Torbay Council

TORBAY RETAIL STUDY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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GVA Grimley

International Property Advisers

Introduction

The Torbay Retail Study has been prepared by GVA Grimley for Torbay Council in order to provide essential background information and an evidence base to assist the Council in the production of a Local Development Framework (LDF) for Torbay and related policy documents. It will enable the Council to prepare preferred options for its retail development strategy up to 2016.

The objectives of this study have been to:

- To assess the retail performance of Torbay's towns and key centres;
- To identify the Council's retail floorspace needs over the period 2005 to 2016; and
- To highlight action required to maintain and improve the competitive position of the Torbay towns in the sub-region.

Study Methodology

In order to achieve the study objectives, the Torbay Retail Study has been informed by a number of pieces of empirical research and a detailed analysis of town centre health and current retail expenditure patterns. Arising out of these assessments, the Study has been able to identify a set of key issues in each of the three Torbay settlements, including the position of each town in the retail hierarchy and its future role, potential retail and leisure development opportunities, plus a retail strategy for each town.

Our analysis of each of the above topic areas has been based on the following assessments:

- Overview of the retail hierarchy in Torbay, focusing on a review of the vitality and viability of the three main Town Centres (Torquay, Brixham and Paignton) and the three District Centres (Preston, The Willows and St Marychurch). Surveys of the retail composition, trading performance, role and function of the centres have been undertaken, along with pedestrian flow counts and a comprehensive survey of traders in each town and district centre.

- Assessment of the need for additional retail floorspace in Torbay over the period 2005-2016, focusing on an assessment of quantitative and qualitative factors for different types of retail goods. This work has drawn upon up-to-date population, per capita expenditure and shopping patterns data to provide a forecast capacity for each of the three main settlements. Floorspace capacity estimates for convenience (food) and comparison (non-food) goods have been provided for Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

- Following the assessment of town centre health and future retail floorspace capacity, a review has been undertaken of potential shopping development opportunities in each of the three town centres. This work has examined existing allocations/opportunities identified in the adopted Local Plan, plus new potential opportunities which have been identified through the course of completing this study. Recommendations have been made for the inclusion of sites in the LDF.

- As a final part of the Retail Study, a broad policy options analysis has been undertaken. This will help the Council to develop a front-loaded Local Development Framework and has been designed to encourage a meaningful response from the local community and key stakeholders on a genuine choice of options for the future of retailing in each of the three towns. The options analysis will help the Council develop its Core Strategy for Torbay, plus agreeing an area-specific vision and defining key objectives. The options analysis itself has taken into account the suite of policy objectives and good practice guidance provided at the national, strategic and local level and has also assessed the potential differences between convenience and comparison shopping provision in each of the three Torbay settlements. It has addressed the role of Torbay as a Principal Urban Area (PUA).

- The outputs from the policy options analysis has allowed the Retail Study to define the future retail role of each settlement and its place in the sub-regional retail hierarchy. A key output from the policy options analysis has been the preparation of a strategy for each of the three centres. The role and strategy for a particular town has been designed to be complementary to each of the other centres and will support the wider regenerative aims and aspirations promoted by Torbay Council. The remainder of this section describes a series of policy approaches and initiatives which are intended to reinforce and promote the distinctive roles of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

For the purposes of this executive summary, a common format is used to record the contents of the retail strategy for each centre. This comprises an overview of the key issues facing each centre, its place in the retail hierarchy and future role, together with an outline of the recommended retail strategy and a description of the actions required to achieve the goals set.

TORQUAY

Key Issues for Retailing in Torquay

- Torquay town centre is the largest centre in the Torbay Principal Urban Area (PUA) and has a high number of national multiple retailers and a low level of vacancy (at around half the national average).

- Torquay currently attracts a high level of requirements from retailers and (Class A3) service providers seeking floorspace in the town.

- As a whole, Torquay has a good level of convenience floorspace provision, although this is dominated by one location: Sainsburys at the Willows District Centre. Convenience retailing in the town centre comprises smaller units, although provision has been improved recently by the introduction of a Tesco Metro store in the former Post Office building.

- At present, there is a leakage of both convenience and comparison goods shopping trips from Torquay, probably due to the good quality road network and ‘pull’ from existing facilities in Exeter.

- Outside of the town centre, the Willows District Centre is an important (sub-regional) shopping destination and does not exhibit the usual characteristics of an average district centre (as defined by PPS6). The other district centre at St Marychurch is assessed to function much more as a local shopping destination, serving the day-to-day needs of the immediate local community.

- Our analysis of potential retail and leisure development opportunities has identified a range of appropriate opportunities for inclusion in the Torbay LDF. Given the structure and physical limitations of the town centre, these new redevelopment opportunities concentrate on the re-use of existing facilities.

Retail Hierarchy and Future Role of Torquay

Torquay is the largest retail centre in the Torbay administrative area and continues to function as the principal retail centre in Torbay. The retail turnover of the centre, particularly for comparison goods, far out-strips all of the other major centres combined. However, the dominance of Torquay also needs to be set in context. The regional shopping centres of Exeter and Plymouth are close to Torbay and a survey of shopping patterns has indicated that Torquay’s catchment area is constrained by the influence of these larger centres. Newton Abbott Sub-Regional Centre also exerts an influence on such shopping patterns.

Therefore, in the future we expect Torquay’s role to remain as the dominant comparison (non-food) shopping destination in Torbay and opportunities will arise from the number of retail and other commercial operators seeking space in the town. Securing the representation of these operators in the town centre will provide qualitative benefits to the shopping experience in Torquay. However, in order to fulfil this aspiration, new premises will need to be provided. At present, very few premises are available and we are concerned that there could be a mis-match between the size of existing premises generally and the requirements of operators.

Torquay also faces threats. Plymouth and Exeter are developing high quality modern shopping facilities which will significantly increase the attractiveness of these centres. Not only will this new floorspace continue to limit the extent of the Torbay shopping catchment, it could also increase the level of leakage from Torquay. A further side effect could be to alter the level of interest shown by national retailers in Torquay. In light of these characteristics, the retail strategy set out below takes into account the opportunities and threats facing retailing in Torquay and responds by providing a series of initiatives for Torbay Council to take forward into its Local Development Framework.

TORQUAY (cont'd)

Retail Strategy

- The current (high) market penetration rate of non-food shopping in Torbay suggests that (on the basis of constant future market share), there will be significant levels of future floorspace capacity (8,500sq m net by 2011 and 22,100sq m by 2016). The study tests whether there is any policy support for increasing current market penetration rates, but the most appropriate future strategy for Torquay will be to follow a 'constant market share' approach for both convenience and comparison retailing. This conclusion is reached having regard to the influence of surrounding settlements (outside Torbay) on shopping patterns and the need to ensure that additional growth in Torquay does not detract from potential growth in Paignton and Brixham. However, the constant market share approach would nevertheless facilitate significant town centre retail development in order to both regenerate Torbay as a whole and to maintain its function as a PUA.

- The 'constant market share' approach continues to offer Torquay the chance to increase its non-food retail offer at significant levels and will create the right conditions to allow new developments to be built which will provide retailers with a better choice of premises, which are better able to meet their modern needs. For convenience retailing, the projected increase is much smaller (additional 2,200sq m net of convenience floorspace by 2016) and should be used to increase the amount of convenience floorspace within Torquay town centre.

- The retail strategy for The Willows District Centre is for it to remain as a defined District Centre, although proposals for additional retail development in this location should be carefully considered by the Council and a criteria-based policy approach be implemented to assess all new floorspace. For St.Marychurch District Centre, we have identified a qualitative need for additional convenience retail provision (in the form of a reasonably sized foodstore) to serve the local community and maintain the role of this centre in the retail hierarchy.

A: Retail Development, Investment and Regeneration

- The suite of Development Plan Documents should identify a range of sites for new retail development within the town centre. Our analysis has recommended that a number of existing (unimplemented) Local Plan allocations are taken forward into the LDF and should be supplemented by new potential development sites. The recommended sites are the former Royal Garage on Torwood Street and areas of the Strand, Market Street, Temperance Street, 3-37 Union Street and the multi-storey car park adjacent to the Pavilion. A longer term option is likely to be the Town Hall and Lymington Road car park.

- Given the physical constraints imposed upon the town centre, it is likely that the Council should seek to promote (and encourage) the redevelopment of existing retail premises, to provide more efficient higher density retail-led developments. In order to achieve this aim, we recommend that the Council, and its partners, work pro-actively with site owners to bring opportunities to the commercial market.

- The two key areas for increased investment will be the northern part of the primary shopping area (around Union Street) and the Harbour area. The potential of the Harbour is well known and this is reflected in the Council's intention to prepare an Area Action Plan as part of its LDF. The Harbour's contribution to the leisure and evening/night-time economy is well established, although there is a very good opportunity to improve the integration of this area with the main town centre area.

- The promotion of mixed use developments in Torquay town centre is an established part of the Council's town centre policies. We recommend that this continues within the LDF, including, wherever possible, residential uses which add additional activity to parts of the town centre which have traditionally been active during working hours only.

B: Town Centre Improvements

- Linkages between the core shopping area and the Harbour should be improved to ensure that the full regenerative potential of the Harbour area is realised. These improvements should form part of the wider on-going Torbay Waterfront Regeneration initiative.

- The Council should seek to ensure, whenever redevelopment proposals come forward, that a range of retail unit sizes are provided, in order that the needs of retailers are met.

- Alongside the development of new retail floorspace, the Council should consider the promotion of the town centre at the regional and national level, to ensure that its profile remains high and a good level retail interest in new premises is maintained. At the more local level, shopper surveys have confirmed the desire to see more local/independent shops in the town centre. Torbay Council should consider following the example of other centres where specific attention and advice is given to independent/niche retailers.

PAIGNTON

Key Issues for Retailing in Paignton

- Retail provision in Paignton comprises significant amounts of retail floorspace in the town centre, plus two large out-of-centre foodstores.

- As a proportion of all units in the centre, vacancies in Paignton are low (compared with the national average). However, there are pockets of significant vacancy within the centre, to be found at the Crossways Shopping Centre and in the western part of the centre around Winner Street. There is also concern over the performance of the town centre's two purpose-built shopping centres: Victoria Square and the Crossways Centre. We consider that significant private sector investment (supported by the public sector) is needed to improve the performance and appearance of these locations, which are a key contributor to the overall health of Paignton town centre.

- The built environment in Paignton town centre has been improved in recent years. In addition to the pedestrianisation of Victoria Street, which is generally popular with town centre visitors, the HERS heritage scheme around Winner Street, Palace Avenue and Church Street been acknowledged as a success.

- There is a clear difference in performance between the eastern and western parts of the centre, as defined by Torquay Road (which acts as a physical barrier).

- In terms of financial performance, Paignton town centre has a significantly smaller economy than Torquay. Around £17 is spent per person per trip in the town centre, which is well below the equivalent rate in Torquay (£34pp per trip)

- Our quantitative need assessment has found that (on the basis of constant market shares) there will be capacity for 2,800sq m net and 4,700sq m net of convenience and comparison retail floorspace respectively by 2016.

- In terms of shopping patterns, Paignton possesses very little leakage of convenience goods expenditure. Unsurprisingly, Paignton is less successful in retaining comparison goods expenditure than Torquay.

Retail Hierarchy and Future Role of Paignton

It has been acknowledged that, in recent years, the health of Paignton's town centre has suffered and, at present, the economic performance of the town centre is mixed: convenience retailing (which serves the top-up end of the food shopping market) is considered to be performing well, but comparison retailing has a reasonably low income (per sq m) and is dramatically different to Torquay.

The key reason for the current performance is Paignton's role in the sub-region. Like Torquay, the influence of Plymouth and Exeter is important, but retail facilities in Torquay are also likely to constrain the attractiveness of Paignton and its ability to attract national multiple retailers. This conclusion is most relevant for comparison (non-food) retailing where only one quarter of expenditure generated by Paignton residents flows to facilities in the town centre. For convenience retailing, the picture is different and Paignton (as a whole) is relatively self-sufficient and is also able to attract expenditure from outside Paignton.

Our analysis of the health of the town centre has identified a number of key issues. First, there are a number of attractive and popular parts of the town centre: the pedestrianised area of Victoria Street and the recent improvements made as part of the Winner Street HERS initiative. However, a number of locations detract from the potential attractiveness of the town centre: Victoria Square and the Crossways Centre. Second, in line with the other Torbay towns, there is a desire (from town centre visitors) to improve the range of shopping facilities in the centre. Both our own assessment and the results of the survey have indicated that improvements to the range of shops should concentrate on both new development and the existing retail stock. Overall, we consider that whilst Paignton is not a failing centre, there needs to be sustained action to ensure that the town maintains its position in the sub-regional hierarchy.

PAIGNTON (cont'd)

Retail Strategy

The key aim of the retail strategy for Paignton is to focus all efforts on improving the performance of the town centre, as a destination which serves a significant proportion of the needs of the local resident population. An analysis of the options for the future of retailing in Paignton has concluded that a 'constant market share' approach is appropriate for convenience shopping, while comparison retailing in the town centre should aim to maintain (and possibly enhance) its current market share.

When aiming to maintain and enhance the attractiveness of comparison goods shopping in Paignton, the key influencing/limiting factors will be competition posed by new retail floorspace outside the centre (and in other settlements) and the level of retailer interest in the town. Therefore, in order to improve the prospects of maintaining and enhancing town centre health, the Council should not allocate sites or approve applications for out-of-centre retailing in Paignton and also carefully consider the effects of schemes in Torquay and Brixham.

The District Centre at Preston is assessed to be performing reasonably well and the current lack of any significant convenience goods floorspace in this centre will be improved if the extant planning permission for a medium-sized convenience store is implemented.

A: Retail Development, Investment and Regeneration

- Our locational analysis has identified that efforts should be concentrated on two retail-led development schemes (the Crossways Shopping Centre and Station Lane) and improvements to the performance of Victoria Square. Consideration should be given to both refurbishment and redevelopment of the Crossways Centre and the need to incorporate Victoria Square into a 'retail circuit'. Land at Station Lane is a long-standing development opportunity and we would encourage the Council to renew this allocation within the LDF and consider opportunities to bring this site forward for development. Station Lane represents one of the few opportunities to extend the primary shopping area in Paignton.

- As noted above, improving the performance of the retail sector in Paignton will require attention being given to both existing occupiers and new development. In brief, given the lower level of retail interest in Paignton than Torquay and other larger centres, retaining existing occupiers is as important as attracting new ones. There is merit in the Council (and/or other public sector agencies) sponsoring the preparation of a town centre strategy for Paignton, which brings together urban design, commercial property market and transportation issues.

B: Town Centre Improvements

- The pedestrianisation of Victoria Street has brought about improvements to the health and attractiveness of this part of the town centre. Unfortunately, the increase in pedestrian activity has led to Torquay Road being seen as a barrier between the eastern and western parts of the centre, to the detriment of the historic parts of the centre (Church St, Winner St and Palace Avenue). To rectify this situation, we would support proposals to pedestrianise part of Torquay Road. We understand that pedestrianisation of the western part of Torbay Road (to create a public 'town square') has also been proposed and we highlight the benefits that this initiative could bring to ensuring that the new mixed use development at Station Lane acts as a popular and integral part of the town centre.

- The recent HERS initiative has been successful in improving the physical appearance and economic performance of the historic (western) parts of the town centre. However, we consider the preparation of the Torbay LDF offers the opportunity to reconsider whether the northern part of Winner Street (to the north of Palace Avenue) continues to function as secondary shopping frontage.

BRIXHAM

Key Issues for Retailing in Brixham

- Brixham is the smallest of the three town centres in Torbay and the vast majority of retail floorspace is located within a compact town centre boundary. Brixham is a popular tourist destination and tourism is a key contributor to the local retail economy. A key characteristic of the town centre environment is the harbour area, which is an active fishing port. The built environment is mostly historic, with very few modern retail units available.

- The town centre attracts around £11m of convenience goods expenditure and £17m of comparison goods expenditure. Retailing in the centre is characterised by small convenience uses (there are no medium or large foodstores) and a mixture of national and local comparison goods retailers.

- Surveys of shopping patterns have found a very low retention rate of convenience and comparison shopping trips in Brixham. This pattern is due to the small size of existing foodstore facilities and lack of national multiple comparison operators, and reinforced by the availability of facilities in Paignton and Torquay.

- Surveys of shoppers indicate that additional food and non-food retail provision, including a new supermarket, are the most keenly sought improvements to the town centre. The surveys have also identified current concerns over the level and location of existing car parking provision in and adjacent to the town centre.

- There is little doubt over the focus of future development activity in Brixham: the former Central Car Park site. This has been highlighted in the Local Plan as a key retail-led development opportunity in the heart of the town centre and will be able to provide (much needed) modern retail premises, retain car parking provision to adequate levels, improve linkages between different parts of the centre and attract inward investment.

Retail Hierarchy and Future Role of Brixham

Our assessment of retailing in Brixham has found that the town centre continues to perform well as a focus for local (small scale) shopping and as a tourist destination. Brixham is the smallest town centre in Torbay PUA and continues to maintain its role in the hierarchy. However, whilst we have not found any serious problems with the health of the town centre, the lack of new retail development in recent years has left the centre with a qualitative deficiency in retail provision.

Our analysis of existing provision and current shopping patterns, plus the views of town centre shoppers, has identified that the town is failing to retain a significant proportion of locally generated food and non-food expenditure. Only one quarter of convenience goods expenditure is retained in Brixham (the rest leaks to Paignton and Torquay) and a lower proportion of comparison goods expenditure is retained. The primary reason for this leakage of expenditure is the lack of a medium or large foodstore in Brixham and the low level of national multiple operators. Therefore, the need to retain a larger proportion of shopping trips within Brixham is the primary focus for the town's retail strategy.

Retail Strategy

Analysis of the policy options for the future of retailing in Brixham has indicated that aiming to maintain the town's existing market share will provide for very little convenience and comparison goods floorspace capacity over the lifetime of the Torbay LDF. Therefore, we recommend that the Council pursue a controlled 'retail growth' approach to convenience and comparison retailing in Brixham. On the basis that suitable facilities can be provided, which retain 75% of locally-generated convenience expenditure and one third of comparison expenditure, there will be capacity for 2,400sq m net of convenience floorspace and 5,200sq m net of comparison floorspace by the end of the LDF period.

However, given Brixham's place in the retail hierarchy, including the influence which shopping facilities in Paignton and Torquay will have on its future development, the retail strategy for Brixham must also ensure that future private sector investment is not harmed by other out-of-centre (or town centre) schemes in Torbay. Accordingly, the retail strategy for Brixham comprises two elements: promotion of the Central Car Park site (see below) and protection of existing and future town centre provision through robust (criteria-based) development control policies.

A: Retail Development, Investment and Regeneration

In order to encourage greater retail development and investment in Brixham and to achieve its regeneration, the retail strategy recommends that the Council's continued attention be given to the redevelopment of the Central Car Park site to provide a mixture of uses. We understand that the Council (through its Torbay Development Agency arm) are currently seeking a private sector development partner for this scheme, and we recommend that the contents of this Torbay Retail Study are used to inform the evolution of this scheme, including the need to sure that:

- the redevelopment scheme includes provision for a medium-sized foodstore of sufficient size to claw back convenience expenditure lost from the Brixham area;
- the redevelopment includes provision (wherever possible) for additional modern retail premises, which are able to attract new retailers to the town;
- the scheme should include car parking provision which meets the sustainability objectives of the Council, whilst providing for the needs of town centre shoppers.
- Given the importance of the Central Car Park scheme to the regeneration of Brixham, the local planning authority should remain closely involved with the developer selection process, plus have an input into the evolution of the redevelopment scheme. This will ensure that the contents of the retail strategy are acknowledged by the scheme.

B: Town Centre Improvements

Many town centre improvements will arise out of the Central Car Park redevelopment scheme, some of which are listed below:

- at present, movement between the northern and southern parts of the town centre is not attractive and creates a physical separation between different parts of the centre. The Central Car Park scheme should create an attractive (and easy) link between Middle Street and Fore Street, possibly extending (and utilising) the existing Union Lane frontage. The creation of a high quality shopping environment will be particular important to ensure that a circulation of pedestrian movement is created which links into existing shops.
- On the basis that a mix of retail premises will be provided within the Central Car Park scheme, it may well be appropriate to extend the primary shopping frontages in Brixham across this site.
- The scheme should provide short-stay parking provision, to serve the needs of shoppers and visitors to the town centre. This will ensure that the town centre remains an accessible and convenient shopping destination.
- Apart from retail and parking provision, there is a good opportunity to introduce additional residential uses into the town centre. Residential uses can add vitality and life to the town centre beyond normal shopping/working hours.
- Whether it is provided as part of the Central Car Park scheme, or through other initiatives promoted through the Council and the TDA, easy pedestrian linkages between the core shopping area and the Harbour should be maintained and enhanced.

GVA Grimley
International Property Advisers

Planning, Development & Regeneration Consultancy
University Gate
Park Row
Bristol
BS1 5UB

Tel 0870 900 89 90
Fax 020 7911 2560

Report authors: Chris Goddard & Matthew Morris
T: 0207 911 2202 & 0117 988 5334
E: chris.goddard@gvagrimley.co.uk & matthew.morris@gvagrimley.co.uk