

## PPS6 – planning for retail?

There remain a lot of questions to be resolved before a satisfactory final version of PPS6 emerges, says **George Nicholson**

Launched just prior to Christmas, the draft planning policy statement PPS6: *Planning for Town Centres* has perhaps not received the attention it deserves, given its implications for retailing. But a number of concerns over the likely implications were raised at a meeting of representatives of the NRPF on 20 February, featuring a presentation by Michael Bach of the ODPM Planning Directorate.

Responding to questioning, Michael Bach revealed that the emphasis now is on delivering 'successful places'. No-one present felt that the policy emphasis on town centres launched with PPG6 was wrong, but there was concern that the retail focus of the previous guidance had been diluted. Indeed, the word 'retail' does not appear in the new guidance's title.

One of the NRPF's major ongoing concerns – made forcefully to the DTI Retail Strategy Group (due to report shortly) – is the lack of understanding within much of the public policy process of the importance of the retail sector to the UK economy. The new statement – unlike the previous PPG6 – does not include a section on 'planning for retail developments'. Instead, what is now planned is a series of yet to be published 'good practice guides' running alongside the new PPS6, covering:

- assessments of need and impact;
- application of the sequential approach; and
- strategies for smaller centres and the evening economy.

These are not expected until later in the year and will, it is assumed, also be subject to consultation.

The recently published *Policy Evaluation of the Effectiveness of PPG6*<sup>1</sup> spelt out that the planning for retailing process started in 1977 with a Circular on *Planning and Large Stores* issued by the then DOE, and has subsequently been developed in successive

circulars and guidance notes, leading up to the publication in 1996 of the final version of *PPG6: Town Centres and Retail Developments*. It is interesting to compare this process with that of the development of housing policy, from a circular in 1989 to the full-blown housing policy contained in PPG3.

A key recommendation in the *Evaluation* study is the need to streamline any new guidance – something that could hardly be said to apply to the new document. Other issues – such as an over-emphasis on development control, the need for a regional dimension, clarification on need and impact, and proper monitoring – have, however, been tackled, at least in part. But as with so much of the public policy, the lack of comprehensive data underpinning the process was revealed by the *Evaluation*

researchers. As they point out, this is essential to monitoring policy effectiveness.

In a speech to the Retail Property Forum on 11 February, ODPM Minister Keith Hill spoke of concern that PPG6 had been seen as too strongly focused on protecting town centres, rather than promoting them. He stressed the need for positive and pro-active planning, with an emphasis on growth. However, concern was expressed by NRPF members that the ideas of 're-balancing' and 'growth' contained in PPS6 had not been properly thought through. They also stressed that a very large question mark hung over the new guidance's chances of success while the question of resourcing the process remained so unclear.

Quite a lot of questions remain to be resolved before the final version of PPS6 emerges. Michael Bach's parting shot was to throw down a challenge to interested parties to come up with positive amendments – a challenge that I am sure will be met, judging by the intensity of discussion at the meeting. ■

**George Nicholson** is Secretary of the NRPF.

## Calling the retail community – online discussion and information exchange

The internet changes at a rapid pace, and 'community' has become a vital aspect to research-led sites. Over the coming months the NRPF website is being redesigned to reflect a new focus on discussion among the retail community. Central to this will be the introduction of a series of articles reflecting the changing nature of retail in the UK and beyond. Each article will be linked to a new discussion forum, allowing users to share ideas and discuss emerging issues. The website will become a portal for retail information, with a fresh new design and more of a human face.

During the coming weeks sample pages will be placed online, and we will be interested to hear your views on them. If you would like to comment on any aspects of the new design, please e-mail [andy@plannet.co.uk](mailto:andy@plannet.co.uk), and we will send you a link to the developing site. We are also looking for regular columnists: if you think you could contribute a 500-1,000-word article, please get in contact (T: 020-7633 0903. E: [Gnicho6499@aol.com](mailto:Gnicho6499@aol.com)).

We look forward to welcoming you to the new NRPF site in the second quarter of 2004. ■



<sup>1</sup> *Policy Evaluation of the Effectiveness of PPG6* CB Hillier Parker and Cardiff University for ODPM, Jan. 2004

# Getting it together

The regional development agencies (RDAs) are charged with the duty of enabling regional *clusters* of economic development to be devised that can power both economic progress and sustainability. The targets of such work are seen as:

- leading-edge companies, especially the SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises);
- efficient use of infrastructure;
- interaction and interchange of ideas and technology; and
- shared expertise and manpower.

A cluster is a mutually supporting powerhouse and a driver for competition – which is where retail is at.

The economic function of a city centre is not just to lower the price of beans or be a venue for late-night drinking, nor is it a crammer to keep the green belt NIMBYs quiet, or to maintain pension-sustaining land values. The city centre is itself a *cluster* – ready made for the RDAs, and abandoned at their (and our) peril. So, what does retail want of the RDAs?

Writing in *Green Futures* magazine (Jan./Feb. 2004), Ben Walker and Anne-Marie Brouder recently set out eight actions that RDAs should take to put clusters together, linking economic drive with sustainability:

- link cluster policies and sustainable development policies at strategic level;
- make sure this approach spreads through regional organisations;
- tailor their interventions to individual clusters and sectors;
- focus on some quick wins so as to enthrone businesses;
- promote shared learning, and networking within clusters;
- stress how economic, social, and environmental benefits go hand in hand;
- encourage regional assemblies to scrutinise how clusters deliver on sustainable development; and
- keep checking on linkages and how to improve them.

They are not alone in this. In the USA, Gary Gates and Richard Florida (respectively, a demographer at the Washington-based Urban Institute, and Professor of Regional Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh) are researching the city centre as a focus for economic growth: '*Cities are creative hubs, whose diverse groups of people interact. This is what drives creative energy... Place has become more (not less) crucial...*' And, closer to home, Luke Mayhew, writing in *New Urban Futures* magazine, identifies links between sectors in cities: '*Links need to be recognised in the High Street where one retailer*

**Geoff Steeley** suggests three priorities for retailing from the RDAs' work in fostering clusters of economic development

*might drive volume and another drive distinctiveness.'*

What does this mean for us? What do we want the RDAs to do with our clusters? Let's keep it simple and identify just three things:

- *First:* Unblock the transport infrastructure log-jams and invest in significant upgrades in city centre accessibility. This will require greater involvement in transport planning over long time-spans and engaging with sustainability aims. For starters, the RDAs could collectively and nationally push for cash for accessibility management. Whether this is dominated by public or private mechanisms may be politically important, but for the city clusters it matters little what the mechanism mix is: doing it – and doing it long – matters.
- *Second:* Link together the investors in change. Retail is a multi-skill and multi-task activity. The brains and drive that are needed to produce wealth creation are present throughout all industries. By bringing linked uses together in the city centres, the interaction and exchange of skills, ideas, and people can be facilitated. Why are the powerhouses of health, education, retail, governance, finance, and leisure spattered in space and isolated in enclaves? Their people and clients need to be together. It is only

since the 1960s that their internal economies of scale separately spawned the diaspora into the suburbs and fields. Now new growth needs a re-clustering. The major blockage is the property process. Land assembly needs to be targeted as a major city centre activity for RDAs.

- *Third:* Promote quality. Over half of retail sales occurs outside city centres – in small towns, suburbs, free-standing malls, and specialist localities. These places *serve*. Without complementary *service* they quickly transmute, sometimes horribly – and often die. Consider: if half of sales occurs in places likely to fail to provide efficiency and effectiveness in delivery, the impact on national wealth creation could be blighting right up and down the production chain. Competition alone is not an answer: it can drive the top; it fails to address the rest. To deliver efficiency of service across the board requires localities to achieve attractiveness that complements the clusters of the cities. These places need programmes of maintenance and adjustment, driving quality, distinctiveness, and renewal.

So: When next, hugger-mugger, you pin down your RDA – over wine, or plans, or catastrophes, or, as a last resort, eyeball to eyeball – get shopping. ■

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

## Did you know... ?

### Top 100 Retail Centre Ranking by Annual Expenditure

| Centre                | Class                      | Expenditure (£ million per year) |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 London – West End   | Primary Centres            | 4,161.1                          |
| 2 Glasgow             | Primary Centres            | 2,360.1                          |
| 3 Birmingham          | Primary Centres            | 2,206.4                          |
| 4 Manchester          | Primary Centres            | 1,691.7                          |
| 5 Leeds               | Primary Centres            | 1,422.6                          |
| 6 Nottingham          | Primary Centres            | 1,393.9                          |
| 7 Bluewater           | Out-of-Town Regional Malls | 1,353.8                          |
| 8 Newcastle-Upon-Tyne | Primary Centres            | 1,322.0                          |
| 9 Liverpool           | Primary Centres            | 1,286.2                          |
| 10 Bristol            | Primary Centres            | 1,249.3                          |
| 11 Trafford Centre    | Out-of-Town Regional Malls | 1,223.1                          |
| 12 Cardiff            | Primary Centres            | 1,175.0                          |
| 13 Leicester          | Primary Centres            | 1,163.5                          |
| 14 Reading            | Primary Centres            | 1,151.6                          |
| 15 Norwich            | Primary Centres            | 1,117.6                          |
| 16 Sheffield          | Primary Centres            | 1,082.9                          |
| 17 Meadowhall         | Out-of-Town Regional Malls | 1,048.5                          |
| 18 Southampton        | Primary Centres            | 1,034.0                          |
| 19 Cambridge          | Major Centres              | 963.7                            |
| 20 Croydon            | Metropolitan Towns         | 960.3                            |

# Linked trips, viability, and vitality – research scoping paper

The NRPF's Research Committee seeks to encourage research into retailing and has focused on five areas:

- accessibility;
- the *Bibliography of Retail Research*;
- secondary shopping;
- retailing/leisure; and
- retail statistics.

Now the NRPF wishes to promote research to determine the extent of 'linked' or multi-purpose trips when people travel to a shop in a particular type of location – and whether such additional activities undertaken during that visit have an effect on the vitality and viability of town centres.

The term 'linked trips' is referred to in a number of UK government documents – most notably in PPG6 and the new draft PPS6 – and is often an issue at public inquiries into retail developments in edge-of-centre locations. However, while there is an acceptance that 'linked trips' are 'good' for the viability and vitality of a centre, the term seems to have a number of different interpretations. The NRPF is also concerned that the research to support the view that linked trips have such a beneficial impact is not well known, even if it does exist.

The Forum has found it useful to commence the research process by commissioning a scoping paper setting out what *is* known – both in theory and in practice – and advising on what needs to be researched and/or disseminated.

The paper, *Linked Trips and the Viability and Vitality of Centres of Retail Activity*, has now been prepared by Latchezar Hristov and Jonathan Reynolds of the Oxford Institute of Retail Management (OXIRM). It is a vital resource for planning inspectors, developers, planners, hard pressed councils, and town centre managers. There should now be no excuse for any not knowing what each is talking about and trying to achieve.

A key section in the scoping paper reveals there are a variety of definitions of 'linked trips', which means that care has to be taken in interpreting research (has nothing been learned nothing from our early work on walking<sup>1</sup>?).

The paper examines the work of developers and retailers – often not publically available. Important work from the

Netherlands and the USA is described.

Following an overview of work by researchers and practitioners, the paper sets out a gap analysis, and areas for in-depth research are presented with recommendations for an approach to further research.

It is hoped that visitors to the Forum's website who know of other work in this field not covered by the scoping paper will notify the NRPF Secretary, George Nicholson (T: 020-7633 0903. E: [Gnicho6499@aol.com](mailto:Gnicho6499@aol.com)). The Forum wishes to encourage interaction on this and other topics between researchers and practitioners in academic, commercial, and government spheres.

Money looking for research projects to support could well start here. Among the potential study topics are:

- in-depth data review;
- the relevance of urban and trading structures;
- the significance of retail and other town centre functions; and
- behavioural changes.

These subject areas may look ominous, but the scoping paper is in real English and makes all plain. Visit the Forum website ([www.nrpf.org](http://www.nrpf.org)); look out for the NRPF seminar; get wise. ■



**Snooper**, retail FORUM's roving reporter and sampler of retail environments, follows some design lines

## A good line in design

The Eastgate Shopping Centre in Inverness was a prize-winner in last December's BCSC Awards, and deservedly so. The Centre tucks well into the town and links the High Street, the railway station, and the 'sequential' retail along the Milburn Road. A good line. Inside, a dome surmounts a concourse and unobtrusively turns the shoppers' routes through a right angle – a nice effect.

But something else turns good thinking into a result. Around the high base of the dome and stretching out from there runs a thin line of neon tube lighting, glowing a designer shade of lavender. It works well, and unobtrusively. A thin line that defines spaces, integrates perceived routes, and unifies a necessary mix of trades, fascias, and activities. A good line in design.

Another line, that of the River Thames, set in mosaic in the floor at Bluewater, works pleasingly too, gently running and integrating. In contrast, the yellow lines on the walkways through the Barbican are not beautiful or unobtrusive. They are, however, vital: the complexity of the place for visitors is daunting, but those lines rescue and serve. Friends in need indeed.

In St Albans you can't see a line. You are one. It is a one-sided shopping street that becomes two on market days. The packing of the market against the shop fronts concentrates trade and pedestrians and becomes a live line – making the town alive.

Design and line. You know it makes sense. ■



*Eastgate Shopping Centre in Inverness*

<sup>1</sup> *Accessibility, Walking and Linked Trips*. National Retail Planning Forum. See [www.nrpf.org/](http://www.nrpf.org/)

# Online data catalogue goes live

The online data catalogue developed by the NRPF, the SPR (Society of Property Researchers), and Geofutures is now live on the web. It's a valuable central source of information on the wealth of digital datasets currently available to retailers and planners. To maximise this value, the feedback of NRPF members will be vital, ensuring that the catalogue can be updated and enhanced to meet their needs.

In addition, it's important to continue to build participation in the data catalogue project: any exercise of this kind is only as good as the information that feeds it. In the first phase of gathering the meta-data records (information about the whereabouts, availability, and nature of available data), strategic consultancy Geofutures Ltd inevitably encountered some issues.

Director Mark Thurstain-Goodwin explains:

*'You can never expect 100 per cent participation. With smaller data provision companies we found willingness to contribute, but sometimes insufficient time resources to give us all the information we requested. Local authorities experience the same constraints.'*

*'Some larger companies hold data in different forms in different divisions, and it isn't always possible to track down a single overall decision-maker. And property companies were the toughest nut of all to crack – even NRPF members. We hope to win them around and make the data catalogue even more comprehensive and accurate in future.'*

The data catalogue provides information on datasets in four main categories (set out below), with user-friendly search facilities to help locate relevant resources. If you haven't yet visited the site, see it at [www.sprweb.info](http://www.sprweb.info) – and please send any comments, feedback, and data contribution offers to Cathy Linacre of the SPR at [clinacre@rics.org.uk](mailto:clinacre@rics.org.uk) ■

## Retail planning datasets included in the online data catalogue

### Base map data

Raster and vector topographical data  
Communications – road, street, rail  
Government boundaries  
Media boundaries  
Census boundaries  
Road databases  
Gazetteers  
Postcode points, boundaries, & maps

### Geodemographics/ demographics

Lifestyles data  
Income data  
Population data  
Housing statistics

### Property

Rentals  
Planning applications  
Retail databases

### Miscellaneous

Retail & shop locations  
Shopping centre information & maps  
Travel-to-work areas  
Shopping/retail coverage  
Drive times  
Retail databases  
Town centre analysis  
Land use change

The NRPF's 'Retail Planners' Bookshelf' (which can be found on the NRPF's website at [www.nrpf.org](http://www.nrpf.org)) lists key recently published documents about retail development and planning issues – publications that you can't afford to miss. In the third of a series looking at each work in turn, Leigh Sparks reviews **BOOKSHELF** *review*  
*Retailing, Sustainability and Neighbourhood Regeneration*

### Retailing, Sustainability and Neighbourhood Regeneration

By Michael Carley, Karryn Kirk, and Sarah McIntosh

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2001, ISBN 1 84263 049 0, 79pp., £14.95.

Regeneration is one of the 'in-phrases' of the last few years. Together with social inclusion, regeneration is seen as the main hope for many areas that have suffered decline and deprivation. But there are relatively few studies of what is meant by regeneration in a retail context, and those that are available seem to have highly contrasting approaches and definitions of the problems and the solutions.

Michael Carley and colleagues' report on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is therefore of considerable importance as it takes a broad look at the retail dimensions of regeneration, sustainability, and neighbourhoods.

After two introductory chapters examining local shopping, the third chapter provides some key lessons and issues from the research project and specifically from the 14 case studies undertaken. The case studies themselves are summarised in the following three chapters before a conclusion on a

strategic approach to retail regeneration is presented.

The report concludes that *'if there is a lesson to arise from the 14 case studies, it is that there is no one right answer as to how to achieve retail regeneration'* (p.13). This might be a function of the breadth of the case studies chosen, but is more likely to illustrate the very locally specific nature of both the problems and the solutions. The key lessons of success are described as:

- attention to the retail marketplace;
- leadership;
- involving residents;
- local vision;
- organisational innovation;
- use of investment; and
- environment and community facilities.

All these factors seem eminently sensible and practical, but emphasise the real hands-on approach needed. Local issues are clearly

vital within a realistic and long-term plan. Where projects have been less successful they are characterised by the team as:

- having short-term aspirations;
- lacking vision and strategy; and
- failing to work towards sustainability.

Regeneration and sustainability in neighbourhoods are important concerns throughout the country. The scope for 'making a difference' is enormous. Short-term 'sticking plaster' schemes are of no real use in alleviating the situation. The Carley report offers no 'toolkit' for the perfect scheme, but through its careful use of examples and ideas suggests how some of the pitfalls can be avoided. No two schemes will be the same, but perhaps the management and organisational principles do bear replication. ■

*Professor Leigh Sparks is with the Institute for Retail Studies at the University of Stirling.* ■

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