

## **Economic & City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee – July 2012**

**Proposed Topic:** ‘How can local shopping centres contribute to the economic well-being of their community?’

### Background

The Integrated Strategy Unit within City and Environmental Services are already working to produce a base study to identify all Local Shopping Parades across the city and assessing their facilities in the community they serve. This work includes identifying all the neighbourhood parades across York, mapping and recording their current use types, environmental quality, accessibility etc. and looking at their role and size in relation to their catchment area. In addition, this work will examine what opportunities there may be to help retain the critical mass of shopping parades as well as opportunities to improve/extend the parades through the allocation of new suitable sites.

In terms of those units currently owned by the council, these are largely situated among areas of social housing, and there are currently no voids. There are a wide range of uses around the city including newsagents, cafes, hot food, domestic appliances, hairdressers, a Polish grocer, an Indian grocer, cycle shop, sports wear and community centre etc. Some parades lack an appropriate mix of shops and the superstores have clearly had their influence on small parades of shops- it is hard to compete with similar goods thus those general stores that exist tend to specialise – for example in Polish or Indian foodstuffs.. Large forecourts and car parks attract anti-social behaviour.

### Currently activity around the topic

A recent report has been published by the Communities and Local Government Dept (CLG) (Jun 2012) into local shops, ‘Parades to be Proud of: Strategies to support local shops’. This noted that local shops provide important services to local communities, are popular and vary in size depending upon location and function. The parades combine retail uses with other community services from hairdressers, clinics and community centres. Since previous research has focussed on city centre retail and high street functions such as Portas, the report attempts to redress the balance by providing initial research and analysis considering the contribution of more local shops. In broad terms research by Verdict, a retail data company,

suggests the share of retail expenditure in neighbourhood locations has held steady at around 16 per cent, suggesting local shops are 'holding their own' amongst other sources of goods. The Association of Convenience Stores (2011) identified three distinct roles for local shops as: social hubs, personalised service providers and community ambassadors.

#### Pros/Cons of doing a scrutiny review on the topic

One challenge lies in the sheer number of local parades in the city coupled with the diversity of both the shopping parade and the area it covers. Each serves its own distinct community with businesses responding to the local market demand.

The work being undertaken currently by the Integrated Strategy Unit within City and Environmental Services will consider the planning and community issues attached to local shops and what opportunities there may be to improve and strengthen the role of the local shopping parade through the planning process in serving the needs of the local community together with issues of good access for all groups etc.

#### Potential focus for any scrutiny review

However, the economic well-being of a shopping parade is a much broader issue than determining the appropriate use of the premises in planning terms and the diversity, flexibility and success of individual businesses in terms of both their own strength, and in serving the needs of the community, is central.

Members will have invaluable local knowledge on the topic of the shops in their area, of both their value to the community and any problems or difficulties being experienced by the businesses themselves. They will be aware of any business challenges and it is in this area that there may be value in considering where parades of shops might develop and increase trade.

Work could focus on the business success of the parade and of individual businesses - to develop links between local shops and the community, to improve the marketing of a local parade of shops with events, discounts for local people and loyal customers etc. There is potential for linking in to the local business support network and professional groups to assist in improving business levels and sustainability – initially by the development of a pilot project. The development of such a pilot would be a worthwhile topic for scrutiny.