems primarily concerned with directing development to town centres rather than with considering how this will deliver successful town centres. Current policy is insufficient to ensure prosperous and successful town centres/places. Research on how

consumers use and perceive town centres has highlighted critical considerations in thinking about what policies and management structures can be devised to ensure that town centres can be more successful. Wider urban literatures are seeking to move from thinking in terms of health metaphors for town centres to more positive ways of thinking about urban places. There is a

challenge here for those seeking to manage and promote town centres. Whatever the realities of the policy which will emerge from current processes in the DCLG, there is an opportunity to change the image of the role and function of town centres in communities and regions to something more dynamic in economic and social terms. ■

Retail planning definitions – the last word?

The NRPF's definitions for retail planning have now been included in Appendix A of *Planning for Town Centres: Good Practice Guide on Need, Impact and the Sequential Approach*, published in April by GVA Grimley on behalf of the DCLG as a 'living draft' for consultation. The definitions are those recommended by the NRPF – except for that of 'net sales area'. When we consulted interested parties on the final draft, all the other definitions were relatively uncontentious; but 'net sales area' aroused some strongly held views. Broadly speaking, our draft definition was supported by the public sector, while most of the major food retailers supported an alternative put forward by the Competition Commission in the recent Groceries Market Investigation. As a result, we

were unable to recommend a definition of net sales area, but put forward one which could apply to all shops and stores, including foodstores, and an alternative which could apply to foodstores only. DCLG has asked for views on these alternatives for foodstores as part of consultation on the draft *Good Practice Guide*.

So now it's nearly all over? Well, not quite. Once the final version of the *Guide* is published by DCLG alongside the new PPS4, the NRPF will probably need to draw the attention of interested parties to the final new definitions and advise on their application. But the acceptance of national definitions marks a big step towards accuracy and consistency of analysis for retail planning. ■

Jonathan Baldock
Town Centres & Retail Planning Consultant

Achieving and encouraging 'mixed-use' development has been driven by the planning system to counter a preponderance of single-use schemes that came forward in the 1980/90s. Planners and urban designers have never been happy with single dominant land uses, albeit the planning system has been responsible for prescribing the segregation of uses by inflexible land use zoning through the development plan system. By contrast, developers and investors preferred the simplicity and certainty of single-use building developments, arguing that a 'mix' could be achieved across a wider area rather than by being prescriptive about achieving the 'mix' within a building or a small land area.

There has been a desire to overcome the separation of uses that have said to characterise the modern English city, whose urban form had begun to replicate the dispersal and sprawl of American urban development rather than the complexity of the European 'compact city'. In his 1995 press release marking the launch of a draft of PPG6, John Gummer indicated central government's desire to promote 'mixed use' within town centres, and that message is still embedded in the current PPS6 (in para. 2.20). The delivery of 'mixed use' schemes within town centres has become the expected norm rather than the exception in the 1980/90s: *'The Government is concerned to ensure that efficient use should be made of land within centres and elsewhere. Local planning authorities should formulate planning policies which encourage well-designed, and, where appropriate, higher-density, multi-storey development within and around existing centres, including the promotion of mixed-use development and mixed-use areas.'*

In terms of delivering sustainable development, of making best use of scarce town and city centre land, of reinforcing the multiplier effect of grouping together a complementary mix of town centre uses, and of designing active and vibrant uses at street level, delivering 'mixed-use' high-density development within town and city centres seems to tick all the right boxes. Town centres were seen as being the appropriate and proper location for true 'mixed-use' schemes, and inevitably retail in its various forms was usually a constituent part of that 'mix', along with other commercial uses.

However, 'mixed use' has gained a much wider currency, proving attractive to a variety of practitioners with vastly different priorities and interest areas. Urban designers have recognised the positive aspect of 'mixed use' (bars, restaurants and retail) in providing interest and activity at street level in what otherwise would be lifeless street

Mixed use and retail content

'Mixed use' as a concept has lost its original purpose, with dangers for the proper planning of retail development, says Alan Taylor

frontages in bland residential and office blocks. Housing practitioners use the term 'mixed use' to describe a desire to achieve not a mix of land uses but a mix of tenures.

The original purpose of promoting 'mixed use' as a means of maximising the development potential of town centre sites has been grasped by other practitioners to promote their particular interests, often in locations other than just town centres. The initial resistance from the development community to 'mixed use' within buildings has largely been overcome – although some would say that street level retail uses are provided to meet requests from council planning authorities rather than commercial need. 'Mixed use' has become the norm, not the exception.

'Mixed-use' schemes now cover every spectrum and scale of development from the £1 billion Olympic village or new eco-town scale at one extreme, down to a single block of flats with a ground-floor coffee shop at the other – and every graduation of size in between. The 'mix' constituent parts can range from supermarkets and sub-regional shopping down to a 'corner shop' scale retail unit embedded in a single residential tower. Often the constituent parts are not obvious, not always separately identified or listed, and the shorthand all-embracing 'mixed-use' label is used instead. The term obscures and glosses over the actual constituent parts of the 'mix'.

The debasement of 'mixed use'

The term 'mixed use' has become a common label, applied to almost every project reported in the development press. No longer is it possible to understand from the label 'mixed use' what that development content and format might be. The component parts and uses are not clearly described, and the label rarely paints an accurate or meaningful description of the scheme. 'Mixed use' as a concept has lost its original purpose, and its use in describing virtually any development has led to it being used with very little precision. That ambiguity has real dangers.

A paper produced by the RICS in 1996 – *Mixed Use Development: Concept and*

Realities – was quite prophetic about the then clamour to promote 'mixed-use' developments: *'Schemes which offer few, if any, of the benefits associated with traditional mixed use areas are, nevertheless, described as mixed-use developments. This debases the concept and risks reducing support for the idea. The term is used as a marketing slogan by some people and the concept is seen as a panacea by others. A lack of clarity surrounds much of the debate about mixed-use developments.'*

'Mixed use' is now synonymous with 'sustainable development' and has become a label equivalent of the CE label on European consumer goods: nobody knows what it really means, but the development would be in some way devalued if the label was not applied.

What has been lost in the universal use of the 'mixed use' label on any sizeable development is that the original idea was proposed as a clear town centre focused concept. The danger is that the 'mixed use' format has spread beyond town and city centres and has dragged the retailing component of the 'mix' with it. Retailing in all its guises (A1, A2, A3, A4 or A5) is often the only use that will deliver a 'mix' beyond housing, flats or student accommodation. The clamour to ensure that there is a 'mix' further fuels the pressure to add retailing to sites which are not town or city centre locations. New retailing is often provided where there is no commercial requirement for it within inner city communities, where the old forms of retailing are often struggling to survive and prosper.

Lost in this ambiguity is any clarity of the real role, need and purpose of one of the key constituents of 'mixed use': the retail component. Lost in that ambiguity is the original intention to deliver 'mixed use' as a key constituent of achieving active and vibrant town centres. 'Mixed use' has become a term without any real meaning, and lost in that 'mix' is the proper planning of retail development. ■

Alan Taylor was formerly Senior Planner in the Planning & Economic Division, City Development Department, Leeds City Council.

Retail markets in the spotlight

Two events in coming months will turn the spotlight on traditional retail markets. Both will give a welcome airing to a corner of the retail industry sometimes not viewed by retailers, developers, planners and policy-makers as part of the same family as high street shops, shopping centres, and other outlets. Considering their history and the sheer number of markets that exist in some form in practically every town or city in the UK, this is an odd situation.

First, the CLG Select Committee will publish the report of its inquiry into the state of the traditional retail markets sector in the UK. The Committee has recently finished taking evidence to the inquiry, with sessions having taken place in London, Leicester and elsewhere, accompanied by visits to a range of street and indoor markets. The Committee intends to make recommendations on the sector's future direction and needs.

The NRPf gave evidence to the inquiry, along with the President of the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) on 20 April, having sent in evidence beforehand (see the NRPf website at www.nrpf.org/). The DCLG Minister responsible – Iain Wright MP – also attended the session. As the NRPf



evidence pointed out (along with that from others, such as NABMA), part of the problem with any analysis of the sector is the lack of regular and reliable data. In fact, there has only ever been one national survey, undertaken by NABMA itself in 2005, which revealed a mixed picture across the country. The survey showed that some markets were growing – such as farmers' markets and car boot sales, along with newer specialist markets such as Borough Market in London – while others were showing a small decline in the number of traders and customers.

The lack of data was something the CLG Committee discussed, along with the need for a 'champion' in government for markets – about which views differ in the industry. Some favour a foothold in BERR as the department responsible for enterprise,

while others see DCLG as the natural home, something the Minister concurred with. The Committee was keen to identify obstacles within both central government and local government to the growth in retail markets, and also asked about the factors underpinning the success of markets both in the UK and Europe. The Committee's report will be eagerly anticipated by an industry keen to shed its Cinderella image. The complete set of oral hearings evidence is available on the NRPf website (at www.nrpf.org/PDF/markets_oral_evidence.pdf).

The second event is an international conference to be held at London's Barbican Centre on 26 June. Staged by WUWM, the conference programme includes a keynote paper on the retail markets industry in the UK from CLG Committee advisor Professor Alan Hallsworth, as well as sessions that will include Robin Butler, Development Director from Lend Lease, one of the partners with Grosvenor in the Preston Markets project. Presentations from Hamburg, Burgos in Spain and from France and Holland will look at examples of successful new market initiatives. Information on the event can be found at www.wuwmretailconference2009.org. ■

Reinvigorating the high street

London First has set up a London Retail Commission to examine how to retain and strengthen London's retail diversity and to explore ways of supporting the capital's town centres. Jeremy Newsum, Chief Executive of Grosvenor Estates, has agreed to chair the Commission, which includes a mixture of developers, retailers, investors, property owners, agents, and retail organisations.

In part set up to tackle the effects of the recession, the Commission is a response to the challenges facing all retailers, from reduced consumer expenditure to other factors such as growing use of the internet, increased competition from new large-scale shopping centres, and problems faced by local shops. It is felt that action is needed now to ensure the long-term health and vitality of London's retail centres. The Commission is to meet between June and September this year, with a view to making an input into the review of the

London Plan. It is also hoped it will help London boroughs in developing initiatives and policy.

The process will involve a series of steering group meetings, roundtable discussions, seminars, and other meetings. A range of issues have been identified, from lease structures, rating and planning policy, to the role of markets and transport. A number of case studies will be used to highlight good practice both from the UK and abroad, and a series of research topics have also been identified to feed into the discussions.

The work currently being undertaken by DTZ for DCLG on the planning tools needed to promote retail diversity and the BRC's strategy report on the high street will also be fed into the process. The NRPf's report on the role of secondary shopping is another important source. Further information on the work of the Commission can be obtained from Kate Vandermeer at London First – see www.londonfirst.co.uk/keeping-the-uk-competitive/planning--development/london-retail-commission/. ■

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