

'The Role and Vitality of Secondary Shopping – a New Direction'

CB Richard Ellis has been commissioned by the National Retail Planning Forum (NRPf) to undertake a major national research project, sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Marks and Spencer Plc and BCSC Educational Trust, on The Role and Vitality of Secondary Shopping. The research team at CB Richard Ellis comprised Jonathan Baldock (Project Director), Elizabeth Mason and Claire Wright, in consultation with the NRPf Steering Group. This research project was also made possible by the support and assistance of a number of Local Authorities, who supplied data and took part in interviews.

Secondary shopping locations (which includes town centre fringe locations, district centres and local shopping/small freestanding 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, property owners and occupiers have been unable to reverse decline and bring about lasting regeneration.

CB Richard Ellis was therefore commissioned to undertake this piece of research, based on detailed case studies of secondary shopping in a sample of large and small towns in different parts of the country. In each location, extensive surveys, analysis and consultations have been carried out, and interviews with the local planning authority undertaken. The objectives of the research were to identify:

- National trends in retailing which are relevant to and have affected secondary shopping;
- Recent trends in the provision of shops and service businesses in secondary shopping locations;
- Reasons why secondary shopping remains secondary, is declining, or has succeeded in changing to a new role;
- Obstacles to regeneration;
- Potential engines of growth;
- Principles and practice for achieving lasting regeneration.

In summary, our principal conclusions are as follows:

- Our research strongly suggests that the changes in secondary shopping over the last 10 years have been more the result of national trends than of particular local events – although local events have also had specific local effects;
- The role and vitality of small town centres and district centres (in particular) depends on the relationship of the centre to its catchment area, and the demographic and socio-economic profile of that catchment area;
- The prosperity of small town centres and district centres also depends to a significant degree on the competition they face from main food stores elsewhere, such as from superstores on out-of-centre sites, and whether or not they contain an 'anchor' main food store;
- Shop vacancy rates in secondary shopping have been falling in recent years; but there are small pockets of severe decline and high vacancy. Such areas of decline are generally due to obvious locational factors;
- Secondary shopping areas generally comprise a much more diverse range of businesses than prime retail areas in the same towns;
- Although they have maintained occupancy by retailers or service businesses, in property market terms, secondary shopping areas have been declining relative to prime retailing;
- Survival of retailers and service businesses in secondary shopping areas depends substantially on specialisation;
- Until recently most secondary shopping streets in large town centres have not been included in public realm improvement programmes; and such improvements have not been widely carried out in small town centres or in district centres in recent years;

- The maintenance of private sector owned buildings and shopfronts in secondary shopping areas is also generally inferior to that in the prime retail areas;
- Major retail developments in or near secondary shopping areas have tended to have large local effects, such as in shifting the 'centre of gravity' of a centre, and thus making secondary shopping areas even more peripheral;
- Retail Statements submitted by developers in support of planning applications for major retail developments rarely consider the impact on secondary shopping areas per se;
- In addition to their impact on the 'anchor' food shopping role of small town centres and district centres, out-of-centre food superstores are now increasingly threatening non-food shopping and services in such secondary shopping centres;
- Planning policies in secondary shopping areas mainly take the form of frontage designations with changes of use restrictions; with limited identification of potential development sites in or on the edge of such areas;
- Most site assembly and promotion of development by local authorities has been in or adjacent to the prime retail areas and for the benefit of those areas, and there has been little new development in or adjacent to secondary shopping areas;
- There is concern and negativity amongst many existing businesses in secondary shopping areas, rather than a spirit of positive cooperation and support; and there is little support from existing businesses for town centre management or local traders' organisations;
- There have been few planning appeals in secondary shopping areas in recent years.

Our recommendations cover the following key themes:

- Creating a coherent pedestrian environment;
- Managing change;
- Creating financially viable developments;
- Improving the public realm;
- Supporting independent businesses;
- Applying asset management principles and niche marketing;
- Using new methods of leasing;
- Obtaining specialist advice;
- Evolving more sophisticated planning policies;
- Applying town centre management;
- Ending differential pricing;
- Applying the sequential approach and controlling development;
- Undertaking further research.

Together these recommendations form a wide ranging approach to the regeneration and support of secondary shopping. We believe that if applied, they have the potential to strengthen the role and vitality of secondary shopping, and take it in a new direction of greater prosperity and an improved service to the local community.

Copies of the Report of Findings and Recommendations and the Case Study Analysis report are available from the National Retail Planning Forum, 6 Copperfield Street, London SE1 0EP. Telephone 020-7633-0903. Details of the Main Report are also available on the NRPF Website: www.nrpf.org.