

Proper review urgently needed

The recent parliamentary statement on town centre planning policies further distances the world of retail planning from the reality of retailing and shoppers, says **Steven Butterworth**

On 10 April, the ODPM issued a second parliamentary statement on its town centre planning policies, as a result of the Government's view that 'there is increasing evidence of differences in interpretation' of national policy. The statement represents the latest edict on how John Prescott wants PPG6, PPG11, and PPG13 to operate in determining planning applications and appeals for retail and other key town centre uses.

The statement focuses on the need and sequential approach tests which edge- and out-of-centre development proposals – where not in accordance with an up-to-date development plan strategy which is itself consistent with PPG6 – must satisfy.

It expands the 'class of goods' based sequential approach to site selection to the 'need' test, by requiring quantitative need to be separately demonstrated for convenience and comparison goods. Greater weight is now to be placed on this quantitative need, rather than qualitative retail need factors, as the latter are perceived as 'increasingly and unnecessarily complicated'. Regeneration and employment needs are no longer to be accepted as capable of contributing to a retail need, but they are to be treated as material considerations.

On the sequential test, flexibility in terms of the format, design, and scale of new development is now required to be even greater, demonstrating that all town centre options for satisfying the identified retail need for convenience and/or comparison goods proposed have been thoroughly assessed. This

could be achieved by demonstrating more efficient design, car parking, mixed uses, multi-storey development, or home delivery services. In relation to large bulky goods stores, 'the First Secretary of State considers that it rests with developers and retailers to demonstrate that a majority of their goods cannot be sold from town centre stores'.

The sequential search should be confined to centre(s) with a similar catchment to a proposal, and the scale of a proposal should also be appropriately related to that centre and its catchment. The statement goes on to advise that 'Developments serving a wide catchment area are required to be located in a centre that serves a similar catchment area'.

The content and tenor of the statement very much reflect John Prescott's ever tightening interpretation and application of his town centre and retail policies in call-in decisions on large retail store developments by B&Q, Ikea, Tesco, and the like. The policy shift effectively amounts to an anti-large-retail-format policy, as best encapsulated by the 'no bulky goods policy exception' to the sequential approach test.

The Government's latest policy shift serves to further distance the world of retail planning from the reality of retailing and shoppers. Large retail formats are increasingly popular with the shopping public and contribute to 'social inclusion' by providing a wide range of products at competitive prices in accessible locations. They also provide new employment opportunities and activity which benefits the local

community and its economy. There is a danger that the current retailer focus on providing this quality of retailing in areas of poor provision, and the regeneration role that large retail formats can have in delivering mixed-use redevelopments, may be diluted as a result.

The timing of the statement is also interesting. Like Richard Caborn's parliamentary statement in February 1999, Tony McNulty's statement also follows legal challenges to recent decisions and, in the Ikea case at Stockport, the Government's capitulation in defending its decision in the Courts.

Ministers presumably felt that they needed to bolster the strength of their policy position as an immediate response to such cases, rather than await publication of the current review of PPG6 – or is it the case that the statement is an excuse to delay completing that review until autumn 2003? The statement therefore serves to highlight that the need for a proper review of PPG6, one subject to public consultation and debate, is now ever more urgent. ■

Steven Butterworth is Planning Director at GL Hearn.

Newly available from the NRPF

TRADING PLACES



A book of 16 articles from Cliff Guy's regular 'Trading Places' column in *Town & Country Planning*, published jointly by the TCPA and the NRPF. Available at £5 (cheque to NRPF with order) from George Nicholson, NRPF, 6 Copperfield Street, London SE1 0EP

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.

Who is measuring the retail industry's capacity for wealth creation? The shareholders, of course – in a very specific way. But what about planners, or arms of government? They have a direct interest in the retail contribution to economic growth and spatial strategies of investment. Retail is widely seen as matter for the ODPM. Except, of course, that food is DEFRA, cars are DFT, e-mail is DTI, location is local government, and competition is – a fight. This is called 'joined-up government'. But who is charged with wealth creation – and how?

Fortunately, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is now involved and producing interesting material, and more is on the way. Planners, however, are dealing almost exclusively with floor-space. This is not a good measure of economic efficiency or competitiveness. Planners' ability to aid wealth creation is therefore constrained, which weakens their role in regional economic strategies and their judgements on location and the role of investment in the economic life of their areas.

Is a lack of understanding of the wealth creation process focusing their attention on ancient industries – which figure so large in their economic strategies – rather than on the retail component of even major town centres? What industry is having an impact on urban and social behaviour on anything like the same scale as Lakeside and Bluewater in the Thames Gateway?

That impact derives from the ability of the retail industry to deliver demand-led efficiency in its suppliers and in its own

Retail and economy

It is vital for Britain that the retail industries' role in wealth creation is understood by planners and regional strategists, says **Geoff Steeley**, Chair of the NRPF Research Group

operations. The resources released by that efficiency gain are immense and are as powerful in the economy as any new invention for industry or bonanza of natural resource. It is vital for Britain that the retail industries' role in wealth creation is understood by planners and regional strategists.

For it to continue to produce efficiency-led growth and social welfare, a few things in the planning process need to be strengthened.

I've already mentioned the sterling work of the ONS in making information and intelligence available. But planners need to be willing and able to understand and use it. It is therefore in Britain's wider interest that planners and local government engage directly in the research scene – which is disastrously neglected at present.

A second area – surprise, surprise – is accessibility as a resource. All industries depend on it: retail vitally so. Like many natural resources, accessibility is slow to change and requires long-term investment. Transport strategies for remodelling and developing accessibility in towns and their catchment areas seem to take even longer to formulate and implement. This would not be tolerated for any other major wealth-creating industry. The big problem here is co-

ordinating public investment with market-led endeavour.

These three things – joined-up government, meaningful statistics, and accessibility for retail – are crucial to enable our retail industry to continue to deliver efficiency-related wealth and services to the economy.

What can competition do? At present, many are confused about this issue. Competition addresses at least three things: the price of goods, the power of companies, and the performance of towns. All three are related and can support or damage each other. But planners are especially interested in the last of these.

Wealth creation requires regional policies that engage with the relations between towns, dealing with both their potential and their vulnerability in an endeavour to make best use of investment and change. Competition policy needs to adopt the efficient operation of towns as a major objective, and not to sacrifice all to the price of beans or one facet of company warfare.

Efficiency creates wealth. Let us make sure we have in place urban and regional strategies for retail that enable that to happen. ■

This item is based on an article written for the June 2003 issue of the British Retail Consortium's magazine, Solutions.

NRPF – 2002-2003 highlights

- Two Forum events: 'RDA Economic Strategies – The Retail Dimension', and 'Retailing and Regional Strategies – The Eastern Region: A Case Study'.
- Publication of *Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access – A Companion Guide to PPG6*, funded by the BCSC Education Trust, the DTLR, and Rees Jeffreys Road Fund.
- Start of a major research project on 'Secondary Shopping'.
- Successful application to the European Commission for a research project on 'Leisure and Retailing', to be run jointly with Norwich City Council and others.
- Third annual review and complete update of the *Bibliography of Retail Planning*, including an updated 'Retail Planners' Bookshelf'.
- Completion of the 'Retail Data Library' project. Collaboration with the Society of Property Researchers established.

- Website upgraded to include the full *Bibliography* and other NRPF publications. Steady growth in website usage achieved.
- Publication with the TCPA of *Trading Places* – a set of articles on retailing and planning by Professor Cliff Guy.
- Three editions of the NRPF Newsletter published.
- Lunch meeting with senior officials from the ODPM.
- Grosvenor becomes a member of the NRPF.

During the year the Research Group met every two months. In addition to developing new projects, the group received presentations on the Planning Portal, the ODPM Town Centre Statistics project, and planners' education. The Board met four times, continuing to attract a high degree of input from member firms and representatives from the LGA. The current members of NRPF are listed on the back page of this newsletter.

What do we want from regional spatial strategies?

Issue 6 of this newsletter asked you to consider 'What do you want from RDAs?' So far, no good. We are still witnessing the dying debate on local planning reform and only slowly seeing the re-emergence of debate on planning policy and mechanisms. But something is stirring. It is now opportune to ask a different question: 'What do we want from regional strategies?'

Work in the East of England Regional Assembly is tackling the issue of retail policy. London, too, is dabbling, and hints of something afoot are leaking out of the regions – although not, we notice, certain parts not to be shamed. So, the NRPF is arranging a seminar this autumn to debate the issue and consider matters flagged up in the East. See you there.

There are some seriously confusing matters that need resolution. What is a catchment area? What is a sub-region? Does town centre policy contain retail policy? Can PPG6 be a sufficient basis for long-term strategy? Are big boxes and competition effectively outside planning? And so on.

And how are we going to deal with 'need' for durables in food superstores; will the food be local policy and clothes be regional? Oh dear.

So where are we at? Debate seems to be homing in on a regional approach to defining retail policy areas at an urban catchment scale and making this explicitly different from a local plan town centre policy. The retail hierarchy idea appears to be too rigid in rapidly growing or declining areas. In heavily developed areas, clusters of towns specialising rather than competing seems to be a useful notion.

Issues repeatedly being raised are:

- Within a catchment how dominant should its centre be?
- Can retail policies be separately controlled and promoted in terms of goods and scale?
- Could a regional approach to transparent investment be a determining basis for growth – or be very specifically not so on, say, sustainability grounds?

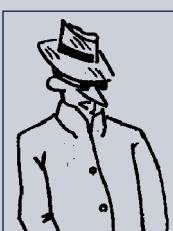
Having asked in an earlier issue what we want from RDAs and their regional economic strategies, **Geoff Steeley** turns his attention to regional spatial strategies

Some things seem to be certain. The first is that regional and local authority boundaries cannot be a basis for retail policy formulation or implementation – at any scale. The second is that transport policy and programmes are key determining factors. The third is that retail policy for regeneration and social inclusion will not operate without public support. The fourth is that, procedurally, subsidiarity should prevail.

Whatever we may think about these matters, the approach to be adopted at

regional level will necessarily vary, and in any case (or at least in the southern half of Britain) be shaped by the Government's commitment to its growth sub-regions. It may be, too, that the retail investment process and the customer choice process will drive the policy more strongly than many would like. My view is that sustainability is waiting out there to slowly but surely put us all in our place. ■

Geoff Steeley is Chair of the NRPF Research Group.



Snooper, retail FORUM's roving reporter and sampler of retail environments, on the marriage of shopping and leisure

Not lightly or inadvisedly

The marriage of shopping and leisure can be a beautiful thing, if entered into in the spirit of the prayer book – 'not lightly or inadvisedly'.

In Milton Keynes, the two have come together as adjoining friends – loosely, sharing a design culture, but quietly aware that if things don't gel they can go their own way. In Reading, too.

Basingstoke is going further – not all the way, but further.

There, the Festival Place scheme is a partnership between generations. Grand-dad – the old town; Mum – a well managed middle-aged post-war scheme; and the young couple – Retail and Leisure, vigorous, lusty and with it, cuddled up to the family. And all three bound together in a coherent plan.

At the heart of this achievement is the designers' command of internal volume and external space-making. Where the new scheme integrates with the old, a long hinge line has been created, whereby the low old ceiling soars up into a light-filled galleria and the old floor skips down to a concourse that flows out into new leisure spaces. Thus it is that two-level multi-use spaces plug into the past in convincing ways architecturally, in pedestrian flows, and in trading. Externally, the large bulk leisure structures flaunt their style and create peripheral walk routes into safe, friendly, and exciting spaces that also connect cars, buses and walkers into the old town and the new town world. There's some air, too. Well done. ■



Festival Place, in Basingstoke – coherent partnership between generations

Secondary shopping – its role and vitality

In most large towns, in addition to the heart of the town centre where the multiple retailers are located and pedestrian flows are high, shopping facilities include a number of more secondary streets where shops are smaller and occupied mainly by independent businesses, pedestrian flows and property values are much lower, and the environment is less attractive. Such towns also often contain district or local shopping centres.

These secondary shopping locations, together with the centres of small towns satellite to regional and sub-regional centres, and small seaside towns, have the potential to provide attractive and sometimes unique shops and services and meet important local needs. But too often that potential is unfulfilled, and policy makers and property owners and occupiers are unable to reverse decline and bring about lasting regeneration.

The NRPf has therefore commissioned CB Hillier Parker to undertake a major

national research project on 'The Role and Vitality of Secondary Shopping'. This will be based on detailed case studies of secondary shopping in a sample of towns. In each, extensive surveys, analysis, and consultations will be carried out over a six-month period. Interviews with the local planning authority will also be undertaken – the assistance of local authorities in currently being sought.

The objective will be to identify:

- the reasons why secondary shopping remains secondary or is declining;
- obstacles to regeneration;
- potential engines of growth; and
- principles and practice for achieving regeneration.

The results should enable more effective local authority policy responses and assist private sector investment.

The research is sponsored by the BCSC Education Trust, the ODPM, and Marks & Spencer. The Project Director at CB Hillier Parker is Jonathan Baldock, who led the company's research for the

NRPf on 'The Sequential Approach to Retail Development', the results of which were published in February 2000. ■

Did you know... ?

Retail rankings, 2003 (2002)

1 (1)	London West End
2 (2)	Glasgow
3 (3)	Leeds
4 (4)	Nottingham
5 (10)	Manchester
6 (6)	Cardiff
7 (7)	Southampton
8 (9)	Reading
9 (8)	Norwich
10 (11)	Bluewater
11 (5)	Chester
12 (13)	Kingston upon Thames
13 (15)	Birmingham
14 (16)	Leicester
15 (12)	Edinburgh

Big winners, 2002-2003:

Basingstoke	+109 (from 140 to 31)
Romford	+24 (from 73 to 49)

Source: Experian

The NRPf's 'Retail Planners' Bookshelf' (which can be found on the NRPf's website at www.nrpf.org) lists key recently published documents about retail development and planning issues – publications that you can't afford to miss. In the second of a series looking at each work in turn, Cliff Guy reviews *Retail Impact Assessment*

BOOKSHELFreview

Retail Impact Assessment: A Guide to Best Practice

John England

Routledge, London, 2000,

ISBN 0 415 21666 4, HB, £80, 225pp.

This book provides a rare example of an experienced practitioner writing at length about methods used in planning practice. It also benefits from research carried out while the author was studying for a PhD at Newcastle University. This enables him to situate 'best practice' advice within a wider background which includes the changing retail planning policy context within the UK, studies of actual (rather than predicted) impacts of various types of off-centre retailing, and a survey of local authorities' views.

The book is intended to serve two markets – the professional working in the retail planning field; and the planning or surveying student who specialises in

retail planning – although its cost (£80) will unfortunately limit its accessibility to the latter. Its main value is in providing advice about reliable and comprehensive methods of assessing the likely impacts of new retail development.

The author concentrates mainly on economic (trading) impact, and follows up a thorough review of methods widely used in practice with his own suggestions for best practice. Quite rightly, he insists that assessment of trading impact is supported by surveys of household shopping behaviour in the areas affected, rather than relying upon estimates of new store turnover gained from company-wide information,

coupled with guesswork about market penetration or trade draw rates.

He also deals in some depth with the health checks which are needed to judge how a trading impact might actually affect a town centre. Recommendations are supported throughout by numerous checklists and a detailed 'worked example' in chapter 10.

This book should be essential reading for anyone involved in either carrying out impact analyses or trying to evaluate other people's. It is the only book in its field, but, fortunately, it is authoritative, lucid, and comprehensive. ■

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

The National Retail Planning Forum. Limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales 3071181. Registered Charity No. 1059869. NRPf Board Members: The Boots Company, BCSC, Chelsfield, Grosvenor, John Lewis Partnership, Legal & General, Lend Lease, Local Government Association, Marks & Spencer, Prudential Portfolio Managers Ltd, Tesco Stores. For further information on the Forum and its activities, please contact George Nicholson, 6 Copperfield Street, London SE1 OEP. Tel./Fax: 020-7633 0903. E-mail: Gnich06499@aol.com. Website: <http://www.nrpf.org>

Retail Forum is published with support from the ODPM. Printed on recycled paper by RAPSiderweb Ltd.