

SHOPPING CENTRES IN WALES

1. Introduction

This report is in outline only and if the Association agrees with its general content then a full report can be prepared.

The report outlines some of the issues with shopping centres (of all sizes) and a possible way forward (or not)

2. Cause and effect

Local shopping has changes and with it the slow demise of many centres. What has changed is:

- a) Covid – its effect on shopper patterns.
- b) Loss of banks.
- c) Loss of anchor shops.
- d) Internet and online shopping.
- e) Lack of free parking and excessive parking charges.
- f) Delivery to your home by supermarkets and other retailers.
- g) What shoppers are looking for.
- h) Business rates making business non-viable.
- i) Out of town centres with free car parking.
- j) Planning – allowing development on major roads comprising fuel stations and eating establishments – mainly fast food.
- k) Pressures on people's time.

3. What is happening

The world has changed (see 4 above) and we need to recognise this.

The large strategic centres in Wales (Cardiff and Swansea) and in England are being chosen by major retailers. For example John Lewis and other international retailers are staying or going to set centres. All the other centres around lose them with no replacements.

Travel is easy for people to get to these centres. An example is that Liverpool is not that far to travel to from North Wales. Therefore why do the traditional larger retailers need to be in the other centres who were surviving before.

The High Street was hit very hard when Woolworth's ceased trading, then BHS and M&S pulled out of many centres. What was left was not attractive enough to sustain a centre.

4. Types of centres

Towns and cities have six types of centres as follows:

Strategic

These centres are the very large ones (for example Cardiff).

These centres attract the large international retailers and are generally doing well.

Major

These centres are or were important centres in the past (for example Llandudno, Rhyl, Bangor etc).

These centres are not attracting enough footfall to sustain the larger retailers in numbers.

Provincial

Smaller but important local centres (i.e. Holywell, Prestatyn)

These centres have lost many of their main retailers and are experiencing empty shops leaving a 'toothing effect',

Local

Small centres (Denbigh, Ruthin).

These centres have a smaller number of shops to service local needs. Shops in these centres are difficult to sustain leaving a lot of units empty.

Specialist

These are centres which have a particular character and centre of attraction (Conwy, Bets y coed).

These centres are few and are generally standing up to the pressures of the retail environment. There may not need to be any action here.

Out of town

Out of Town Centres have had a severe effect on town centres but are still popular for the regular shopper. No action may be needed here.

5. Issues

The main issues which have affected the town centres and their attractiveness to shoppers include:

- a) Empty shops – often looking untidy.
- b) Non retail frontages – estate agents, solicitors, evening retailers (takeaways).
- c) Lack of reasons to go to centres – loss of banks for example.
- d) Cost of being in the centre (rates and rents).
- e) Slow re-actions of the planning system to meeting a changing environment.
- f) Parking (lack of it or cost of it).
- g) Lack of public toilets.
- h) Local Authorities not understanding or listening to business retailers, often this is caused by too many restrictions and rules.

6. Actions into the future

The actions that could be taken into the future would include:

a) Do nothing

Let the market take its part and leave local plans as they are with identified centres as they are today.

Effect is that centres will continue to struggle and in some cases 'die a slow death'.

b) Try revitalising centres

To expend money in trying to revitalise centres with grants and incentives.

Effect is that a lot of money is spent with little or no result. Evidence of this is the Mary Portas report and actions taken in several towns with £100,000 invested in each. In each case the town has not improved in some cases has got worse.

c) Change strategy

Reduce the size of centres for retail in local plans and invest in incentives/grants to enable those businesses outside the new centre to move into it creating a more vibrant centre but smaller. This would include a review of parking provision and parking charges.

Effect Either town centres do not respond and continue to struggle or the centre could be revitalised with a more pleasant environment to attract shoppers to a more select centre.

7. Recommendation

The following is recommended:

- a) A full report is commissioned to be presented to Welsh Government and Parliament.
- b) A local MP and SM to be found to promote the report in the Senedd and Parliament.
- c) To seek funding from the Welsh Government for a full study.
- d) Town and Community Councils should have more say and involvement in looking after their own centres.

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