

DRAFT



FUTURE OF TOWN CENTRES

**STROUD, NAILSWORTH, STONEHOUSE, DURSLEY, WOTTON UNDER
EDGE**

1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to consider what the major town centres within Stroud District Council will look like in 2031 and how they may function. The study further considers what policy levers are at the disposal of SDC to modify negative effects or boost positive effects of change and how effective they are likely to be.

In seeking to achieve this objective the study is divided into the following sections.

The second section will consider the national context, whilst the major towns in the District are imbued with an individual character and are likely to require consideration of individual policy responses to the challenges of the future they will all come under the influence of the national context in which they operate.

The third section of the study will consider critically the existing policy context and the existing evidence base.

The fourth section of the study will examine the existing character and health of each of the Town centres.

The fifth section will report on the presentation of the findings of the first four sections of the study to stakeholders in each of the Towns. The section will include the stakeholder's suggestions for potential policy changes to respond to the likely changes to the Towns.

The final section of the study will consider the strengths; weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to each Town. This section will also consider, drawing on the stakeholder engagement, the potential policy responses by Stroud District Council and their likely efficacy.

2. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The retail and service sectors of town centres have undergone and are still undergoing considerable change which will affect the functioning of town centres during the study period. The previous paradigm was that with increasing wealth, population and leisure time coupled with increasing personal mobility that there was a need for a continual expansion of retail and service floorspace, with planning policy seeking to direct that growth to suitable locations, either in town, edge of town or out of centre. That paradigm is now very questionable. Unfortunately whilst there is, as this study will demonstrate, strong clues as to the replacement paradigm it has not yet fully emerged to clearly guide policy responses. The study will, in the remainder of this section consider the details of the new trends and their affect.

2.1 E Retailing

The archetypical 'High street' in the last Century up to the 1980's comprised a butcher, greengrocer, baker and grocer with ancillary service uses. It was the only place for food, clothes and homewares, banking and other services The rise of the out of town supermarkets, and retail parks in the 1980's marked the commencement of the decline of traditional 'High Streets' and resulted in various pieces of Government guidance/policy protecting town centres. The onset of e-retailing in all its forms; click and collect, home deliveries, online shopping has provided a further challenge.

The UK has one of the most developed online markets in the world, but physical stores are still very much at the heart of shopping,

nevertheless¹ the channels for retailing are becoming increasingly intertwined. In particular this is best demonstrated by the fact that click and collect spend at constant prices is forecast to grow substantially between 2015 to 2016 from some £8bn to £11bn. There is evidence of viewing comparison products in store but ordering on line, potentially at a lesser cost. The decimation of physical booksellers on the high street can chiefly be laid at the door of Amazon, whose growth into other goods categories also provides a significant threat.

Physical stores will remain at the heart of shopping but with the growth of various channels the level of overall spend will increase but will not necessarily lead to an immediate demand for new floorspace. The outlook for new retail/ service floorspace is far from clear, Experian consider that non store retailing spending continues to grow rapidly in real terms from 2015 to 2035, outpacing traditional forms of spending, to account for some 20% of sales by the mid 2030's²

It is expected that the demand for new convenience goods floorspace up to 2031 will be very modest mirroring the expected growth in overall convenience expenditure. For comparison goods the redevelopment of older more inefficient space, potentially redundant service sector space such as banks is likely to result in some demand but less than would have been forecast without the existence and growth of multichannel retailing.

2.2 'Cafe' Culture

The growth of 'cafe culture' has been the saving of many 'High

¹Verdict / True value of Stores July 2016.Click and collect/ online sales/ other remote e retailers/Home delivery .2 Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 13 Oct 2015 .3 FT 14/6/16

Streets'. Neil Wrigley, professor of human geography at the University of Southampton, quoted in the Financial Times notes:³

'The UK's town centres and high streets have been progressively shifting their orientation from retail to services for at least two decades in line with changing consumer culture, lifestyle and demographics'

In his research on 1,100 high streets he found the number of cafes, restaurants, hairdressers and opticians increased by 24% between 2000 and 2006, whilst apparel stores fell by 4%. This trend persists with research by The Local Data Company finding that health and beauty services were among the fastest growing businesses by floorspace in 2015.

The growth of cafe premises and their popularity is evidenced by the emergence of nationwide chains such as Starbucks, and Costa, though consumers prefer independent operators.⁴

The growth of cafe culture is reinforced by the trend of increased 'eating out', particularly evident amongst those of below pensioner age.⁵ A trend that will only be likely to be enhanced as those in younger age cohorts move through having been socialised into increased demand for 'eating out'.

The specific reasons for the growth in expenditure in cafes/ restaurants are difficult to find but in the case of cafes the free on site wi-fi, the improvements to the range of products on offer and the changes over the last decade to working practises may account for some demand as there is a blurring of work and leisure time. Restaurant expenditure growth may be accounted for by factors such as increased interest in the culinary arts, not least stoked by the

4. Cafe culture show data May 2016. 5. NEMS mkt research March 2016.

plethora of 'cooking shows' on television and foreign travel, engendering in the population desire for new culinary experiences. The latter trend has also helped the continued existence of specialist convenience retailers supplying artisan and niche products.

A further factor may be the growth in interest of certain sections of the population in both the provenance of food and also the trend towards healthy eating.

2.3 The 'Service' Sector

The typical High Street up until the millennium was the spatially preferred location of such service type uses as banks, building societies, recruitment agencies, estate agents, turf accountants and post offices. This is no longer a given.

Turning first to banks, the onset of personal electronic banking, including seeking loans, together with personal electronic transfer of funds has made the use of cash and cheques decline. The introduction of debit and credit cards with contactless technology has further reduced the need for citizens to carry cash. The provision of online banking and the ubiquity of ATMs have reduced the physical need for banks to retain premises on Britain's high streets. A financial website 'This is Money' reported in May 2016 that:

"Britain's biggest banks have shut three branches every two days in the past year"

"Campaigners argue suburbs; market towns...tend to suffer most"

A leading article in the Sunday Times Business section of 4th December 2016 noted that five years ago the largest five banking

groups had some 7821 branches, in December 2015 some 6740 and a year later in December 2016 some 6,225.

Building societies are also coming under the same pressures of the electronic age with the continued growth of on-line banking. It can plausibly be argued that the principle customers for physical branches of both banks and building societies are the same groups and now comprise those within the population who were socialised before the widespread use and expertise in electronic communication. This group are by definition destined to decline with time. There is therefore scant expectation that the demand for physical financial premises will grow, rather it is to be expected that the current trend of decline will continue.

Service uses such as recruitment agencies and estate agents are also being affected by the 'electronic revolution'. Web sites such as Zoopla and Right Move are run from offices with no physical presence on the high street. Similarly many recruitment agencies no longer need or are willing to pay for a ground floor premises on high streets. It is also foreseeable that in the future that estate agents will no longer need, nor wish to pay for, premises on the high street. The vast majority of their business can be undertaken electronically, with staff based either at home or in offices cheaper than being in a retail premise on the high street. Similarly it is to be expected that recruitment agencies will fall under the same pressures with much of their business being able to be undertaken electronically coupled with off the high street offices. Travel agents are already a much rarer use on the high street than prior to the emergence of 'holiday' web sites.

Even the presence of 'betting shops' on the 'high street' are under threat, the rapid growth of online betting from electronic devices

provides customers easy access to gambling, the continued existence of betting shops may be a function of the cash pay out slot machines which are licensed within those premises. With on line gambling growing it is potentially possible that cash slots machines may not be sufficiently popular to ensure the continued presence of betting shops on the High street.

Even quasi-public bodies have not been immune from the changing of consumer habits and technology. Over the past 30 years the number of post offices in the UK has almost halved from some 22,000 branches in the early 1980's, although with Government intervention the numbers have remained stable over recent years at a branch network of some 11,500 branches. The Government's policy paper '2010 to 2015 government policy: postal service reform' notes that " the government's strategic policy for the future of the Post Office network sees a network with a minimum of 11,500 post office branches being maintained with the company becoming more sustainable and viable". However this level of coverage is somewhat of an aspiration and the impact of electronic technology and the need to run a commercial operation may place pressure on this aspiration. It is noteworthy that uses such as 'job centres' on high streets have also declined, not least because of seeking cost reductions.

2.4 Summary

In a 2014 study undertaken by the University of Southampton entitled 'High Street Performance and Evolution' the authors (Professor Neil Wrigley and Dr Dionysia Lambriri) found that the speeding up of the trends that have been identified above was a function of the recession in the UK economy from 2007 to 2011, but warn that high streets will not revert to the pre-existing paradigm.

The authors consider that at the heart of the evolution the high street will continue the long term structural shift away from retail provision to non electronic services.

The direction of travel on e-retailing in all its forms is mixed, in some retail categories the adoption of multichannel retailing may strengthen physical stores, i.e. click and collect. Other forms of e-retailing including those applicable to service uses are and will continue to lead to a diminution of demand and overall reduction of physical floorspace.

There is a positive story to tell with the rise in convenience stores and food outlets, giving evidence to the trend outlined above of a newly emerging food and cafe culture. Research by PWC in the first half of 2016 reported in October 2016 noted:

‘Comparison goods retailers are under the most pressure across Great Britain with fashion stores and men’s and women’s clothes shops all in the six hardest hit sectors’

Matthew Hopkinson, Director of The Local Data Company stated:

‘The retreat of multiples from town centres continues, reflecting the wider changes happening in retail driven by the retrenchment of comparison goods retailers, especially in clothing and footwear...The spaces left by the traditional occupants of our high streets are being increasingly filled by health care operators, food and beverage operators and the ongoing rise of the discounters’

It would be tempting to conclude that a new paradigm has emerged to guide policy formulation and action, but this would be misleading. Some trends may be less long term than consumer fashion, such as the emergence of the ‘pound shops’, a flight by consumers to a quality shopping experience with increased economic prosperity,

could spell the end of this category's expansion.

However the reduction in demand for floorspace for financial services is not likely to be reversed and will be likely to continue. The demand for convenience floorspace is also not likely to grow to any large extent. In particular, the growth in convenience goods expenditure is very low and the market is being affected by home delivery, click and collect and competition from 'deep discounters' such that more established fascia's may be forced in some locations to reduce floorspace. The increase in major fascia small convenience stores has been made at the expense of the traditional corner shop⁵

The reduction in apparel and shoe sales floorspace, not linked to multi channel retailing, is also, with the affects of electronic shopping likely to continue. However the rise in demand for personal services, leisure and cafe culture floorspace is likely to continue.

High streets will continue to be the focus of retail and community activity however the challenges they face are potentially more challenging than they have faced since the commencement of the 20th Century. The ongoing pattern of change suggests that larger centres which have a greater representation of national retailers are likely to be well placed to weather the changes.

For smaller centres town centre strategies which support the continued evolution of the high street are considered even more vital. This may involve less prescriptive policies towards centres reflecting rather than opposing some of the trends outlined above. Policies which support the emergence of better quality rather than a larger retail centre, maximising the benefits of the tourist trade and

⁵ Sunday Times 30/10/16

perhaps reflecting that a retail unit in use, even for uses such as hot food takeaway in circumstances where they are already prevalent is better than having a long term vacancy on the high street.

It will be important that town centres are well positioned to be able to adapt to on-going changes in the retail and leisure sector.

3.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND EVIDENCE BASE

3.1 Policy Context- the history

The challenges of the 1980's with the rise in out of town shopping comprising large food stores and retail parks produced a reaction from policy makers. Planning circulars and planning policy guidance were produced from the 1970's onwards where successive governments sought to modify negative effect on Town Centres.

An article in The Planner (August 2016) reporting on the National Retail Planning Forum seminar 'The Changing face of retailing', notes that the planning system is too inflexible and too slow to respond to changes in retail with the result that many UK high streets face an uncertain future.

Cliff Guy, in a book entitled 'Planning for Retail Development' published in 2007, identifies four distinct phases of policy reaction to the emergence of threats to the established dominance of the High street.

- 1960s/1970s- early days of retail regulation with initial resistance to new retail forms.

- 1980's – a loosening up of regulation to a more market led approach allowing an expansion of new retail forms, mirroring the prevailing general political climate of the 'Thatcher era'
- Late 1980s – the gradual tightening up of policy as effects on town centres became to be perceived.
- 2000's the continuation of town centres first policy which has redirected off-centre developments and focused attention back into town centres.

As can be noted by this very summarised policy chronology, policy has tended to switch emphasis between restriction on new forms of development, to limited encouragement of such development as the realisation of its positive economic effects are recognised, and then returning to greater restriction as pressure groups, public sentiment and nostalgia takes hold. The policy reaction to the 'out of town revolution' was not one of a consistent evolution of policy but rather a reaction to economic circumstances pertaining at the time and political and social pressure. The chronology of policy change justifies the judgement set out above that the planning system is good at responding too late and not necessarily appropriately after events occur.

3.2 Current Policy

With the new decade of the 2010s Government sought to promote a more pro development approach to assist the economy out of recession, and to simplify and reduce the quantity of planning guidance. The result was the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012, a much vaunted reduction of some 1,500 pages of advice to 49, though the NPPF was backed up by guidance available only electronically which is much more lengthy.

Section 2 of the NPPF focuses on 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres', with the advice that policies in Development Plans produced by local authorities should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out proposals for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. The NPPF recognises the social importance of town centres, requires definition of primary and secondary shopping frontages, and recognises the role of street markets. The document also encourages planning authorities to produce policies which meet the needs of all town centre uses, including leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential uses.

The NPPF marks a continuation of the immediately preceding advice of the sequential approach for main town centre uses, a town centre first approach. Retail, leisure and office proposals outside the town centre above a national size threshold require to be justified by an impact analysis on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in town centres.

It is noteworthy that the NPPF in the section that first deals with town centres (2.3) encourages the growth of centres.

This encouragement of growth in an electronic age of retailing and certainly the commencement of a new retail paradigm may be an example of previous attempts by policy to regulate by fighting yesterday's battles.

John Reynolds of the Oxford Institute of Retail Management and Said Business School said at the 2016 National Retail Planning Forum that under pressure from internet shopping 'spatial aspects of retail were changing rapidly' requiring 'a more creative, flexible and permissive planning system' 'The planning system is very good at saying no;

it's much less good at facilitating flexibility and growth'.⁶

The Stroud District Local Plan was adopted as part of the Development Plan on the 19th November 2015 and the policies in the Plan are a major determinant of development management decisions. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Material considerations can include inter alia emerging Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP), the NPPF, and National Planning Practice guidance.

The adopted Local Plan policy dealing with retail and town centres is Core Policy CP12. The policy sets out a retail hierarchy with Stroud being the sole Principal Town centre and Dursley, Stonehouse, Nailsworth and Wotton –under –Edge being designated 'Other Town Centres'. Primary and secondary shopping frontages are defined on the proposals maps in the plan.

The stated purpose of the core policy is to seek to protect and bolster the role that the district's town centres play in providing jobs and contributing to the local economy. The hierarchy was informed by district wide retail studies undertaken in 2010 and updated in 2013. These studies have been further updated as part of this report and the results will be set out in the next section.

The policy seeks to maintain the role of the identified centres to ensure they provide a range of facilities and services, retail proposals outside the centres are required to justify their use by submission of retail impact statements for any proposal over 1000sq m for Stroud and for the remaining centres studied 500sq m (Policy EI9 refers).

6. The Planner August 2016

The Local Plan seeks to encourage all town centre appropriate uses to locate in the centres such as leisure, entertainment, cultural, tourist entertainment and mixed uses.

3.3 Evidence base

As part of the evidence base for the Stroud District Local Plan 2015 an update to the 2010 Retail Study was produced by GVA dated July 2013. The study found that there was no real change in floorspace requirements between the 2010 study and the 2013 update. However this conclusion was reached on the basis of the forecast special levels of trading at that time (mail order and e-retail), however as discussed in section 2 of this report those assumptions have not been amended to account for the increased growth of e-retail.

The study recommended changes to secondary frontages in Stroud and definition of a primary shopping area and town centre boundaries to Stonehouse and Nailsworth. This recommendation is reflected in the adopted Local Plan.

The amount of vacant floorspace within the towns studied was not taken into account as a potential reservoir of available space. Since 2013 the likely demand for retail capacity in the towns being studied will have and continue to be affected by new retail commitments outside the District's boundaries. For example, John Lewis will be opening in Cheltenham and there is also a further 100,000 sq ft site potentially available in the town. The expansion of the sub regional shopping centre at Cribbs Causeway, now a called in planning application, and the expansion of the retail offer at Gloucester Docks to include a Next Home and fashion store will have an effect.

3.4 The policies of the adopted local plan are bolstered by the emergence of NDPs, whose policies, when the plan has undergone a referendum and 'made' by SDC, have the same force as policies of the adopted Local Plan.

Of the centres, the subject of this study, Stroud has a 'made' Town Centre NDP, whilst Stonehouse and Dursley have draft plans and Wotton under Edge has recently published a community plan update.

3.5 The Stroud NDP sets out a vision for the centre to build policy upon and to form a base for the promotional statements seeking to deliver that vision up to 2035.

The vision for the town is that it should be “a welcoming, healthy, thriving place.... attractive and (making) the most of its heritage and its diverse cultural character; it should be accessible to all and have a vibrant feel; and it should be an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable place which reflects its bohemian and green personality”

The Plan in summary contains policy which seeks to encourage new business and residential floorspace to locate in the centre, particularly on upper floors, to seek to also encourage the retention of retail frontages within the primary shopping area. The Plan also identifies sites capable of redevelopment and enhancement. Within the promotional statements the plan seeks to influence matters beyond the remit of the Town Council, such as car parking provision, town centre promotion, and pedestrian priority.

The Plan at Appendix three, within a SWOT analysis, notes the threat of falling market share by reason of the growth of other centres and the growth of e-retailing. The SWOT analysis in the Plan reproduced

at Appendix 1 demonstrates the concerns and potential of the current situation, but the potential remedies are perhaps curtailed by the document being a spatial plan with only spatial policies being promulgated.

3.6 The Stonehouse NDP is at a relatively advanced stage with a draft having been sent out for consultation. The next stage being a consideration of responses followed by a referendum and then the Plan being made by SDC and acquiring the status of a constituent part of the Development Plan.

The draft Neighbourhood Plan encourages retail and service premises within the defined primary retail frontage and notes that the town has a 'vibrant high street with high occupancy rates' but also acknowledges the competition threat from 'online retail offers'.

3.7 A Pre-Submission draft version of the Dursley NDP was published in November 2015. A major cornerstone of the draft document is the 'vision for Dursley' which looks ahead twenty years. The vision is that the town will serve 'as the prime market town serving the South of Stroud District'. The Plan seeks to retain town centre retail and support local tourism. The Plan notes that whilst since 2007 when an Urban Design framework identified specific action, some of which have occurred such as the new Sainsbury store there remains continued aspiration to improve public realm as opportunities arise. The Plan envisions non spatial opportunities to support the Town Centre including setting up a retailers association and, in conjunction with SDC to set up a Business Improvement District to raise funds to improve retailing in the town. Whilst the mechanism for this initiative is clear there are no specific projects envisaged apart from an unspecified marketing campaign and events. The plan does promote improvements to long and short stay car parking in the

town centre, though the Plan recognises that this Policy requires action by other bodies.

3.8 The Wotton community plan was first published in 2005 and has been reviewed in 2016. The plan is not a document produced under the auspices of national planning legislation but it nevertheless is a relevant source for this present study.

The Plan notes that the world in 2005 looked very different to current circumstances having weathered a global financial crash and with the effect of Brexit still to emerge. The Plan notes that the high street businesses have been diminished with the closing of banks and the onset of online shopping and home deliveries and finally the increasing attraction of other centres within the greater Bristol conurbation.

The Plan notes the strengths of the town, including the Town Regeneration Partnership and the high quality historic centre, but notes the persistent perceived parking problems in the centre. The Plan within its priorities identifies the need for a diverse selection of shops and a reduction in number of vacant premises, and within an Appendix to the Plan sets out suggested action to achieve this aim. Those actions together with other potential initiatives will be further discussed later in this study.

4.0 EXISTING CHARACTER AND HEALTH OF THE TOWN CENTRES

4.1 The fourth section of this report focuses on the retail health of the town centres that are being studied utilising time series data to identify apparent trends since 2005. Whilst they should be treated with caution the overall balance of the various categories of retail is compared to the United Kingdom percentages. In addition the

commentary on each town will also comprise more subjective analysis drawn from surveying the individual centres.

4.2 Stroud

The time series survey data of Stroud Town centre and the other studied centres from 2005 to 2016 are set out in Appendix 2. That data utilises the areas as defined as the town centre at the time of the particular surveys and therefore strict comparison is not entirely accurate as the area has expanded, nevertheless the figures demonstrate that the percentage of convenience outlets (4%) is far below the national average (13%). In fact the surveyed figures hide a trend that that has occurred over time, with a significant fall in convenience food retail stores being reduced to a single supermarket (Iceland) a baker and two small shop units. The town now has no butcher or dedicated greengrocer. However the town has a notable and well attended farmers market on Saturdays.

The overall level of vacancies is commensurate with the national percentage, with the percentage of comparison units being above the national average, though the number of national retailers or even regional retailers is small. The most notable being Argos, New Look, W H Smith's, Halfords, Boots and Wilkinson's.

The town has greatly benefited by being the home, in various buildings, of an expanding and dynamic employer, Ecotricity, whose employees circa 700 are a major component in supporting the town centre.

The town is markedly different from the other towns studied, mirroring its position in the retail hierarchy in the Local Plan. The number of retail premises present is nearly three times larger than

the next biggest town (Nailsworth). The town acts as the 'capital' of the District, demonstrated by its position in the Retail rankings 2014(a UK wide ranking of town centres, Mintel) at number 503, compared to Nailsworth 1895 and Dursley 2146, . Stroud is described in those rankings as a 'Major District' centre, with Nailsworth and Dursley both described as local centres. The remaining two towns Wotton Under Edge and Stonehouse are not present in the rankings.

Appendix 3 comprises three tables derived from a current study by the Council's retail consultants focused on Stroud which consider the likely demand for comparison floorspace in Stroud up to 2031, including existing commitments, excluding them, and finally excluding commitments but with a reduced market share reflecting increased competition from other centres which have planned or implemented investment such as Cribbs Causeway, Gloucester and Cheltenham. The results show that the level of comparison floorspace capacity is likely to reduce considerably, with only in the final period 2026 to 2031 having some potential growth. However capacity analysis for such a distant period as 2026 to 2031 must be treated with considerable caution, as such variables as e-retailing's growth trajectory or even the emergence of new forms of retailing and national trends are difficult to quantify for such a distant period.

It is likely that with the merger of Argos and Sainsbury's the existing Argos premises in Stroud will at some stage be replaced by a 'click and collect' facility within the existing out of centre Sainsbury's store. National retailers such as Wilkinson's, New Look and Halfords may also refine their business model as a reaction to national trends and choose at the end of lease periods to withdraw from lower order centres. In a recent study produced for Sheffield City Council and

Rotherham MBC by GVA the authors note that 'it will be the smaller town centres that will lose out'

As discussed in section two of this report the threats of e-retailing and consumption of services electronically, such as banking, recruitment, house buying, gambling and travel all present a meaningful threat to Stroud, and the demand and need for physical service premises.

A more positive future view of convenience retailing is not unreasonable, given the paucity of convenience outlets in Stroud and the food culture evidenced by the popularity of the farmers market and reinforced by national trends (as discussed in section two). However whilst an identified gap in the market is evident, the fulfilment of it will depend upon local initiatives.

In summary, the existing town centre of Stroud is facing a future where there is likely to be a marked contraction of comparison floorspace, a reduction in the number of service units across several categories in reaction to national e-retailing trends, and as a consequence freeing up of more retail space. These trends will be accompanied by an increase in vacancy rates. There are opportunities to reduce this level of unused space by capitalising on the evident popularity and current dearth of convenience floorspace in the centre. The role of the town as an entertainment and leisure destination has been slowly growing as Appendix 2 illustrates, though the overall percentage is under the national average and may provide an indication of the future direction of travel. Finally the vitality of the broad retail function of Stroud is underpinned by the in town location of a major, expanding and technologically cutting edge employer.

4.3 Nailsworth

Appendix two sets out the composition of Nailsworth. It is the second biggest retail centre in the District, but is some three times smaller than Stroud in terms of overall retail outlet count. The survey material shows that since 2005 the overall level of retail units in the centre has remained stable and the retail categories which have achieved most growth are the leisure and miscellaneous categories. The overall balance of retailing, demonstrates a small deficiency against the national average in convenience goods retailers. However it is noteworthy that the centre has been able to retain butchers, fishmonger, greengrocer, baker and three supermarket premises to serve the local populations day to day needs. In surveying the town it is noticeable that there is evidence that it has become a leisure destination as well as a functional centre. The establishment of premises such as 'Hobbs' evidence this leisure aspect as do other cafes and restaurants, such as 'Wild Garlic' and the abundance of gift shops, and independent small fashion retailers. The town has no large scale representation from comparison national retailers and this confirms that the town's function is as a local centre albeit with a considerable leisure content.

The centre has seen the reduction of service units such as banks which is continuing, but overall this has not to date adversely impacted on the level of vacancies, which at 5% are well below the national average of 11%.

In summary there is scant evidence that e-retailing has had, to date, an adverse effect on the Town. There has been some effect on the town of electronic banking and other service delivery but this has not resulted in a material change to vacancy levels.

4.4 Dursley

Appendix 2 records that at present the overall number of convenience and comparison premises in the town centre is broadly similar throughout the survey period from 2005 to 2016. In terms of vacancies there was a small spike in the period of 2009 to 2013 which could perhaps be attributed to the recession in the UK economy but levels have now returned to pre-recession levels.

The overall balance of retailers in the town provides a solid convenience base to serve the town's population. During the period recorded by Appendix 2 there has been a closure of a bank, but the premises have now been re-opened as a popular cafe. This is in line with a trend which shows a rise in leisure uses in the town. This trend is discernible in all of the towns studied.

4.5 Wotton under Edge

The time series data for Wotton Under Edge records that in a similar fashion to Dursley the overall balance of retailing between comparison and convenience have remained fairly constant with eight convenience outlets, including two small supermarkets and some 35 comparison stores. In a similar manner to Dursley and Nailsworth there has been a small growth in leisure outlets, and similarly to Dursley a fall in service uses. This is reflected in the withdrawal of banks. In the case of Wotton the closure of the Nat West branch has left a very significant and visually important building vacant and in poor repair for some years though it is now being renovated to provide a family dwelling.

It is noteworthy that the level of vacancy in Wotton under Edge has grown from some 4% on 2005 to 10% in 2016. This level of vacancies

is consistent with the other smaller towns studied with the exception of Nailsworth but the growth of vacancies is untypical.

4.6 Stonehouse

Stonehouse is the smallest of the towns studied as measured by the total number of retail outlets. The percentage of convenience units has remained broadly constant for the eleven year period studied, as has the proportion of comparison units. As with Dursley and Wotton under Edge the overall representation of leisure uses has grown but there has been a more marked reduction in service uses constituting some 10% fall from 2005 until 2016.

The level of reduction of service uses reflects the effects of e-commerce with a fall in representation by banks and the closing of the post office and its relocation into a sub post office branch within a supermarket.

The overall levels of vacancies in Stonehouse are currently consistent with the towns studied within the range of 9 to 10% and consistent with the national level of vacancies at 11%, with the exception of Nailsworth at half of this level.

4.7 Summary

There is a marked difference in both scale and function of Stroud to the remaining towns studied which reflects the Local Plan's hierarchy of centres. The four towns studied excluding Stroud all have a mainly local importance, where the function is to serve the local population's comparison and above all convenience needs. All have and will be in the future affected by the rise in e-banking and the provision of other services electronically.

Nailsworth, from the survey material, appears to be the most successful with signs that it is developing a leisure and retail offer

that is attractive to not only its natural catchment area but a wider tourist function with up market food retailers and gift shops.

Wotton under Edge, Dursley and Stonehouse, from survey material, are all providing a local centre function to their catchments, all have suffered from the withdrawal of banking services but their future role is likely to continue, but with perhaps fewer retail outlets. The relative success of Nailsworth may provide some lessons for the other towns and the views of stakeholders will assist in forming judgements and policy responses.

Stroud perhaps offers the most challenges, with a small convenience offer, a comparison offer that may be under threat by the potential withdrawal of national fascia's, and the impact of e-retail and competing alternative higher order centres which have significant ongoing investment. The forecast impact is, as discussed above, a marked reduction in demand for comparison floorspace, such that there is likely to be a vacant and growing surplus in the next decade. The service sector is also likely to see a marked decline as national influences continue to have effects. These effects will increase vacancies, and if not managed will reduce the overall attractiveness of the town markedly.

The success of the weekly farmers market and the marked growth of the leisure sector from some 45 outlets in 2005 to 61 in 2016 are worthy of further consideration, perhaps signposting a refining of the function of the town.

Appendix 1

Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis

Source: Adopted Stroud Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015 – 2035

Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis

Strengths

Markets.
Independent shops.
Canalside improvements.
Pedestrianised areas.
Parks.
Cultural street life and festivals.
Countryside setting.
Cafés.
Historic features.
Subscription Rooms.
Community expertise, experience, energy and enthusiasm.

Opportunities

Ongoing investment in the canal regeneration.
Significant amount of undeveloped and underused land close to the town centre.
Successful Farmers' Market bringing shoppers into the town centre.
Popular festivals and cultural activities bringing people into the town centre.
Growth of Ecotricity in the town centre.
Redevelopment of Market Tavern.
Improved rail links.
Stroud defined as 'Principal Town Centre' in Local Plan.

Weaknesses

Quality of the shopping facilities.
Appearance of the streets.
Appearance of key buildings such as Merrywalks multi-storey car park and the cinema.
Traffic congestion.
Parking charges.
Anti social behaviour.
Pedestrian/vehicle conflict.
Condition of roads and pavements.
Empty shops.
Barriers to ease of movement between canal and town centre.
Poor 'legibility' into and around the town centre.
Lack of effective delivery on plans and projects.

Threats

Out of centre retail developments take shoppers and investment away from town centre.
Competition from other centres such Gloucester, Cheltenham and Cirencester.
Growth of internet and phone shopping.
Congestion discourages people from coming to the town centre to shop, enjoy cultural and leisure activities.
Historic character continues to deteriorate.
Lack of connectivity between canal and town centre undermines regeneration.

Appendix 2

Summary Time Series Data

Stroud

	<i>Convenience</i>		<i>Comparison</i>		<i>Service</i>		<i>Leisure</i>		<i>Miscellaneous</i>		<i>Vacant</i>		<i>Total Number</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	
20-Oct-05	11	4	107	38	67	24	45	16	35	12	20	7	285
20-Oct-06	11	4	109	38	68	23	47	16	32	11	23	8	290
20-Oct-09	16	5	101	35	68	23	44	15	31	11	32	11	292
09-Nov-12	16	5	108	34	71	22	56	18	37	12	29	9	317
25-Jul-13	15	5	108	34	70	22	56	18	36	11	32	10	317
16-Jul-14	13	4	110	35	72	23	58	18	38	12	27	8	318
07-Dec-16	12	4	111	35	69	22	61	19	36	11	31	10	320
GB Jan 17		13		29		27		25		6			
GB Jan 17 Vacancy Rate												11	

Notes:

Surveys from 2012 to 2016 inclusive include all town centre commercial properties, some of which were excluded from earlier reports

GB data from Local Data Company. All currently live businesses in the area, counts split by classification

Convenience: Bakers. Butchers & Fishmongers. Confectionery, Tobacco, Newsagents. Groceries, Supermarkets & Food Shops. Off Licences. Petrol Filling Stations.

Comparison: Books, Arts & Crafts, Stationery, Printers. Car & Motorbike Showrooms. Charity & Secondhand Shops. Chemists, Toiletries & Health. Department Stores & Mail Order. Discount & Surplus Stores. DIY, Hardware, Builder's Merchants & Household Goods. Electrical Goods & Home Entertainment. Fashion & General Clothing. Florists & Garden. Footwear. Furniture, Carpets, Textiles, Bathrooms & Kitchens. Gifts, China & Leather Goods. Jewellers, Clocks & Watches. Pet Shops & Pet Supplies. Sports, Toys, Cycle Shops & Hobbies.

Service: Auto & Accessories. Auto Services. Banks, Financial Services & Building Societies. Employment & Post Offices. Estate Agents & Auctioneers. Hairdressing, Health & Beauty. Household & Home. Launderettes, Dry Cleaners & Other. Locksmiths, Clothing Alterations & Shoe Repairs. Pawnbroking & Cheque Cashing. Travel Agents & Tour Operators.

Leisure: Accommodation. Bars, Pubs & Clubs. Cafes & Fast Food. Entertainment. Restaurants.

Miscellaneous: Medical. Non-Retail. Transport.

Nailsworth

	<i>Convenience</i>		<i>Comparison</i>		<i>Service</i>		<i>Leisure</i>		<i>Miscellaneous</i>		<i>Vacant</i>		<i>Total Number</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	
19-Oct-05	12	11	53	49	24	22	10	9	3	3	6	6	108
19-Oct-06	12	11	52	48	23	21	10	9	2	2	9	8	108
20-Oct-09	13	12	52	47	23	21	11	10	3	3	9	8	111
25-Oct-11	14	13	54	50	23	21	11	10	2	2	5	5	109
30-Nov-12	14	13	54	49	22	20	12	11	4	4	5	5	111
18-Jul-13	14	13	56	50	21	19	15	13	4	4	2	2	112
18-Jul-14	14	13	56	50	21	19	14	13	5	5	1	1	111
22-Sep-16	12	10	50	43	25	22	16	14	7	6	6	5	116
GB Jan 17		13		29		27		25		6			
GB Jan 17 Vacancy Rate													11

Notes:

Surveys from 2012 to 2016 inclusive include all town centre commercial properties, some of which were excluded from earlier reports

GB data from Local Data Company. All currently live businesses in the area, counts split by classification

Convenience: Bakers. Butchers & Fishmongers. Confectionery, Tobacco, Newsagents. Groceries, Supermarkets & Food Shops. Off Licences. Petrol Filling Stations.

Comparison: Books, Arts & Crafts, Stationery, Printers. Car & Motorbike Showrooms. Charity & Secondhand Shops. Chemists, Toiletries & Health. Department Stores & Mail Order. Discount & Surplus Stores. DIY, Hardware, Builder's Merchants & Household Goods. Electrical Goods & Home Entertainment. Fashion & General Clothing. Florists & Garden. Footwear. Furniture, Carpets, Textiles, Bathrooms & Kitchens. Gifts, China & Leather Goods. Jewellers, Clocks & Watches. Pet Shops & Pet Supplies. Sports, Toys, Cycle Shops & Hobbies.

Service: Auto & Accessories. Auto Services. Banks, Financial Services & Building Societies. Employment & Post Offices. Estate Agents & Auctioneers. Hairdressing, Health & Beauty. Household & Home. Launderettes, Dry Cleaners & Other. Locksmiths, Clothing Alterations & Shoe Repairs. Pawnbroking & Cheque Cashing. Travel Agents & Tour Operators.

Leisure: Accommodation. Bars, Pubs & Clubs. Cafes & Fast Food. Entertainment. Restaurants.

Miscellaneous: Medical. Non-Retail. Transport.

Dursley

	<i>Convenience</i>		<i>Comparison</i>		<i>Service</i>		<i>Leisure</i>		<i>Miscellaneous</i>		<i>Vacant</i>		<i>Total Number</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	
19-Oct-05	8	7	30	28	29	27	13	12	16	15	11	10	107
19-Oct-06	9	8	33	31	31	29	13	12	17	16	4	4	107
20-Oct-09	7	7	29	28	28	27	13	13	14	13	13	13	104
25-Oct-11	7	7	28	27	27	26	13	13	13	13	16	15	104
20-Nov-12	7	7	28	27	28	27	13	13	16	15	12	12	104
22-Jul-13	7	7	28	27	27	26	15	15	15	15	11	11	103
22-Jul-14	7	7	30	29	27	26	15	15	15	15	8	8	102
04-Oct-16	7	7	30	29	26	25	15	15	15	15	9	9	102
GB Jan 17		13		29		27		25		6			
GB Jan 17 Vacancy Rate													11

Notes:

Surveys from 2012 to 2016 inclusive include all town centre commercial properties, some of which were excluded from earlier reports

GB data from Local Data Company. All currently live businesses in the area, counts split by classification

Convenience: Bakers. Butchers & Fishmongers. Confectionery, Tobacco, Newsagents. Groceries, Supermarkets & Food Shops. Off Licences. Petrol Filling Stations.

Comparison: Books, Arts & Crafts, Stationery, Printers. Car & Motorbike Showrooms. Charity & Secondhand Shops. Chemists, Toiletries & Health. Department Stores & Mail Order. Discount & Surplus Stores. DIY, Hardware, Builder's Merchants & Household Goods. Electrical Goods & Home Entertainment. Fashion & General Clothing. Florists & Garden. Footwear. Furniture, Carpets, Textiles, Bathrooms & Kitchens. Gifts, China & Leather Goods. Jewellers, Clocks & Watches. Pet Shops & Pet Supplies. Sports, Toys, Cycle Shops & Hobbies.

Service: Auto & Accessories. Auto Services. Banks, Financial Services & Building Societies. Employment & Post Offices. Estate Agents & Auctioneers. Hairdressing, Health & Beauty. Household & Home. Launderettes, Dry Cleaners & Other. Locksmiths, Clothing Alterations & Shoe Repairs. Pawnbroking & Cheque Cashing. Travel Agents & Tour Operators.

Leisure: Accommodation. Bars, Pubs & Clubs. Cafes & Fast Food. Entertainment. Restaurants.

Miscellaneous: Medical. Non-Retail. Transport.

Stonehouse

	<i>Convenience</i>		<i>Comparison</i>		<i>Service</i>		<i>Leisure</i>		<i>Miscellaneous</i>		<i>Vacant</i>		<i>Total Number</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	
19-Oct-05	6	9	19	28	21	31	12	18	8	12	2	3	68
19-Oct-06	7	10	17	25	20	29	12	18	8	12	4	6	68
10-Sep-09	7	10	18	26	19	28	13	19	8	12	4	6	69
07-Nov-12	6	9	21	30	17	25	14	20	7	10	4	6	69
17-Jul-13	6	9	22	32	17	25	14	20	9	13	1	1	69
17-Jul-14	6	9	21	30	18	26	15	21	9	13	1	1	70
17-Nov-16	7	10	19	27	15	21	14	20	9	13	6	9	70
GB Jan 17		13		29		27		25		6			
GB Jan 17 Vacancy Rate												11	

Notes:

Surveys from 2012 to 2016 inclusive include all town centre commercial properties, some of which were excluded from earlier reports

GB data from Local Data Company. All currently live businesses in the area, counts split by classification

Convenience: Bakers. Butchers & Fishmongers. Confectionery, Tobacco, Newsagents. Groceries, Supermarkets & Food Shops. Off Licences. Petrol Filling Stations.

Comparison: Books, Arts & Crafts, Stationery, Printers. Car & Motorbike Showrooms. Charity & Secondhand Shops. Chemists, Toiletries & Health. Department Stores & Mail Order. Discount & Surplus Stores. DIY, Hardware, Builder's Merchants & Household Goods. Electrical Goods & Home Entertainment. Fashion & General Clothing. Florists & Garden. Footwear. Furniture, Carpets, Textiles, Bathrooms & Kitchens. Gifts, China & Leather Goods. Jewellers, Clocks & Watches. Pet Shops & Pet Supplies. Sports, Toys, Cycle Shops & Hobbies.

Service: Auto & Accessories. Auto Services. Banks, Financial Services & Building Societies. Employment & Post Offices. Estate Agents & Auctioneers. Hairdressing, Health & Beauty. Household & Home. Launderettes, Dry Cleaners & Other. Locksmiths, Clothing Alterations & Shoe Repairs. Pawnbroking & Cheque Cashing. Travel Agents & Tour Operators.

Leisure: Accommodation. Bars, Pubs & Clubs. Cafes & Fast Food. Entertainment. Restaurants.

Miscellaneous: Medical. Non-Retail. Transport.

Wotton-under-Edge

	<i>Convenience</i>		<i>Comparison</i>		<i>Service</i>		<i>Leisure</i>		<i>Miscellaneous</i>		<i>Vacant</i>		<i>Total Number</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	
19-Oct-05	9	10	36	40	25	28	11	12	5	6	4	4	90
19-Oct-06	9	10	37	41	25	28	11	12	5	6	3	3	90
11-Nov-09	9	10	34	38	25	28	11	12	5	6	5	6	89
31-Oct-11	8	9	34	39	25	28	12	14	3	3	6	7	88
30-Nov-12	9	10	31	34	27	30	11	12	5	6	7	8	90
19-Jul-13	10	11	31	34	27	30	11	12	4	4	8	9	91
22-Jul-14	9	10	34	37	27	29	11	12	2	2	9	10	92
27-Oct-16	8	9	35	39	23	26	12	13	3	3	9	10	90
GB Jan 17		13		29		27		25		6			
GB Jan 17 Vacancy Rate													11

Notes:

Surveys from 2012 to 2016 inclusive include all town centre commercial properties, some of which were excluded from earlier reports

GB data from Local Data Company. All currently live businesses in the area, counts split by classification

Convenience: Bakers. Butchers & Fishmongers. Confectionery, Tobacco, Newsagents. Groceries, Supermarkets & Food Shops. Off Licences. Petrol Filling Stations.

Comparison: Books, Arts & Crafts, Stationery, Printers. Car & Motorbike Showrooms. Charity & Secondhand Shops. Chemists, Toiletries & Health. Department Stores & Mail Order. Discount & Surplus Stores. DIY, Hardware, Builder's Merchants & Household Goods. Electrical Goods & Home Entertainment. Fashion & General Clothing. Florists & Garden. Footwear. Furniture, Carpets, Textiles, Bathrooms & Kitchens. Gifts, China & Leather Goods. Jewellers, Clocks & Watches. Pet Shops & Pet Supplies. Sports, Toys, Cycle Shops & Hobbies.

Service: Auto & Accessories. Auto Services. Banks, Financial Services & Building Societies. Employment & Post Offices. Estate Agents & Auctioneers. Hairdressing, Health & Beauty. Household & Home. Launderettes, Dry Cleaners & Other. Locksmiths, Clothing Alterations & Shoe Repairs. Pawnbroking & Cheque Cashing. Travel Agents & Tour Operators.

Leisure: Accommodation. Bars, Pubs & Clubs. Cafes & Fast Food. Entertainment. Restaurants.

Miscellaneous: Medical. Non-Retail. Transport.

Appendix 3

The Potential Effect on Demand for Comparison Floorspace in Stroud
2016 to 2031.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON GOODS CAPACITY, 2016-2031**Stroud (including commitment)**

	2016	2021	2026	2031
Available comparison goods expenditure	£603.0	£665.5	£795.1	£946.9
Turnover from study area	£100.5	£110.7	£132.0	£156.8
Market share	16.7%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%
Expenditure inflow	£6.0	£6.6	£7.9	£9.4
Total turnover potential	£106.5	£117.3	£139.9	£166.2
Benchmark turnover of existing and committed facilities	£106.5	£116.9	£130.6	£145.6
Commitment	£7.6	£8.4	£9.3	£10.4
Residual expenditure	-£7.6	-£7.9	-£0.1	£10.2
Indicative sales density for new comparison goods floorspace (£/sq m)	£5,275	£5,789	£6,467	£7,211
Indicative retail floorspace capacity (sq m net)	-1445	-1372	-10	1417

Notes:

Total expenditure taken from Table 5f.

Turnover from study area taken from Tables 9a-9d.

Market share is the turnover from study area expressed as a percentage of total available expenditure.

Expenditure inflow based on assumptions made in 2010 and 2013 Retail Study.

Total turnover potential is the study area derived turnover plus expenditure inflow.

Benchmark turnover at 2016 assumed to match total turnover potential, projected forward assuming a growth in efficiency of existing floorspace.

2015 PRICES

TABLE 2: COMPARISON GOODS CAPACITY, 2016-2031**Stroud (excluding commitment)**

	2016	2021	2026	2031
Available comparison goods expenditure	£603.0	£665.5	£795.1	£946.9
Turnover from study area	£100.5	£110.7	£132.0	£156.8
Market share	16.7%	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%
Expenditure inflow	£6.0	£6.6	£7.9	£9.4
Total turnover potential	£106.5	£117.3	£139.9	£166.2
Benchmark turnover of existing and committed facilities	£106.5	£116.9	£130.6	£145.6
Commitment	£0.0	£0.0	£0.0	£0.0
Residual expenditure	£0.0	£0.4	£9.3	£20.6
Indicative sales density for new comparison goods floorspace (£/sq m)	£5,275	£5,789	£6,467	£7,211
Indicative retail floorspace capacity (sq m net)	0	73	1435	2862

Notes:

Total expenditure taken from Table 5f.

Turnover from study area taken from Tables 9a-9d.

Market share is the turnover from study area expressed as a percentage of total available expenditure.

Expenditure inflow based on assumptions made in 2010 and 2013 Retail Study.

Total turnover potential is the study area derived turnover plus expenditure inflow.

Benchmark turnover at 2016 assumed to match total turnover potential, projected forward assuming a growth in efficiency of existing floorspace.

2015 PRICES

TABLE 3: COMPARISON GOODS CAPACITY, 2016-2031**Stroud (excluding commitment) (lower market share)**

	2016	2021	2026	2031
Available comparison goods expenditure	£603.0	£665.5	£795.1	£946.9
Turnover from study area	£100.5	£99.8	£119.3	£142.0
Market share	16.7%	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%
Expenditure inflow	£6.0	£6.0	£7.2	£8.5
Total turnover potential	£106.5	£105.8	£126.4	£150.5
Benchmark turnover of existing and committed facilities	£106.5	£116.9	£130.6	£145.6
Commitment	£0.0	£0.0	£0.0	£0.0
Residual expenditure	£0.0	-£11.1	-£4.2	£4.9
Indicative sales density for new comparison goods floorspace (£/sq m)	£5,275	£5,789	£6,467	£7,211
Indicative retail floorspace capacity (sq m net)	0	-1915	-646	685

Notes:

Total expenditure taken from Table 5f.

Turnover from study area taken from Tables 9a-9d.

Market share is the turnover from study area expressed as a percentage of total available expenditure.

Expenditure inflow based on assumptions made in 2010 and 2013 Retail Study.

Total turnover potential is the study area derived turnover plus expenditure inflow.

Benchmark turnover at 2016 assumed to match total turnover potential, projected forward assuming a growth in efficiency of existing floorspace.

2015 PRICES