Town Centre Comeback

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The picture of retail in market towns has been the subject of passionate debate during the last decade. Swinging from the highly sensationalised perspective of the *decimation of the high street* by supermarkets and out of town shopping centres, to a *more positive view* of town centre and edge of town developments coupled with optimistic visions of a more diversified future.

What should we believe?

This guide takes an objective view of the current research and debate. It augments third party research with our own snapshot of 26 towns and offers guidance on what you can do to *revive your high street.*

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Action for Market Towns thanks all award entrants for their time and effort in entering the awards and permission to be included in our case study database. Thanks to all those who responded to the amt-i survey.

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1. Introduction

The picture of a soulless collection of multiple retail stores, interspersed with boarded up shops, shabby streets and struggling independent retailers typifies what many people see as the small town high street of today.

The press would have us believe that people have left their local shopping streets in droves, in favour of out of town shopping centres and large supermarkets. Many have condemned high street shopping to the scrap heap and see our small town centres as being refocused around sleeping and eating. This guide examines the picture and goes beneath the sensationalism to take a look at a range of reports and our own findings.

Throughout this guide we make reference to multiples, these are traders that have a countrywide presence and are well known household names. Regional shops are identified as those with stores / units in several towns throughout one geographical region only and Independent shops are identified as those that are specifically local to the town.

The Context for this Guide

Some facts about small towns:

- There are roughly **1600 small towns** across England.
- More than **one in five people (22%)** in England live in small towns.
- These towns grew in population by **4.3%** between 2001 and 2009 compared to a **4.7%** population growth for England as a whole.
- **One in three small towns**, however, experienced a population decrease.
- Even so, small towns have the second highest proportion of national businesses (**21%**) and employees (**17%**) after Metropolitan areas (**33% and 36%**).

[Commission for Rural Communities, 2009]

Some fact about the retail sector:

- Retail continues to be the **UK's largest private sector employer** with 2.8 million employees.
- It makes **significant economic and social contribution** to every local community, region and nation.
- The UK's **top 75 retailers employ two-thirds** of the total workforce, while there are around 150,000 sole traders operating in the sector.
- Despite the recession, the turnover of the retail sector in 2009 was £315 billion which equates to **8% of UK GVA.**
- There are **188,000 retail enterprises**, operating in around 286,000 retail establishments across the UK.

[Skillsmart, 2011)

2. The Situation

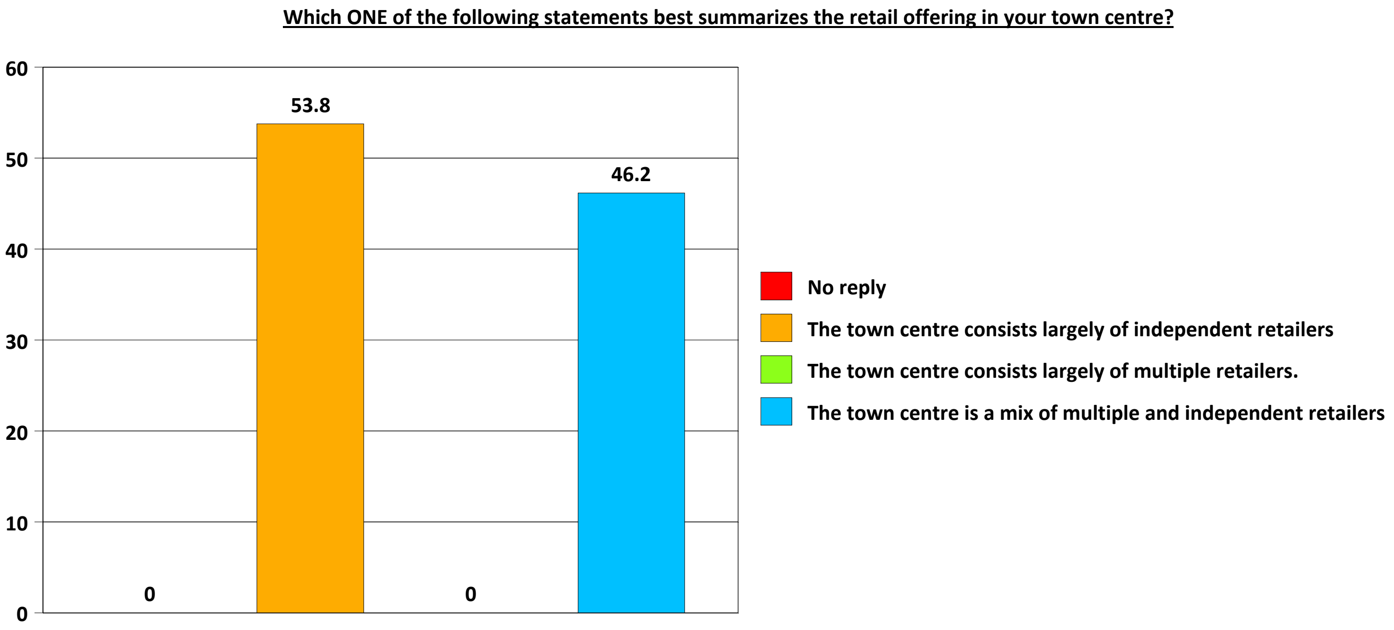
Clone towns? The mix of multiples and independents in small towns.

Action for Market Towns consultancy division, amt-i has collected data from 75 towns through the benchmarking service which measures 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to determine town centre vitality and viability. As part of this service, under KPI 3, amt-i looks at key attractors and multiple trader representation. It is our view that the vitality of a town centre depends highly on the quality and variety of retailers represented. National retail businesses are considered key attractors and are particularly important in terms of attracting visitors and shoppers to a town. However, the character and profile of a town often also depends on the variety and mix of independent shops that can give a town a "unique selling point" and help distinguish it from other competing centres. A sustainable balance of key attractors and multiple names alongside local independent shops is therefore likely to have the greatest positive impact on the vitality and viability of a town. The following table illustrates the mix of independents, key attractors, multiples and regional shops that we have found across 75 market towns nationally.

	National
Independent	68%
Key Attractor	4%
Multiple	19%
Regional	9%

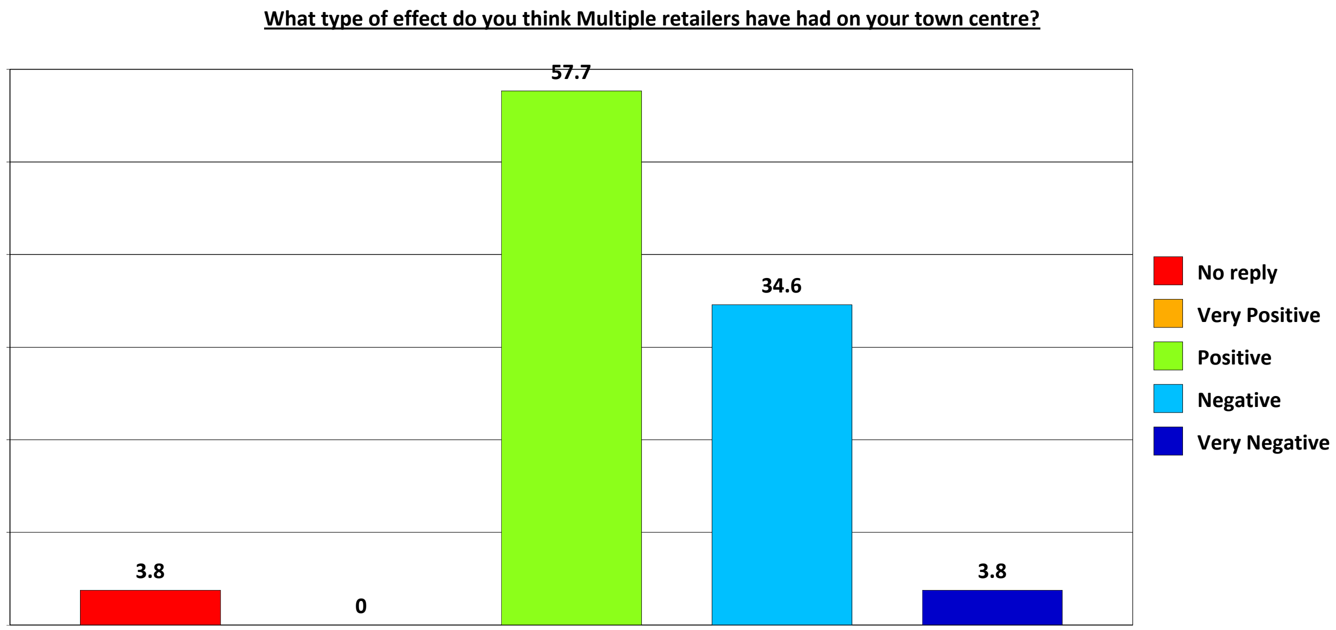
Further research, conducted as an online survey of Action for Market Town members and non member contacts, found 53.8% of the town representatives (26 towns) reported that their town centre consisted largely of independent retailers, whilst 46.2% stated that their town centre was a mix of multiple and independent retailers. None of the localities indicated that their town centre was made up of largely multiple retailers, unsurprising when 53.8% of the 26 towns represented in the analysis consisted of a population below 10,000.

The chart on the following page, illustrates the response we received when asking about the ratio of Independent and multiple traders in small town centres. An array of answers were provided, ranging from 100% independent: 0% multiple to 40% independent: 60% multiple. The average response from the localities in terms of the ratio of Independent retailers in their town centre was 71.5%, whilst in regards to multiple retailers the figure was 28.5%.



These findings suggest a slightly higher number of independent stores survive in our small market towns than the New Economics Foundation “Clone Town Britain” reports may suggest. This is likely to be because amt-i surveyed more small towns in terms of population size and number of A1 retail units, compared with the towns listed in the New Economics Foundation reports.

More than half of the localities we surveyed, reported that the Multiple retailers in their town centre had a ‘Positive’ impact, whilst 34.6% stated their effect had been ‘Negative’ and 3.8% ‘Very Negative.’ Interestingly, none of the localities chose the option of ‘Very Positive.’

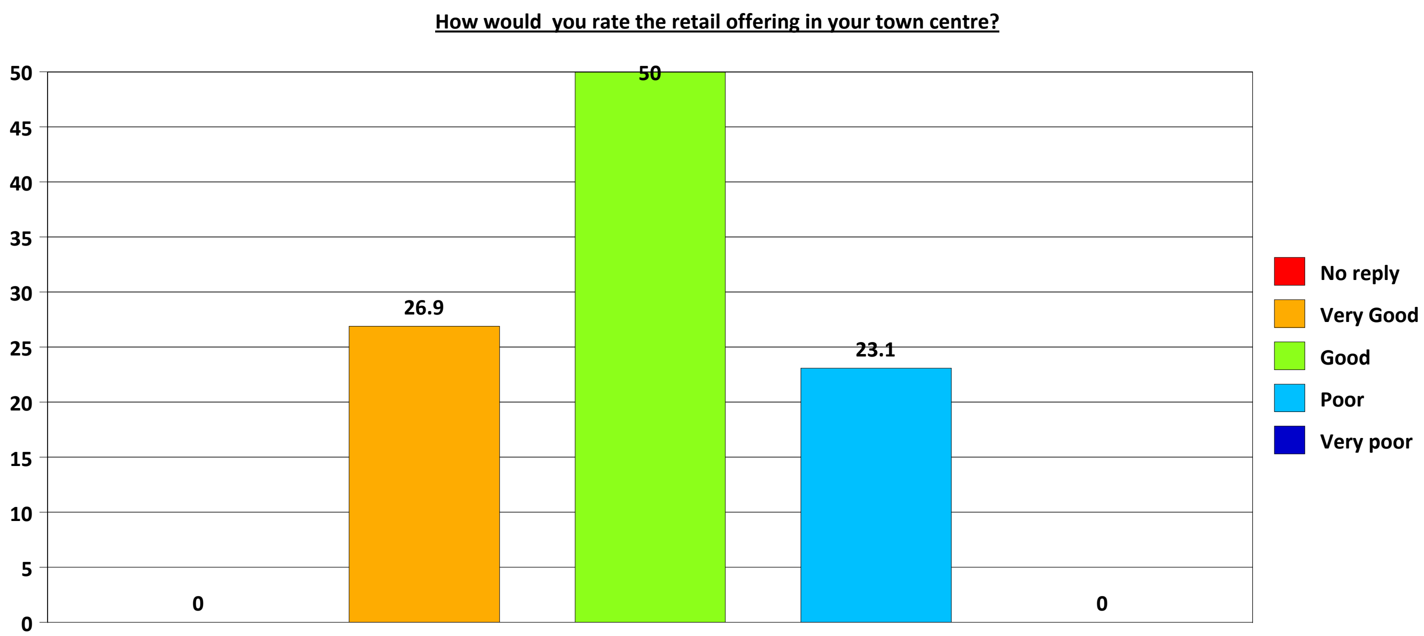


Expanding on why the Multiples had a 'Positive' impact on the town centre a key theme emerged around their role as an attractor of visitors and increased footfall. The other theme was that Multiple retailers improve the mix and offering within the town centre.

One theme to emerge in regards to why the Multiple Retailers had a negative impact on the localities town centre revolved around the larger chains taking business away from the smaller traders. The range of responses received can be found in the appendix.

Town centre quality ratings and vacancy rates

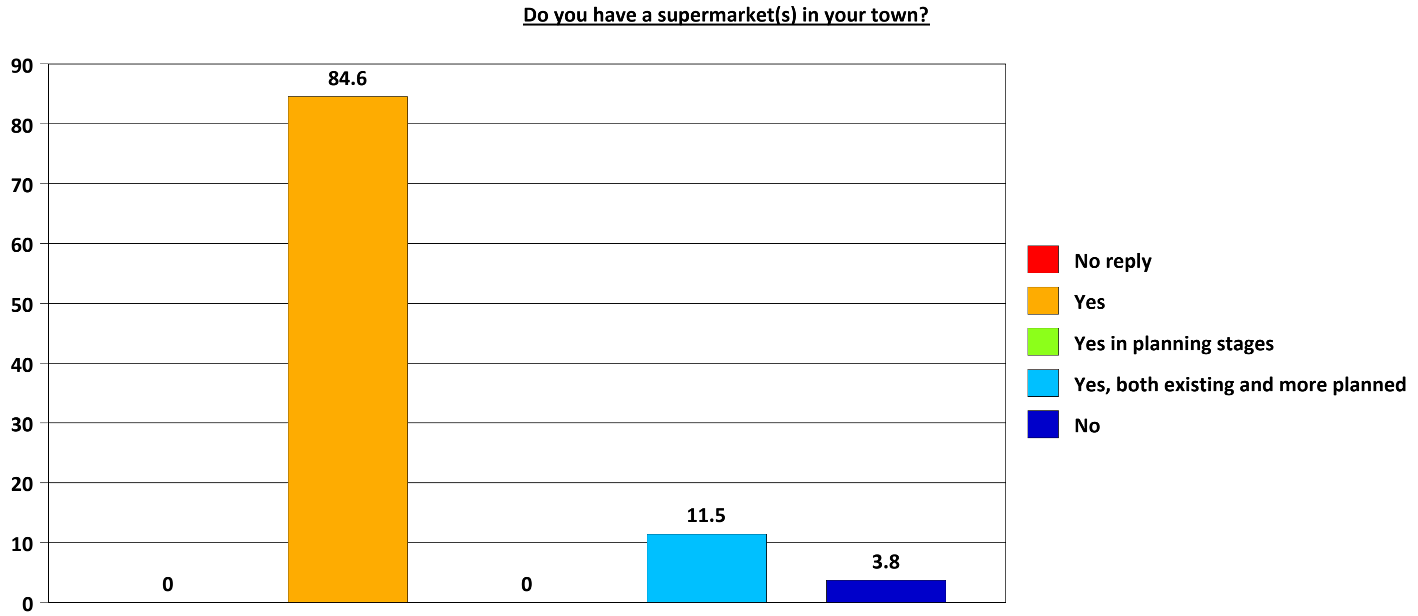
In our survey 76.9% of the 26 localities rated their town centre retail offering as 'Good' (50%) or 'Very Good' (26.9%). Interestingly, paradoxical responses become evident when the questions of 'How would you rate the retail offering in your town centre' and 'Which one of the following statements best describes the retail offering in your town centre' were cross tabulated. For example, 71.4% of the localities who rated their town centre offering as 'Very Good' were based in towns consisting largely of independent retailers. Similarly, the majority (66.7%) of localities who reported their town centre retail offering was 'Poor' were also based in this type of town.



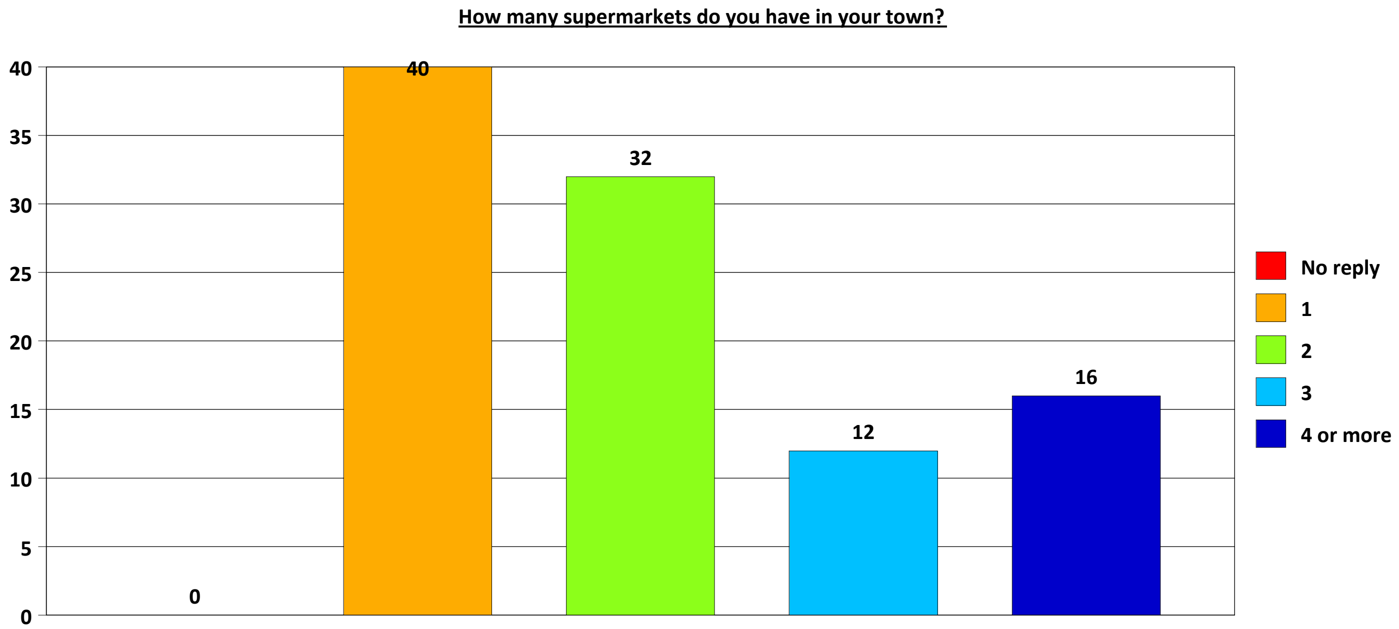
amt-i's Benchmarking results show vacant units amongst the 75 market towns surveyed during 2010 at 8%, which compares favourably with the national picture of 14.6% vacancy rates as reported in May 2011 by the Local Data Company http://www.localdatacompany.com. Once again, common sense suggests that this could be the result of a sample of smaller towns but the data to confirm or refute this was not available at time of writing.

Supermarkets – a snapshot

The following response to our online survey gives a snapshot of the number and location of supermarkets in our small towns. (Respectively 26 and 25 towns responded)



96.1% of the localities who responded to the online survey stated that they had a supermarket within their town, 84.6% of this figure indicated they had an existing supermarket whilst 11.5% stated both existing and another planned.



40% of the localities represented in the survey housed one supermarket and 32% housed two supermarkets. 28% of localities were home to three or more supermarkets. 80% of respondents indicated that they had a supermarkets based in the town centre, whilst 52% housed supermarkets on the edge of the town centre.

3. Views and Visions

Current research

The debate over the future of the high street and in particular independent retailers facing increasing competition from multiples, has raged a while. Here we review a few of the studies most relevant to the topic. One can find support for both the positive and negative views of multiples and supermarkets, expressed by our survey respondents.

Some of the key points to emerge from this review include the location of supermarkets, with edge of town and town centre developments offering a potentially more positive effect than out of town developments. Ensuring a good balance between independents and large food stores/multiples in the town centre and supporting independents through a range of policy interventions.

New Economics Foundation (NEF)

The New Economics Foundation (NEF), in their 2003 report, **"Ghost Town Britain"** said of Britain that it "used to be a nation of shop-keepers. We have become a nation of shop-busters." It highlighted the increasing loss of a variety of local shops, most visibly in villages and market towns that have for decades formed the backbone of local community life. It also predicted what it called 'Ghost Town Britain' where high streets, and those accessing them, would have fewer facilities and amenities, leading to swathes of remote areas, not conducive to traditional community life.

In 2010, and following on from their 2005 report, **"Clone Town Britain"**, NEF published a review, ***"Re-imagining the High Street: Escape from Clone Town Britain".*** *It stated that the* overall trend towards "Clone Town Britain" (a clone town being where over half the stores are chains) continues, despite widespread publicity about the loss of local identity. It suggests that 41% of UK towns are clone towns and a further 23% are on the verge of becoming clone towns.

All Party Parliamentary Group for Small Shops

In 2006 a group of politicians published a report on the future of the high street. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Small Shops held an Inquiry entitled "High Street Britain: 2015" with the aim of highlighting the problems of the smaller retailer (as distinct to large multiples) and to draw attention to their social as well as commercial role. It explored trends affecting the retail market with a view to predicting the state of local retail in 2015, and offering recommendations around this.

The report highlighted the importance of the small retail sector as a key driver of entrepreneurship, employment, skills, local economies, innovation, and sophisticated business networks. It also talked about the social benefits of the sector including accessibility to goods and services, social inclusion and community activities.

In essence, the evidence collated during the Inquiry pointed to many small shops across the UK having closed by 2011, with few independent retailers taking their place. The reasons behind this included: a heavily unbalanced trading environment, exacerbated by national policies in areas such as planning and skills development which have unwittingly benefited the larger companies.

The report suggests a number of policy areas that could be usefully addressed to redress the balance including:

- Implement a moratorium on further mergers and takeovers until the government has brought forward proposals to secure diversity and vitality of the retail sector.
- Establish a retail regulator
- Revise the two-market ruling – the blurring between 'top-up' shopping and 'one-stop' shopping with multiples active in both markets
- Introduce comprehensive codes of practice across the retail sector – including between suppliers and retailers in the grocery sector
- Review the tax system and close the Jersey VAT loophole
- Review application of rate relief system as applied to independent trading on the threshold of viability – extending rate relief especially to those on the high street or in community locations
- Introduce new requirement for all local authorities to adopt a retail strategy within the Unitary Development Plan (Local Plan)
- Implement measures to restrict the environmental impact of shifts in the retail sector – for example food miles

University of Southampton

In December 2010, a University of Southampton-based research team published a report, **"Revisiting the Impact of Large Food stores on Market Towns and District Centres",** with the results of a major three-year, two-region, before/after study of the impacts of food store developments on UK market towns and district centres. The study was commissioned by Tesco, the researchers are fully aware that the report could be accused of being biased for that reason but they have made a determined effort to produce a rigorous academic study. This study challenges the findings of the DETR study on the same topic in 1998 – a study which was heavily criticised in drawing conclusions that were not supported by clear evidence. The Southampton work is a thorough report backed up by detailed case studies. The eight case studies include a cluster of four market towns and a cluster of four district centres, some of which were expecting a large store either in the town or on the edge of the town.

Four key findings emerged from the study:

1. Trade 'claw back'– shoppers more likely to stay in town to shop, as opposed to driving further afield to out-of-town locations. The number of 'immediate' catchment respondents leaving their towns/centres for main food shopping reduced significantly from an average of 56% 'pre-opening' to 25% twelve months after the opening of the new stores. This was accompanied by a significant decrease in car usage and an increase in walking on food

shopping trips. The case study centres became significantly more attractive to consumers in the wider catchment areas. The percentage of those choosing to do their main food shopping in the towns/centres which experienced a new food store development increased from an average of 19% pre-opening to 43% twelve months later.

2. Linked Trips - The new supermarkets are not just being used for 'one-stop' shopping. Via the mechanism of linked trips the existing town centres have experienced increased footfall and urban 'buzz', helping to maintain and enhance their vitality and viability. Averaging across the six cases which have experienced a new food store development only a third of consumers claim 'never' to combine the new food store with the existing town/district centre. 68% of respondents claimed to combine visits to the new food stores with visits to other shops or services in the existing retail centres. These linked trips findings together with 'claw back' and 'pull power' evidence is in marked contrast to the negative view of 'edge-of-centre' food store development presented in the DETR (1998) study.

3. Benefits to consumers and traders – One year on from the opening of the new food stores, 70% of consumers concluded that the new store was beneficial for themselves and their families. The main reason given by consumers for perceiving these benefits relating to the belief that the new stores had attracted more people to shop in the existing centre, helping to increase its vitality and viability. The positive attitude was also attributable to the travel-saving benefits of improved local access to full-range food retail.

   A more complex picture emerged when looking at benefits to traders. A year after the opening of the new food stores, almost half of the local traders interviewed thought that overall the effects of the new food store were 'good' for the vitality and viability of the centres. The majority of traders said that the new food stores had no effect on their business. The views of the remainder of traders were evenly split between 'good' and 'bad'. When asked about the main factors that affected their sales in the year after the new stores opened, the majority of local traders stated that the economic climate was the primary factor. Any reduction in sales was thought to be mostly due to general economic conditions and low consumer confidence (44%) compared to those who thought it was due to the new food store (15%).

4. Changing retail and service unit composition of the centres – the study found little evidence to support a view that centres experiencing food store development have experienced greater economic health problems in the recession than centres not subject to the impacts of food store development. It found that local media/ popular opinion could often create negative perceptions of the impact of large food stores on towns, which might actually be attributable to, for example the last recession.

Association of Convenience Retailers

The Association of Convenience Retailers is currently undertaking a **Knowledge Transfer Partnership** study which seeks to better understand the economic, social and environmental contributions that local shops make to their communities. The project has two stages:

1. Evidence Review – academic work regarding the contributions that local stores make to their communities; trade press coverage of relevant topics; ideas generated by a programme of informal store visits.

2. Programme of Research – this is currently being formulated to include:

   Multiplier Effect: to measure the bottom line benefit associated with contributions to the local community of a particular store.

   Brand Equity: to better understand what customers value in a store, how they differentiate between different stores in the local area and what ultimately drives their choice when deciding where to shop.

   Environmental Benefits of Local: measuring the environmental benefits of a store to the local community through existence as a local shopping option and initiatives undertaken.

The project is still in progress but should provide some interesting insights into the sector.

Towards Big Society

Within the context of decentralisation of the planning system, the Decentralisation and Localism Bill aims to shift power from central government back into the hand of individuals, communities and councils. It includes provision for the creation of Neighbourhood Development Plans and Orders, as well as new Community Rights such as the Right to Buy. The policies will have far-reaching impacts, not least giving communities a far greater say over the development of their area, how this will impact the local retail sector remains to be seen.

At time of writing, Mary Portas has just been appointed as government advisor to reverse the decline of our high streets. “The first thing I’ll do is to look at the worst-affected areas,” says Portas, “but more importantly at what will make buzzing, thriving and relevant high streets for the consumer. The new ideas will come from what the customer needs.” [1]

[1] What makes the perfect high street? Mary Portas has been appointed by the prime minister to reverse the decline of our town centres. What does she need to do? Sunday Times Main paper page 1 Tim Rayment and Kate Walsh Published: 22 May 2011

Visions for our high streets

Mary Portas' vision of a customer led revolution is shared by Andrew Simms Policy director, nef:

"Our high streets can become centres of economic and social revival. Just what is needed for a 'Big Society'. By bringing empty properties back into use we could see a proliferation of new local food hubs to sell and learn about local food production. There could be energy saving hubs to provide the latest on saving energy, going green and saving money. There are openings for time banks and tool share initiatives to bring people together, again these save people money and increase the range of services available locally. Local finance hubs that offer a range of alternative arrangements to the discredited big banks – such as credit unions and local currency schemes could also expand. All of these could underpin a local economic renaissance, increasing vibrancy and resilience."

For Portas, high-street shopping is more about pleasure than bargains. "Experiential shopping is about loving being in the shop — the smell, the light, the people — rather than saying, 'I could have got that on Amazon £4 cheaper'". She imagines a high street that is "more social, with meeting spaces and diversity". [2]

The perceived customer demand for a shopping "experience" is echoed by Dan Thompson, Empty Shops Network founder, April 2011:

"Town centre shopping is becoming a leisure activity. For convenience, out of town or a shopping mall is easier; for price and choice, the internet wins. The places that are doing well combine interesting, niche retail with good quality arts and culture, decent public realm, local distinctiveness and a vibrant, varied cafe culture. The pop-up shop is becoming a feature of the high street, adding interest and variety and increasing the time people spend in town centres. Empty shops reused can support new business and old, give space to creative industry and social enterprise alike, and add art, culture, community and fun to our high streets."

However, not all believe that the high street will necessarily need to become some sort of special experience in the future. Geoff Burch commenting on AMT's Prosperous places forum suggests that rising petrol prices will turn the 'best price' reason for shopping in multiples at retail parks, on its head.

"I have some extra points to make and that is that actually the high street is probably destined to become an everyday place to shop again and not just a niche."

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[2] As above

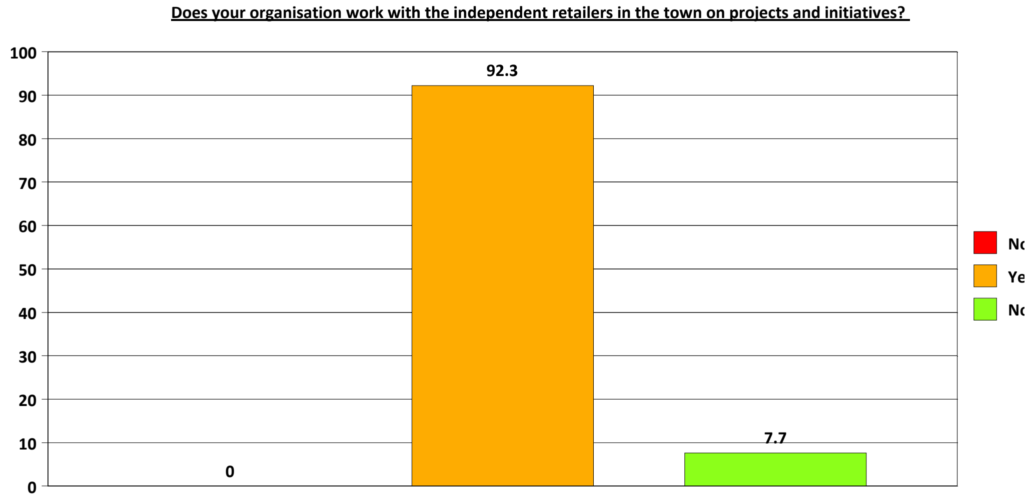
4. Vibrant towns - what is being done

For this guide, Action for Market Towns' research and consultancy division, amt-i, asked a range of people including economic development workers, town centre managers, community partnership representatives and local business owners about working with independent retailers and multiples and how successful this has been. amt-i also compiled two new case studies of best practice which illustrate how towns can work with supermarkets and multiples in a positive way.

This section offers a summary of our survey findings, the new case studies, some of the most relevant case studies from our 2011 market town awards and projects from our online case study database. For details of how to access these and 100's of other case studies, including full funding information and contact details of the people who made them a reality, see the resources section at the end of this guide.

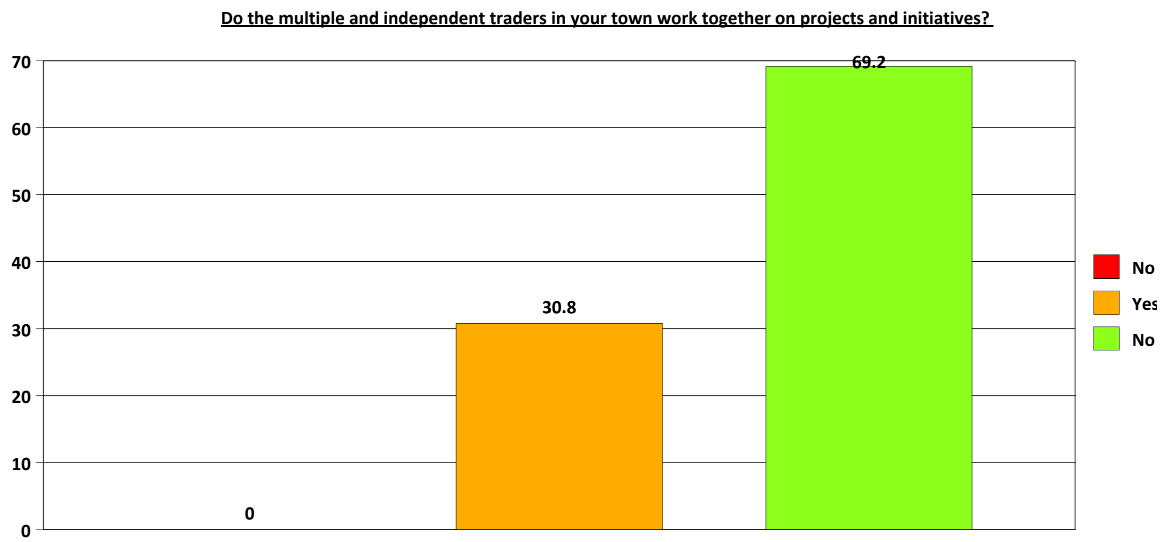
Working with independent and multiple retailers – survey findings

Of the 26 towns that we surveyed 92.3% indicated that they worked with the independent retailers in the town on projects and initiatives.



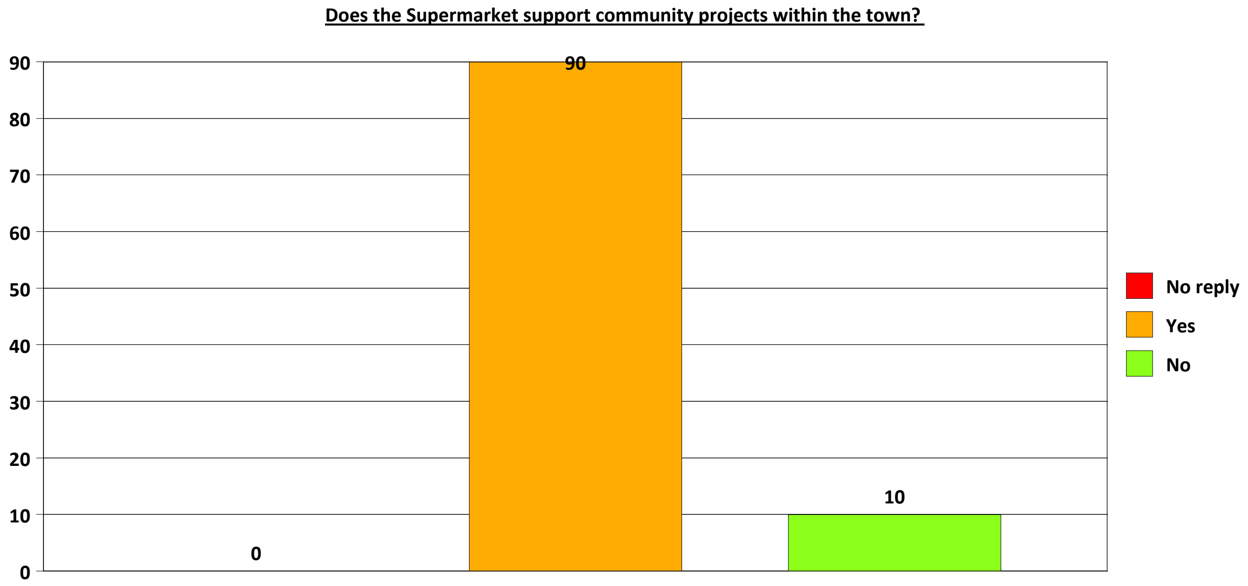
A number of themes emerged from how the localities worked with the independent retailers. Promotional and Town Events were commonly cited; Representatives from the independent retailers sitting on the local Chamber of Commerce Board, or working with the organisation was another theme; finances and funding were mentioned, as were loyalty schemes. In contrast to the 92.3% of localities who worked with the Independent retailers in their town centre, this figure markedly dropped down to 46.2% when asked if they worked with the multiple retailers on projects and initiatives. In regards to the type of work which took place, the responses were much more varied than illustrated with the independents; with sponsorship emerging as a theme. The responses can be found in the appendix.

The majority (69.2%) of the localities indicated that the multiple and independent retailers in their town centre did not work together on projects and initiatives. From the 30.8% of those whom did work together, via 'Events' was a theme.



In terms of the success of the localities working with independent retailers on town projects and initiatives, the majority (70.8%) reported that they had been 'Successful'. As with the localities working with their independent retailers, the ratings were high in regards to the successfulness (87.5%) of the independent and multiple retailers working together on town centre initiatives and projects.

Working with Supermarkets – survey findings



In localities where there was just one supermarket, 90% reported that the retailer supported community projects within the town. Interestingly within those locations with more than one supermarket this figure regarding the support of community projects dropped to 20%. 13.3% of towns with multiple supermarkets also indicated that none of the supermarkets supported community projects. Community project support focused on funding involvement. See the appendix for the responses received.

In regards of the successfulness of the supermarkets in supporting community projects, 81.7% reported that this was either Successful (63.6%) or Very Successful (18.1%) in their locality.

Case Studies

The following case studies paint a vivid picture of towns that are making a comeback. The first two case studies illustrate the importance of a strong evidence base in planning and executing successful projects. The following three case studies provide examples of working positively with supermarkets and multiples and getting the most out of section 106 agreements. The next three cases look at how towns can increase footfall through effective partnership working, and town-wide promotion. Creating space for and making the most of their rich arts, heritage and culture through productions, events and the effective use of digital communications. The final three case studies in this section look at entrepreneurial start ups to develop local market stalls and channels for local produce.

Measuring Town Centre Performance – Cheshire East

Cheshire East Council required a systematic measurement of the performance of the 14 market town centres and urban localities of Crewe and Macclesfield. In response to this need the Economic Development team purchased multiple Town Benchmarking licenses allowing the town councils, community partnerships, local government officers and keen volunteers representing the 14 market towns to conduct the innovative process. Representatives from the fieldwork teams in each town were all trained at two well attended seminars run by amt-i. One of the benefits of the approach adopted by Cheshire East was that those trained and new to the system could share good practice.

Once the data had been collected and reports generated by amt-i, a further two events were held to disseminate the findings. The dissemination process ensured that the reports may be used as a tool to measure the progress of initiatives and developments in the town centres.

As a result of the benchmarking process actions to increase footfall to towns have been identified such as developing marketing in the region. Cheshire East are committed to measuring and understanding the performance of their town centres in a longitudinal and regional and national context and the Benchmarking approach is already underway for 2011.

"AMT's expertise has been invaluable to Cheshire East Council. Their staffs' attitude and flexibility to working with us has been extremely helpful and supportive and we look forward to continuing to work with AMT as our Sustainable Towns work develops."

Jez Goodman, Economic Development Manager, Cheshire East

An integrated Approach – Princes Risborough

The Mayor of Princes Risborough contacted amt-i following the AMT Convention in Melton Mowbray. The Mayor indicated some of the problems effecting market towns which had been discussed at the event were relevant to his town. Allied to this issue, a wide range of research had been conducted in the Buckinghamshire town over the last 10 years from a plethora of agencies, but this work had not been collated into a document to outline the;

- Opportunities for Princes Risborough to be marketed as a destination
- Selling points of the town centre
- Areas for improvement

Mike King, Senior Consultant, worked through the documents to provide an easy to understand report for all key stakeholders in the town to digest. Key recommendations from the report highlighted that Princes Risborough had an opportunity to market itself as a tourism destination for Walkers and Cyclists, but to do this the range of accommodation and attractions to keep visitors in the town, especially overnight needed to be improved.

Augmenting the secondary research, amt-i completed their unique Town Benchmarking activity within the town. As an example of the importance of a strong evidence base in defining future projects, prior to the benchmarking work, the impact of the market was felt to be minimal on the economy of the town centre. However, the evidence collected through the benchmarking process allowed this preconception to be dismissed; the impact of the market had an obviously positive effect on footfall in Princes Risborough. This finding led one of the local pubs to clear a derelict car park and use the space for specialist markets with great success.

Tesco Supermarket Expansion – New Mills/Whaley Bridge

This case study looks at a 106 agreement between High Peak Borough Council and Tesco. The planning application was for an extension to their existing store. The resulting agreement included townscape improvements, a vacant shops promotional grant fund, shop front improvement grants and improvements to town gateway signage, planting and maintenance.

Further agreements were made that Tesco will notify suitable local companies of contracting and sub-contracting opportunities, prior to tendering. The supermarket also agreed to working closely with the job centre, to advertise all vacancies, support unemployed people to access these vacancies and to recruit local people.

The vacant shops promotional fund was an innovative element of this section 106 agreement. The Borough Council requested money to help new business start ups that would not compete directly with Tesco and they accepted this proposition. Tesco haven't specified any criteria for the grants, this is to be determined by the Borough Council, who will also administer them. Possible criteria include £1500 up front for shop fittings and business training/coaching or staff training to hopefully lead to long term success. An additional £1500 will be available in 12 months. It may be that the criteria for the grants be focused on product, rather than service providers but this is still to be determined. Businesses applying to the vacant shops fund will also be eligible for the shop front improvement grants.

Key Lesson – "If you don't ask, you don't get. Our planners didn't think they would get these things but they asked and got. You have to tie it closely to the influence of the store vs. for e.g. to do up a park."

- ***Helen Pakpahan, Economic Development, High Peak Borough***

Supermarket Recruitment - Clay Cross

A project to ensure long term unemployed were able to take advantage of the employment opportunities offered by the opening of a new supermarket in Clay Cross. This project was led by North East Derbyshire District Council who worked in partnership with Chesterfield College, Jobcentre Plus, Skills Funding Agency and Derbyshire Employment and Skills Board.

The supermarket provided the partnership with information on what skills were needed and using the expertise within the partnership, these skills were developed through interview skills training and a pre-employment training programme.

The aim was to get 120 long term unemployed people into sustainable employment, however due to the calibre of both the training and the learners, 153 people were secured employment, 7 of which were selected for team leader positions and 16 were given higher skills positions.

The five week pre employment training programme covered; motivation, work/life balance; budgeting/finances, communications; team building and customer service.

Key lessons:

- Formal service level agreements were adopted between partners to guarantee resources and delivery.
- The programme needed to have the supermarket on board earlier rather than 4 months in.
- More human resources and time to run the programme would have been better.
- One strategic and one operational group would be used if the chance to run a similar project arises.

Pedestrian Link - Crewkerne 2011 West Zone Action for Market Towns Awards
Winner – Partnership and Strategic Working category

When M&Co. (Mackays) announced that they were intending to move into Crewkerne and extend an old shop, A Better Crewkerne & District (ABCD) saw it as an opportunity to get all relevant landowners together and ask them to improve the area. At an initial meeting in August 2009 all the landowners agreed the area needed improving and said they were willing to co-operate. At a meeting in October M&Co.'s architect put forward a proposed design for a demarcated walkway, with estimated costs. In March 2010 ABCD successfully applied for a grant of £10,000 from South Somerset District Council's (SSDC) Market Town Investment Group. This grant was used as seed funding and kick started discussions with the four landowners regarding financial contributions. As M&Co. were now on site carrying out works to the shop they agreed to project manage the creation of the pedestrian link and used their contractor to carry out the works.

In the meantime ABCD and the SSDC Community Regeneration Officer (CRO) decided to investigate further improvements to George Lane, a street linking the service yard and proposed walkway to the main high street. George Lane was not under highways authority and was full of potholes and weeds. A land search showed no registered owner of the lane, although a number of commercial properties required access. In July 2010 County Highways agreed to adopt the lane if it was resurfaced to a required specification. The specification was passed to M&Co.'s onsite contractor who priced up the works. ABCD and SSDC then persuaded M&Co. to fund 50% of the cost of resurfacing George Lane; they then approached all the owners of commercial property requiring access on the lane and asked for a financial contribution. Four local businesses made contributions and SSDC made up the shortfall.

By November 2010 George Lane was resurfaced and the pedestrian link had been created and was ready for use. The project was innovative in that it involved public, private and third sector organisations, working together for the benefit of the community.

Key lessons:

- Communication is vital in a project like this. The partners involved were scattered around the UK and obviously each has their own agenda. A District Council Officer and a representative from ABCD were the main channels of communications. They ensured that all relevant parties were kept informed and maintained channels of communication throughout. In this situation email was the best way to communicate.
- Don't be frightened to voice the wishes of the community.

- Be persistent. In this situation although supportive of the project, one landowner was initially reluctant to contribute financially. Rather then accept their decision a letter was written outlining the benefits of the project and providing evidence to back up those claims. After another discussion the landowner not only agreed to make a financial contribution they also intend to make changes to their own property, which will further enhance the area.

Exploiting Wallingford's Rich History 2011 South East Zone Action for Market Towns Awards Winner – Partnership and Strategic Working category

The overall purpose of this project was to boost the visitor economy whilst at the same time encouraging more local people to use their town. The anticipated increased footfall is expected to benefit the existing local businesses and encourage investment in the town.

Following two reports, one by the Civic Trust and the other by Lockwood, retail consultants, both concluded that Wallingford's economy needed to develop. The Town Council initiated a Town Healthcheck which was completed early summer 2008 and handed over to the Wallingford Partnership Ltd to action to help improve Wallingford's well being from an economic point of view.

The Partnership embarked on a consultation process involving residents, local councillors, and local parish councillors, and visited Care Homes where residents were not able to attend the public meetings. It also sent a questionnaire to all homes in Wallingford seeking comments.

Following these consultations, it was agreed that provided grants could be obtained from SEEDA through the Small Rural Towns programme, matched funded by SODC that the following activities should be included in the overall project scope:

- Develop a series of walks/trails around the town and local area supported by leaflets, MP 3 players and having the leaflets displayed on the web site.
- Install Wi-Fi internet access across the Town centre to include a web cam facility.
- Install brackets on buildings in the town centre to fly flags to help theme particular events.
- Provide additional Christmas decorations and a supporting electrical infrastructure connected into the existing street lighting system.
- Develop and extend the existing Town website, www.wallingford.co.uk to include an ability to create advertisements and accept payments by debit/credit cards.
- Improve direction signs and information boards around the town.
- Provide better information about events taking place in Wallingford to local villages.

The facilities provided by the project seem to have helped sustain the local businesses because the number of shops vacant in Wallingford is substantially less than other market towns and a number of new businesses have opened in this past 12 months. A recent survey carried out by SODC (January 2011) reveals that only 6.4% of shops in Wallingford (9 units) are vacant compared to an average of 14.8% for towns throughout the country.

What's In Limited – Thame 2011 South East Zone Action for Market Towns Awards
Winner – Business and Economy category

What's In Thame started as a community website designed to link all local information together into one simple accessible information point with a business directory included for revenue generation. This has now developed into a collaboration between multiple local organisations that have not only scaled to over 27 Town based websites going live but delivered social and community projects as an unexpected benefit.

What's In Thame has become the link that has enabled the community to get involved in initiatives such as the Give it a go day for sports and the streaming of brand new community driven video content into the website. What's in Thame has led by example and the Group now has 27 sites live in other communities.

This is the first community based website that offers all content through an iPhone application. This enables the extension of the Town's local information and services to a much larger audience who are now choosing to browse the internet on their mobile phones. One of the great benefits for the residents and visitors to Thame is the promotional messages that are displayed on the web and phone which is highly relevant and timely when they are shopping in Thame (iPhone) or thinking of shopping in Thame (web or iPhone). Businesses are able to load up vouchers and offers on the web site using pre defined templates so it is easy for them to do. In fact the entire process of setting up and changing content has been made very simple backed up by both online and telephone based help.

Diss Corn Hall Refurbishment 2011 East Zone Action for Market Towns Awards Winner – Social and Community category

A community-based project modernising the fine Diss Corn Hall and giving it new life as a centre for the arts, culture and heritage for Diss and its surrounding villages – made possible by the partnership of investment through Diss Town Council and management by the volunteer Diss Corn Hall Trust.

The success of this project has brought many hundreds of shoppers to the northern end of the town which in recent years has been suffering from the superstores, located to the south, and has been in serious economic decline.

The Trust appointed a highly effective manager who, through an imaginative events programme, has generated sufficient funds to significantly reduce the dependency on DTC and provide a model of financial stability for the future. Good marketing, using the press, effective brochure distribution and a well designed website has built awareness and audiences.

Woodbridge supports its town centre - Towns-4-Towns Exchange Fund project

This project formed part of a Towns-4-Towns Exchange Fund project between **Princes Risborough** and **Woodbridge**. Princes Risborough wanted to understand how other towns have managed to successfully engage with local businesses to fund town centre regeneration and increase footfall to their towns. With the help of an Exchange Fund grant from AMT they arranged to visit examples of best practice in four different towns to help inform their planning.

Woodbridge Town Centre Management has been tackling the recession with a number of unique initiatives. This field trip assessed two in particular:

- A web-based shopping guide
- A retail campaign to raise the profile of the town

Retailers in Woodbridge decided that they needed to promote their strengths – excellent, personal service and a unique shopping offer in a very attractive environment. Their advertising budget was limited and so the campaign to ‘Keep Calm and Carry on’ was key to reaching potential visitors across the country. The local community was involved in the campaign by supporting the local businesses and shopping local wherever they could.

The role of a town centre manager was highlighted clearly in Woodbridge; where many towns are cutting back on this resource this field trip illustrated that a good town centre manager can provide valuable expertise and more than pay for themselves through innovative activity.

The ‘Keep Calm’ Campaign was a prime example of an affordable yet innovative public relations exercise which reached a wide; both national and local target audience. Delegates learned that you don’t have to spend a lot of money on printed advertising material and advertising space in the local and national media to raise awareness of your town; a creative solution to a local issue can generate a great deal of wider interest.

The delegates were keen to transfer the idea of a business web directory to their own town. They felt that the web solution is cheaper and there is greater opportunity to change business details as new businesses arrive in the town and existing ones close. Delegates learned that a simple web format, professional designed and maintained is more cost effective in the long run.

The original seed funding came as a result of a section 106 agreement in Woodbridge when Tesco Supermarket expanded. The other projects were not expensive and often ran on a shoestring; with individual businesses contributing to the overall budget.

Hitchin BID Towns-4-Towns Exchange Fund project

This project forms part of a Towns-4-Towns Exchange Fund project between **Princes Risborough** and **Hitchin**. Princes Risborough wanted to understand how other towns have managed to successfully engage with local businesses to fund town centre regeneration and increase footfall to their towns. With the help of an Exchange Fund grant from AMT they arranged to visit examples of best practice in four different towns to help inform their planning.

In April 2009, Hitchin businesses voted to turn the local Town Centre Management scheme into a Business Improvement District (BID). All the businesses involved pay a small annual levy to fund projects and services that will benefit the area they work in, their customers, clients and employees – with the overall aim of improving their whole business environment

Hitchin in Hertfordshire is one of the first small towns in the county to gain BID status. This has largely been due to the hard work of Keith Hoskins, the Town Centre Manager.

For the next five years (the period BID status lasts before the next vote is due) the Heart of Hitchin BID management team set a series of objectives, covering 5 areas of activity:

- Safety & Security
- Clean & Gleam
- Access & Parking
- Hitchin 'Look & Feel' and Marketing
- Promotions & Events

The actions to date have included the appointment of three Town Centre Rangers to patrol the BID area for 120 hours each week – keeping in touch with BID members, acting as 'eyes and ears' and logging and organising action on graffiti, littering, cleaning, antisocial behaviour and shoplifting incidents.

CCTV has been improved or introduced in hard-to-supervise areas of the town centre and lighting improved in poorly lit areas. A full Shopwatch survey has been completed to enable the service to be improved and updated. Graffiti has been logged when spotted and dealt with, the Community Payback Team has been clearing and cleaning access routes to stores. Alleyways are regularly disinfected. A survey of car park usage has been completed so the viability of free or lower cost parking can be assessed.

Market improvements have been supported and have resulted in more stallholders and greater footfall.

Truly Local Shop – Stalham 2011 East Zone AMT Awards Winner – Business and Economy Category

Truly Local CIC Ltd has been set up to run a shop on the high street that will sell only items that have been either made, caught, brewed, reared, baked, grown, fermented, processed or crafted within a 35 mile radius of Stalham, thereby keeping it and your £s local.

The aims and objectives are to support, encourage and promote local producers and artisans, thereby reducing food miles and reducing the need for huge lorries to use small rural roads, bringing trade back to the high street and keeping jobs and money in the community. Stalham and Happing Partnership were able to achieve such a high standard due to the advice and support of the Norfolk Rural Community Council, the diverse talents of the directors and the amount of funding they were successful in obtaining.

The partnership learnt how complicated and expensive it is to set up and run such an outlet, and the amount of perseverance required. If the Truly Local Shop proves to be a success in Stalham they hope to open (in time) another in a similar struggling market town or village that does not have a shop nearby offering such services.

Make it Your Market – Huntingdonshire 2011 East Zone Action for Market Towns Awards Winner – Business and Economy category

The Make it your Market programme consists of a combination of free advice on how to set up your own market trader business, discounts on market stall pitches and the free loan of market stall equipment. It provides tailor made start-up advice for potential market traders and removes barriers to start-up.

Ongoing evaluation (including evaluation forms) by the project team has been a key feature of this project. As a partnership project, extremely constructive feedback between partners has resulted in a number of service quality improvements.

Since this programme began a number of similar national projects has been launched but the bringing together of partners at a local level brings additional benefits to this project. All partners involved in this project feel that they are contributing within their core service responsibility but by working together on this specific project feel that the end product has greater impact than the component parts (contributions).

This has enabled the project to be delivered on a very low budget and also produced additional and unanticipated benefits in terms of improvements to efficiency of local level service delivery, improvements that a national programme is unlikely to provide.

Slaithwaite Cooperative Limited – The Green Valley Grocer 2010 Yorkshire & Humber Market Town Awards. Winner – Business and Economy category

This is a community owned shop with a difference. Founded in a rush when the local greengrocer was about to close down by 2 members of the community partnership and 2 members of MASTT the local transition towns group. It is a greengrocer promoting local food and it is thriving and continues to increase its sales and impact on the small town centre.

The initial need was considered to be for a green grocer, to complement the other local suppliers and help make the local service offer viable, but the local food economy aspect had been recognised in the Renaissance vision consultation process. In a sense the need was also an opportunity.

The shop's community ethos is strongly rooted in being affordable and appropriate for all sections of the community. The community share ownership is structured to complement this and they have plans to promote the share ownership more strongly to widen the ownership base. Delivered to a high standard, demonstrated both by the strong sales and the impact on other shops in increasing their sales. Strong marketing and communications have generated considerable press interest. Over £25,000 worth of shares now held, 77% under £100.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

This S.W.O.T. analysis gives a generic view of the situation facing our small towns and an indication of what might be done. It is offered as a summary of the amt-i survey findings, literature review and views, visions and case studies of the previous pages. It paves the way for more practical pointers on what can be done in the next section.

Not all of the points in this analysis will apply to all towns, for example some towns have more attractive architecture; some have stronger community leaders and partnerships. The final section of this guide describes methods of evidence collection and reporting that you may wish to use to understand your own town's unique strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These include Action for Market Towns' Town Action Planning framework and amt-i's Benchmarking service.

Strengths • Existing diversity and strong independent shops • Local distinctiveness makes strong town brands possible • Passionate, driven and committed people working in partnership • Historical position as hub of community • Architecture or countryside attracts tourists • Surrounded by natural resources and assets which can increase resilience and local supply opportunities	**Weaknesses** • Poor retail offer, existing shops need to 'up their game' • Poor townscapes, public realm, traffic and parking issues • Lack of communication and partnership working amongst town councils, community groups and local business owners. • No obvious leadership and/or resources to drive change • Lack of knowledge of what can be requested and realised
Opportunities • Big Society agenda and Government support • Town wide marketing trend, training and supporting platforms e.g. My Card • Changing customer attitudes, demands for local product and a shopping experience • Low carbon agenda and rising petrol prices • Attraction of skills and experience from larger and possibly more expensive, urban areas	**Threats** • Multiples and supermarkets increasingly moving into town centre as petrol prices increase • Consumer spending expected to remain at low levels until 2013[3] • High rent and rates • Erosion of local supply chains and resilience through increase in multiples • Loss of young local talent to larger urban areas

[3] Andrew Goodwin, senior economic adviser to the Ernst & Young Item Club quoted in Telegraph, May 16th 2011 "Consumer spending 'to remain subdued for another nine years'", James Hall.

5. *Take Action – What you can do*

This section looks at a range of actions that you can take to improve your high street. Some of these suggestions are aimed at town councillors; some are aimed at local business owners and some at community groups or town partnerships. The actions each of these stakeholders can take are summarised by group in the appendix. Ultimately, all of these groups must work together to realise some of the vibrant visions glimpsed earlier in this guide.

1. Know your town

Collect evidence, demonstrate effectiveness and communicate success! A strong evidence base can ensure you identify projects that will have the greatest benefit for your town. It can help you to better understand your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and to leverage in funding and other resources.

Workbooks and guides such as Action for Market Towns' Town Action Planning framework (TAP) and amt-i's benchmarking system are low cost ways of gathering the intelligence you need to make your case. As well as greater understanding these tools can also increase credibility of community partnerships and business groups that may otherwise be seen as 'talking shops'. Actually getting out on the streets and speaking to business owners in the course of the research offers an ice breaker and can be the catalyst for further networking events and the creation or revival of a business forum. See the resources section for web links to the TAP and Benchmarking service and contact details.

Starting your project on a strong foundation of fact will mean that you can measure its effectiveness through comparing before and after vacancy rates or business confidence for example. This will help to maintain motivation amongst the project team, recruit more resources or members to the programme and demonstrate outcomes to funders or investors. It will also give you something to shout about, to raise the profile of your town with positive stories in the local press which will help raise civic pride.

2. Work with Supermarkets and Multiples

Although our survey results suggested that town partnerships and councils found it more difficult to work with multiple retailers than independents, the case studies reviewed in the last section were good examples of what can be achieved. Whilst pedestrian link ups are important, think about how you can go beyond the public realm and help independent retailers through start up grants and training as in the High Peak example. Remember; "If you don't ask, you don't get".

The key lessons from our case study towns included; to start earlier in getting the supermarket on board and to keep communication levels up, the supermarket may be positive and responsive but they may not be proactive. Be persistent and don't always take no for an answer, outlining benefits of a project and backing up with evidence can sometime sway views in favour of the project. Work in partnership with a number of stakeholders and don't be afraid to voice the views of the community. Ensure that you have strong leadership and clarity through formal service agreements, steering groups and well resourced project management.

3. Collaborate and Communicate

"One good shop cannot save the High Street but a handful working together maybe can".[4]

Think of your town as a department store which has a consistent marketing message and brand. We have seen from the survey results that town wide events and loyalty cards are two ways in which the town can come together to market itself. Traditional methods for drawing the town together are walks /trails, leaflets, signage and information boards. The key is to chose a brand that builds on your towns local distinctiveness or USP and stick to it! Remove clutter and use consistent colour themes and logos. Provide guidelines to groups who want to use the branding to ensure it is used correctly. Use your branding on all public relations materials and promote your town widely to outlying villages and neighbouring towns.

Websites and mobile phone apps are the communication methods of the digital age. They too need to be high quality and provide customers with a single point of 'entry' to the town. People expect to be able to navigate quickly and easily and buy a wide range of products and services from a single standard interface. They expect to be able to get information such as locations of stores and customer reviews; compare prices, receive offers and make a purchase. Consider working with a web or mobile app development company who specialise in small town digital communications to achieve all this. See the resources section for more details.

"Independent retailers must work together better but always remember that you have unique attributes. To optimise a town centre online there needs to be individually of outlets within a uniformity of process (and don't let web designers tell you any different!). Use local media. The better and more coordinated the editorial the more believable the story and the greater the opportunity to increase your footfall."[5]

Help retailers to understand the opportunities for cross marketing and collaboration, or if you are a retailer yourself in a small town, consider, from the customer's viewpoint, what other shops in the town they may wish to visit. For example a local wine shop may want to suggest the olives available at the local deli, or the dress shop to mention the shoe shop. Communicate these cross marketing messages in store and online.

Business improvement districts are relatively new in small towns and provide a more formal model for businesses to collaborate, as well as creating a financial resource to be used for the benefit of the whole town. They can provide a strong platform to launch other projects and gain commitment were an informal group or forum may not be as successful. As well as case studies of BIDs there are

[4] Re: How can we save our town centres? by Man About Towns » Wed May 25, 2011 8:22 am
[5] Re: How can we save our town centres? by will@poptotheshops » Wed Mar 16, 2011 1:53 pm

a number of consultants and trainers that can help if you think this approach will work in your town. The Association of Town Centre Managers has a lot of experience in working on BIDs.

4. Encourage Entrepreneurialism and Creativity

There are many examples of areas that were once considered undesirable acting like magnets for artists because the rents were cheap, who then transformed the place into a thriving centre for creativity and ultimately a vibrant and attractive place to live or visit, Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire, is one of those examples.

This guide looks at a number of cases of how entrepreneurialism and creativity can be encouraged into our small towns and Action for Market Towns' case study database has many more, in particular award winners from previous years who have transformed empty shops into art galleries and studios. Some suggestions include offering grants and training for entrepreneurs who wish to start out in retail via a market stall, or existing market stall holders who would like to move into a shop. Support start up businesses who are responding to the increasing demand for local food and produce. This can be done by shopping there, buying shares, offering grants or sponsorship or promoting through cross marketing. Provide space and time for young artists to flourish by renovating disused buildings or empty shops and offering realistic rents and rates.

"It is awful to see empty shops everywhere but as an advisor to people who are trying to start small businesses a lot of them would like to get into retail but stupidly enough find it very difficult to rent a premises at a fair price. I may be completely wrong but when trying to investigate this situation I was told that a lot of property is owned by large investment and pension companies, whose property's book value is based on the notional rent – they would rather have an empty premises with a notionally high rent that nobody is prepared to pay than have a full premises on a low rent which would crash the book value of their assets. Stupid, I know, and there should be a solution to that. No high street in the world is going to pick up or be a desirable shopping experience if you have to wander past empty shops covered in graffiti and fly posters."

5. Give the customer what they want

The final and perhaps most important point is to give the customer what they want. This has been put excellently by contributors to Action for Market Towns prosperous place forum:

"focus on the customer, not what you want from the customer!"[6]

"Successful traders don't fear competition, but study their competitors, learn from them and find a niche to exploit, or unmet demand to tap into."[7]

[6] Re: How can we save our town centres? by will@poptotheshops » Wed Mar 16, 2011 1:53 pm
[7] Re: How can we save our town centres? by Jon Fox » Tue Apr 26, 2011 3:39 pm

Geoff Burch[8] offers four ways in which independents can compete more effectively with multiples:

- The first and most important thing is that they must have the same level of professionalism. If you blinded somebody and led them into a multiple or led them into a private shop, even if they could see no signs or labels, when the blindfold is removed they would know which is the slick professional outfit.
- Secondly, the multiples have to be slick and professional because of their high staff turnover and because of that they cannot offer the same level of knowledge and experience that an independent can – and whilst the independents are full of knowledge and experience they do sometimes seem a bit reluctant to communicate it.
- Thirdly, they have got to learn to sell. All of the marketing initiatives and cooperative effort can only do one thing and that is to provide us with an opportunity. When people visit us we must use that opportunity to secure the sale.
- A final thought, they need to become easier to do business with than the big multiples, in other words be prepared to fit an electrical plug, deliver the goods to the person's home, order an unusual product from possibly even a competing retailer, and be able to change at the drop of a hat which is something the big boys just can't do.

Local authorities, Town and Parish Councils and Town Partnerships can help independents to do this through training, online toolkits and sharing best practice. Community and town partnerships can use web based business directories, ecommerce and loyalty card schemes to generate an income which can help to fund training and development for retailers or to invest in improved marketing materials, shop fronts or window dressing. Before investing in anything be sure to ask shoppers what they want, through a visitor survey or shopping questions in the benchmarking or town action planning worksheets.

[8] Re: How can we save our town centres? by Geoff Burch » Thu Apr 28, 2011 2:41 pm

Summary and Conclusion

Supermarkets and out of town shopping complexes have clearly taken the lion share of the retail market in the last decade, as Chris Wade neatly sums it up on the AMT forum:

"The TCPA brought clarity to the debate by saying that you don't have to be very smart to work out that if out-of-town shopping has been allowed to increase by 36% in a decade that it is bound to have an impact."

Planning policy during the last decade has gone some way to move large food store development into town centre and edge of town centre locations, with seemingly positive effects linked to claw back and linked trips. Evidence to support this comes in the form of customer and business surveys, future research might look more directly at the economic implications of these purported positives, along with the value of employment opportunities created by the opening of a large store relative to the economic impact elsewhere. As we have seen in this guide, employment opportunities can be also created through small scale entrepreneurial and creative initiatives.

The wisdom of allowing multiple large food stores in or around a small town is also questionable. Rather than viewing multiples and supermarkets as the enemy, this guide has emphasised the importance of *balance* in the retail mix.

Customers may have voted with their feet to support supermarkets and "malls" up until now but the tide seems to be turning. The shopping experience is becoming more important than price, desire to revive our own towns, demand for local produce and rising petrol prices are all conspiring in our favour. Supermarkets and multiples aren't blind to this changing climate and demand, they are willing to engage proactively with planners and local authorities to put something back into the places they put their stores. As Mary Portas suggests, it would be nice to see this local investment extend beyond times when new stores or expansions are planned. True integration into the town centre, not just through physical linkages but sharing best practice to help independents achieve the same levels of professionalism and presentation and co marketing through collaborative deals or other forms of cross promotions would also be welcome developments.

As well as the part planning has to play in the future of our town centres, there is much that *people* can do. In the final section of this guide we have examined 5 action areas that people in towns can take to capitalise on this changing tide. You are not alone in what, at times, may seem like a hopeless crusade, Action for Market Towns can support your work in a number of ways as seen in the resources section. Other towns are ready to share best practice and private companies offering products and services designed to encourage people to shop locally, are springing up with social purpose at the core of their business. Different stakeholder groups can help their town centres if they are prepared to take the positive actions summarised on the next page. Most importantly town councils, independent and multiple businesses, town groups and community partnerships need to work together and consider their town as a complete offer, if town centres are going to make a comeback.

"The other thing that strikes me is that the big battle now for the consumer is between out-of-town and internet retailers -which could be an artificial fight with nobody fighting passionately for the future of soulless shopping malls. Town centres need to focus on giving something different from both and hang on to a smaller share of the spoils that is nevertheless theirs for the taking.

How can we save our town centres? by Man About Towns » AMT forums Wed May 25, 2011 8:22 am

Town Centres Can Come back if:

Local Authorities and Town Councils:

- Understand town performance through key performance indicators
- Use evidence to make plans and implement projects that will have an impact
- Encourage artistic and entrepreneurial activity through grants and low rates
- Work with multiples and supermarkets through section 106 agreements in innovative ways
- Offer local businesses training, toolkits and opportunities to share best practice

Independent business owners:

- Work together to market your town as a complete offer
- Learn from multiples
- Exploit niches and pick up market share from failed national chains
- Capitalise on your ability to offer superior customer service
- Take advantage of grants and training on offer

Town Groups, Community Partnerships and Business Forums:

- Use technology and innovative business models to your advantage to generate an income
- Implement town wide marketing, business networks and collaborative deals
- Facilitate partnership working amongst the town council, local businesses, attractions, schools, charities and non profit organisations
- Take direct action, set up your own shop and shop local!

Resources

AMT's top 10 tips to beating the recession on the high street:

1. **Get the basics right:** Signage and car parking are important – if your customers can't park or find their way around you will lose them. Our consultancy organisation **amt-i** can help you with signage audits and car parking studies.
2. **Organise events:** Events are a good way to get people back in to your town – and not just at Christmas.
3. **Know your customers**: A **Town Centre Services package** from amt-i includes business training, mystery shopping and visitor surveys.
4. **Encourage loyalty**: **Loyalty schemes** are a great way to boost business. amt-i can help in setting up a loyalty scheme for your town.
5. **Joint marketing**: Link up with neighbouring towns to create a destination for visitors.
6. **How well are you doing?** We can lead you through an innovative online **Town Benchmarking programme** to review your town's retail offering, number of vacant units, traditional markets and business confidence and compare it to neighbours and other similar towns across the country.
7. **Learn from others:** Our **Towns-4-Towns scheme** helps you learn from the success of projects in other towns. Local networks of towns let you share good ideas – AMT has already established one such network collaboration with North Yorkshire County Council.
8. **Check out case studies of good practice:** The AMT website has an online library of nearly 200 case studies of successful projects in towns throughout the country to give members inspiration and practical advice.
9. **Find your way through the policy jungle:** AMT members have access through our website to **policy information** as well as help in putting policy into practice.
10. **Join Action for Market Towns:** Membership opens up a whole range of services to your town. Read about more **member benefits**.

See our Prosperous Places campaign for more tips and advice.

Action for Market Towns works with and supports emerging Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Authorities, Town Councils, Community and town partnerships, independent businesses and selected partner businesses dedicated to improving the vitality and viability of small towns through innovative solutions. AMT has a national network of around 400 members and can work with members and non members alike through our consulting arm amt-i.

amt-i is a social enterprise consultancy and can help with town centre performance through benchmarking, town marketing and loyalty cards in partnership with My Card, town centre services such as mystery shopping, visitor surveys, car parking and retail training. For more information, help and advice please see the AMT website www.towns.org.uk or contact us:

5 Baxter Court, Higher Baxter Street, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 1ES.
T: 01284 756567 email: business@towns.org.uk

The following links take you to resources mentioned throughout this guide, all web links were active May 2011. If any links are broken please contact Action for Market Towns on the number above and we will be pleased to help you locate the correct resource.

- To find out about the benefits of becoming an AMT member please see: http://towns.org.uk/members/why-join-amt/
- For more information non the **Benchmarking Service** described throughout this guide, please visit: http://towns.org.uk/2010/08/05/town-benchmarking/
- You can learn how to prepare for localism and develop community led plans using the **Town Action Planning framework** here: http://towns.org.uk/2011/05/24/localism-ladder-preparing-community-led-neighbourhood-plans/
- To join in the debate on the Action for Market Towns forum, you don't have to be a member, simply register for free here: http://members.towns.org.uk/forum/index.php

The following providers are offered as a starting point for towns wishing to research their own solutions. Action for Market Towns is working in partnership with My Card Ltd but does not endorse any other provider at the time of publishing this report.

Loyalty card providers

My Card Ltd (website under development): mycard@btinternet.com Mark Barnes 07590 005692

Savvy UK Ltd: www.savvy-loyalty.co.uk A provider of smart card technology to market towns in the UK.

Loyalty Pro: http://www.loyaltypro.co.uk/; Not so well known to the authors and understood to be more expensive than Savvy but offer an alternative which may be researched independently.

Smart Loyalty: http://www.smartloyalty.net/ A German company that appear to have a good product that's well used in Europe, but unproven in the UK.

Website Development and ecommerce providers:

All the Little Shops: www.allthelittleshops.co.uk platform for fully integrated web presence, including town details and events, business directory and ecommerce with loyalty card option.

Pop to the Shops: www.poptotheshops.co.uk national directory and ecommerce site for independent shops.

Mobile phone application providers

iThame: www.ithame.co.uk Detailed mobile application to communicate town information, maps and news in Thame, Oxfordshire. Now available for other towns.

My Pocket Angel: www.mypocketangel.co.uk : The UK's first local loyalty mobile application which sends timely, special offers straight to the customer's phone.

Reports and publications

Action for Market Towns; Local Loyalty - a guide to local loyalty cards to be published end of June 2011

The New Economics Foundation (NEF), , **"Ghost Town Britain"** (http://www.neweconomics.org/publications?keys=ghost+town+britain&tid=All)

NEF, ***"Re-imagining the High Street: Escape from Clone Town Britain".*** http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/reimagining-the-high-street

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Small Shops Inquiry "High Street Britain: 2015" http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/15_02_06_highstreet.pdf

University of Southampton-based research team published a report, **"Revisiting the Impact of Large Food stores on Market Towns and District Centres",** http://www.riben.org.uk/report/ .

The **Association of Convenience Retailers Knowledge Transfer Partnership study** http://www.acs.org.uk/en/info/document_summary.cfm/docid/31316180-6916-409F-9B1B55F8F0B8EF87

CPRE From field to fork: Hastings. Mapping the local food web http://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-do/farming-and-food/local-foods/update/item/1660-our-new-research-shows-the-value-of-local-food-webs

Appendix

Answers received in response to the question what type of effect do you think multiple retailers have had on your town centre?

- “Young people are attracted by brand names”
- “Attract footfall”
- “Multiples attract younger customers”
- “Sainsbury’s is a small scale store but attracts shoppers from the wider area to our town”
- “Attract footfall”
- “The opening of the town's first major supermarket attracted shoppers that previously went to other towns”
- “Because they add another attraction to shoppers when they are picking where to shop in this area. We are fortunate to have an equal division of independents and good national retailers which provides the shopper with a wide choice of services in one town.”
- “People from a wider area use the new store”
- “Give a mix to the town centre”
- “Have brought quality and choice where it did not exist before”
- “Takes business away from small independent (especially) food traders without putting any investment back into the community to compensate”
- “Draw customers from markets and small shops”
- “There are not many MT in the Town centre but there are several within a short drive away and these take trade away from the likes of grocers, butchers, fishmonger, etc

Answers received in response to the question, does your organisation work with independent retailers in the town on projects and initiatives

- "Promotion of activities for residents and tourists in Kirkby Stephen. Promotion of Christmas Lights. Proposed Food & drink Festival"
- "Town Events e.g. Tour of Britain race starting point, Christmas late night shopping event and 'Lights Switch on”
- “Promote a Food festival”
- “Event planning”
- "Promotional schemes”
- "Events. Promotions. Christmas lights"
- "Promotional Activities Local Advertising"
- "Has representatives and close contact on the local Chamber of Commerce"

- "Chamber of Commerce Events"
- "Chamber of business"
- "My shopping centre is located in the heart of the town so I constantly work with the town as a whole which hopefully will increase footfall for us all. I achieve this by working with the Chamber of Commerce, Town Council and various event forums."
- "Member of the chamber of trade"
- “Start up grants”
- "They provide core funding and also volunteers and donations"
- Part finance Market Manager post"
- "We promote a loyalty scheme.
- "We introduced a town loyalty card in 2009"
- “Shop local time limited project”
- “Think Local scheme"
-

Do you work with multiple retailers on projects and initiatives?

- "This is much harder, only two really support our work"
- "Data gathering, event planning, soliciting sponsorship
- "Sponsorship for events & help with charitable events"
- "membership of Town Centre Initiative"
- "Ask them for support, which benefits them through being seen to support local businesses"
- "One multiple retailer - Tesco - has supported local community initiatives."
- "A great deal of them are members of the Chamber of Commerce, through this I have found it easier to approach them for sponsorship of events through to them actively taking part in some way."
- "Only really in terms of future planning - we currently have number of planning applications in - and work with companies looking to relocate and expand"

Do multiple and independent traders work together?

- "Some joint work on events"
- "Through town events"
- "Mainly charity and town events"
- "They work together by taking part in some way with the various town events as an increase in footfall through raising the profile of the town benefits everyone."
- "Christmas lights provision, both attend traders association meetings"

How do supermarkets support community projects?

- "Funding and volunteers"
- "Provides location for fund raising activity - sales of raffle tickets, bag packing, donations of prizes etc"
- "Assists with funding, parking and CCTV"
- "By offering a share of profit to community projects chosen by customers"
- "Financial and supportive of raffles etc"
- "Fund-raising, support to local business group"
- "Grant funded a project with young people. Support for Christmas Lights Switch on. Allowed fundraising car wash in their car park Bag packs for charity. Willing to get involved in new community projects"
- "Sponsorship of events, support for retail associations"
- "They nominate a local charity each year to support"
- "Fundraising and donations to local charities and causes"
- "One supports fundraising for local beauty spot"