**The Retail Planning Knowledge Base
Briefing Paper 9**

Evidence Based Retail Planning Policy: Data Crisis

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Key Quotes:

'The lack of spatial data has produced a dysfunctional planning system and has placed local authorities at a major disadvantage. The lack of centrally provided data makes the examination of impact a guessing game. With reliance on ad hoc and one off data lessons from studies of individual locations are not able to be assimilated easily. The question of cumulative impacts cannot be considered. The hypocrisy of a government issuing planning guidance suggesting the key issues are vitality, viability and impact but then denying the need to collect data to answer such questions are breathtaking' Sparks,L. The census of distribution: 25 years in the dark, **Area**, 28(1),1996, p. 93.

'This raises the question as to what extent government policies are based upon sound empirical evidence. If such evidence is lacking it could be the case that opinions, uncertainties and even myths dictate retail planning policy, Guy, C., **Planning for Retail Development**, London: Routledge, 2007, p.244

'We were concerned that the Barker Review of Land-Use planning did not provide the evidence to justify the proposed change to PPS6, despite placing great stress on the need for evidence based policy making. Kate Barker was relying on the Competition Commission to provide the evidence…..Like the Commission we were looking for hard evidence rather than theory, opinion or lobbying. .. We are however disappointed with the provisional Findings and Possible Remedies Report because we are unable to follow an audit trail from factual evidence, through findings and conclusions to possible remedies'. BCSC, **BCSC calls for Competition Commission to provide clearer evidence in supermarkets report**, London: BCSC, 2007 www.bcsc.org.uk

'It is a great shame that, several months after we explained clearly why the Commission's analysis of store numbers in our sector was flawed, we are once again rehearsing these arguments. The latest data used by the Commission, from the Office of National Statistics, is as unreliable as the Experian-Goad database the Commission has erroneously given credence to up until this point'. James Lowman, Association of Convenience Stores, **ACS Publishes Response to Competition Commission's Provisional Findings,** Farnborough:ACS, 2007 www.thelocalshop.com/en/Press_Office/details/index.cfm/obj_id/494C0076-683F-4A69-9353A4C9C705D46F

Context

1971 may seem very distant from2007, but remarkably it remains the last time that data on retailing was collected on a mandatory and comprehensive basis. There is frustration that the government is calling for policy based on an evidence base but there is no evidence on which to base policy. Local authorities are expected to base local policy on actual data. A 2005 paper from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister outlines the types of data which local authorities might require to have to develop policies for their town centres in order to provide evidence based policy making in their areas. These included concepts such as baselines, benchmarking and monitoring and a checklist with justification for gathering particular evidence, suggested measures, required geographic dis-aggregation and the use of specific data in policy development (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister **Guide to improving the economic evidence base supporting regional economic and spatial strategies**, London: ODPM, 2005p. 84-85). The ongoing Competition Commission investigation into the grocery retail sector report and the responses to it also reflect an awareness that there is a lack of appropriate accepted data on a range of issues from local competition to productivity and even on the way that people shop.

The National Retail Planning Forum has emphasised its concerns both in the National Retail Planning Forum newsletter (Davis, M. and Thorpe, D. Why is the 1971 Census of Distribution so important? **Retail Forum**, 13, 2007) and at its 2007 November meeting when Mark Thurstain-Goodwin entitled his presentation on data problems '**Retail statistics: Groundhog Day'** reflecting disappointment that promised improvements had not materialised and that we seem doomed to repeatedly return to the same point: how can we have evidence based policy without the evidence? Recognition that an adequate data base is required at the national level with a spatial element to it has been long and widely recognised. It remains elusive, despite the 'fine words' of government reviews that it is required. The latest statistics being made available by the Department of Communities and Local Government remain partial and disappointing (www.socd.communities.gov.uk/socd/). Modern technologies such as those developed at CASA, University College London make it easier than ever before to assemble and make meaningful large spatial datasets. It is thus a bitter irony that in 2007 there is less spatial retail data available than in 1971, yet an even greater need for that data.

Data Problems

- Definitions vary and in some cases do not accurately reflect the way retailing is organised
- Data is collected by different organisations on different bases
- Data is collected for different purposes and it is not necessarily meaningful to assume that data can be used for different purposes
- Lack of transparency
- Lack of continuity
- Lack of consistency
- Lack of benchmarking
- Lack of data archiving
- Some types of data are missing from data collection.
- It is always easier to trace new developments than those going out of business
- Costs to local authorities in collecting data are high so they often rely on data from consultants or as presented by applicants
- Too late to collect data once an application is made as this can not give time series data
- Privatisation of data collection has been partial and incomplete but there is no way to assess how incomplete or partial.
- The costs in assembling data from different government departments are excessive
- In comparison with other countries our data for planning is poor

Consequences

- There is room for much debate over the data used by applicants and local authorities
- Assumption that data which exists tells the whole story or a reluctance to admit that the right data does not exist leading to a make do approach
- This could worsen if test were to become more complex
- Much data lacks independence and is geared towards supporting a particular point of view
- Companies may be better furnished with data than local authorities
- Invalid assumptions are often made but there is no data to verify or negate these
- In rewriting legislation adequate data is essential
- Examples are overused and overextended as no contextual data exists
- We never learn from the past
- Arguments over data are common

Key literatures

The literature selected includes material from government departments concerning data developments, examples of data being used and collected and commentaries on the problems created by the lack of adequate data on retailing for retail planning.

Cox, J., Thurstain-Goodwin, M. and Tomalin, C.
Town centre vitality and viability: a review of health check methodology,
London: NRPF, 2000, 81p. (Email: mtg@geofutures.com)

This paper was a desk review of the health check methodology, its application and potential. In reviewing health checks topics including awareness, who was responsible for carrying them out, how the data set was used, which data was collected and methods of analysis were investigated. One of the major concerns of the study was the viability and potential for a national set of comparative core data on town centre health. The study supported the collection of such a data set to provide a context for individual results and to provide time series data as well as promoting good practice.

Davis, M. and Thorpe, D.
Why is the 1971 Census of Distribution so important?
Retail Forum, 13, 2007. (Available online at www.nrpf.org/PDF/Newsletter_13.pdf)

A discussion of the baseline role of the 1971 Census of Distribution in the absence of any other equivalent up to date data. A resume of what has happened since 1971 is included. Through discussion of the problems with these latter approaches key data issues are emphasised.

Davis, M.
30 years of town centre change,
Paper presented at National Retail Planning Forum **Bi-annual Review of Retail Planning,** London, 27th November 2007. (Available online at www.nrpf.org/PDF/NRPF_071127_Davis.pdf).

A review of the problems in creating time series data on retail change from existing data sources. The paper highlights the range and type of questions that it is difficult to answer without adequate spatial time series data.

Dawson, J. and Sparks, L.
Information for retail planning,
The Planner, 72(7), 1986, 23-26. (Email: Leigh.Sparks@stir.ac.uk)

The demise of the Census of Distribution left planners without the necessary data to understand retail change. This is shown to have led to delays and inefficiencies in planning decision making. A survey of planners to investigate data sources used further underlined this.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Town centres; defining boundaries for statistical monitoring: feasibility study,
London: HMSO, 1998, 53p.

To implement the type of monitoring required to assess vitality and viability in the town centre a statistical definition of the town centre is required. There is a lack of nationally consistent data collected on town centres. Indices of town centredness were evaluated using data from the Non-domestic Building Stock database and the Inter-departmental Business Register. A trial set of towns was used. Population data was also used. It was found that if the population density data was plotted against the index of town centredness there was an inverse relationship. The constancy of this relationship led to the conclusion that population density constituted an adequate surrogate of town centredness and could be used to define the boundaries of the town centre.

Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Statistics - coming soon to a town centre near you!
London: Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2001, 8p.

This document includes details of statistics to be collected on retail outlets in towns and cities across the UK and the problems associated with them. It was shown that the current sources of available data are an underestimate.

Guy, C.
Estimating shopping centre turnover: a review of survey methods,
International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, 20(4), 1992, 18-23.
(Email: Guy@cardiff.ac.uk)

With the demise of the **Census of Distribution** retail data has to be collected by individual researchers and is thus tailored to meet their needs rather than a range of needs. This article presents data on mid-Wales. The problems of this type of survey and the wider implications of these problems relative to the overall retail picture are studied. Information was partial with some retailers withholding valuable information. The article concludes that a nationally based official data collection would be much more useful and is required if an adequate understanding of the sector is to be achieved.

Guy, C.
Town centres first,
Town and Country Planning, 73(2), 2004, 48-50. (Email: Guy@cardiff.ac.uk)

An examination of the consultation draft of PPS6. New features and changes in direction such as the consideration of goods versus formats and the role of smaller towns are discussed. Pressure from the Treasury on issues of business productivity are shown to have influenced some of the changes. It is concluded that planning authorities do not have the expertise nor the data required to make the proposals work.

Hall, P.
Who's up and who's down in the urban hierarchy?
Town and Country Planning, 70(1), 2001, 268-269.

Urban hierarchy analysis is undertaken for a series of years - 1913, 1938, 1965 and 1998. The basis is multiple retailer representation rather than retail turnover due to data limitations. Planning policy cannot alter the fundamental fact that the retail

hierarchy is extremely dynamic and that it will not follow planning policy for hierarchies of centres and urban vitality measures. Really big centres will continue to compete even if there are other newer centres.

Moir, C. and Dawson, J.
Distribution,
London: Chapman and Hall, 1992. (Reviews of United Kingdom Statistical Sources, Volume XXIX).

An essential reader in statistical sources of relevance to the retail sector. In addition to giving bibliographic details of statistical sources the volume details the potential of each source and also the difficulties and limitations of the statistics.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Producing boundaries and statistics: London pilot summary report.
London: TSO, 77p. (and CD Rom), 2002.

This is the first publication from the initiative to collect detailed retail statistics on a spatial basis. Data are presented for London boroughs giving turnover, floorspace and employment by convenience, comparison and service categories of commercial property. 147 areas of town centre activity are included for 21 retail cores. The statistics are for 1999. The aim of the project is to make available for the first time statistics which will permit comparison between centres to be made.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Producing boundaries and statistics for town centres: England and Wales, 2000: Interim Report,
London; ODPM, 2004, 48p.

This publication reports on the project to produce aggregate statistics with a view to establishing Areas of Town Centre Activity. The areas designated under the model have no policy status but can be used by those responsible for strategic planning. It includes useful background information on the datasets and their potential and problems.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Technical report; using town centre statistics to indicate the broad location of retail development – initial analysis,
London: ODPM, 2005, 11p. (Available online at www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/148952)

The report analyses changing retail location through the use of Valuation Office Agency data attempting to give comparable data across England and Wales. The project emerged from the ODPM's Town Centre Statistics Report. The study then develops a model of town centre activity based on this data and ABI employment data for retailing. Retail cores are thus identified. This permits town centres to be delineated and edge of centre buffer zones of 300 metres to be mapped out. This process is designed in order to make it possible to implement planning policy with respect to the sequential approach. A table shows the distribution of retailing by zone between 1971 and 2003.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Guide to improving the economic evidence base supporting regional economic and spatial strategies,
London: ODPM, 2005, 94p. (Available online at
www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/325633)

This volume sets out the types of evidence which it is envisaged local authorities should have at their disposal for formulating policy. Chapter 11 specifically addresses these issues in relation to retailing in town centres and sets out lists of required data for evidence based policy making.

Reynolds, J.
How efficient is UK retailing?
European Retail Digest, 43, 2004, 7-13. (Email: jonathan.reynolds@sbs.ox.ac.uk)

There has been discussion in the planning literature about the relationship between retail formats and productivity and the planning implications of different business formats, particularly relating to economies of scale. This article compares UK retailing with other countries to assess productivity. It reports on a Department of Trade and Industry Retail Strategy Group commissioned study. Different possible measures are discussed. The significance of differences in the property environment is highlighted. A key finding of the study recommends improved data collection so that better measures of productivity from differing perspectives can be used.

Reynolds, J. and Schiller, R.
A new classification of shopping centres in Great Britain using multiple branch numbers,
Journal of Property Research, 9, 1992, 89-110. (Email:
jonathan.reynolds@sbs.ox.ac.uk)

Nationally available comparative retail data is not available in the UK to assess retail change or comparative development. Hillier Parker developed the use of multiple branch representation as a surrogate measure. The article explains the rationale and methodology behind this measure. Comparisons are then made with data collected in 1984. Future developments of the measure are then suggested. This measure has now been widely accepted.

Scottish Executive
Retail development survey 1998-2002,
Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2004, 31p. 0 7559 4281 7 (Available online at
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/07/19669/40371)

This report brings together the findings from the annual reports for 1998-2002 to give five year trend data. The report indicates that the current system is producing retail proposals which follow national guidance policy. The trend for proposals both in terms of floorspace and numbers of proposals is relatively constant representing continued investment to offer choice and competition. Higher floorspace levels are in the non food sector for comparison goods and mixed developments rather than in convenience. Town centre locations have been the locus of most construction. The

sequential approach is being applied. Mixed developments pose new challenges. Chapters detail number of developments, floorspace, type of development, construction type, location and sequential development.

Sparks, L.
The census of distribution: 25 years in the dark,
Area, 28(1), 1996, 89-95. (Email: Leigh.Sparks@stir.ac.uk)

The absence of data of the quality of that in the Census of Distribution is discussed. It is argued that commercial data collected is incomplete and insufficient. Given then importance of the retail sector this is lamentable.

Thurstain-Goodwin, M. and Unwin, D.
Defining and delineating the central areas of towns for statistical monitoring using continuous surface representation,
London: CASA, University College London, 2000, 13p. (CASA Working Paper 18)
(Available online at www.casa.ucl.ac.uk/working_papers/paper18.pdf)#

This paper illustrates the types of data interpretation and mapping which is potentially available.

Thurstain-Goodwin, M.
Tracking retail trends in London; linking the 1971 Census of distribution to ODPM's new town centre statistical series; a revised version,
London: CASA, University College London, 2005, 20p. (CASA Working Paper 91)
(Available online at www.casa.ucl.ac.uk/working_papers/paper91.pdf)

The paper outlines the process by which it was possible to match the different data sources and gives some of the results obtained for tracking retail change in London.

Thurstain-Goodwin, M.
Retail statistics: Groundhog Day?,
Paper presented at National Retail Planning Forum **Bi-annual Review of Retail Planning**, London, 27th November 2007.
www.nrpf.org/PDF/NRPF_071127_Thurstain_Goodwin.pdf

The paper describes how little data collection has moved forward and is indeed in danger of moving backwards. Although a system had been set up for spatial statistical retail data to be collated from the available government departments the project seems to have stalled.

Wrigley, N.
The effects of corporate foodstores on the high street: rebalancing the debates?,
Submission to the Competition Commission, London,: Competition Commission, 2007, 14p. (Available online at: www.competition-commission.org.uk/inquiries/ref2006/grocery/pdf/third_party_submissions_other_org _prof_neil_wrigley.pdf) (Email: N.Wrigley@soton.ac.uk)

In this piece Wrigley draws out some of the more positive aspects of supermarket development. He views the limitations of the database as in part responsible for the

debates over the impacts of supermarket development and certainly as inhibiting a proper understanding of their impact at the local level. The lack of a proper evidence base is cited on several occasions as a major problem in understanding retail planning outcomes.

Web sites

www.experian.com.
www.statistics.gov.uk/abi
www.geofutures.com and www.geofutures.com/online/towncentresfullscreen.html
www.communities.gov.uk
www.socd.communities.gov.uk/socd/

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