

Response to Scrutiny Panel. Retail Policy

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Aims:

1. To establish the full range of challenges facing Jersey's diverse retail sector.
2. To establish the current policies and actions of the Minister for Economic Development towards the retail sector.
3. To examine whether the Minister's policies and actions represent an appropriate response to the challenges facing the retail sector.

Introduction

As the Town Centre Manager of St Helier my response is based upon the retail offer of St Helier Town Centre. As can be seen by the reports produced in the UK based on the regeneration of the High Street this is not a problem that is unique to Jersey. Both the Grimsey Report and the more publicised Portas Review have made interesting recommendations with the former emphasising the importance of a long term strategy for town centres.

There is no doubt that the face of retail will evolve as it has always done and the Chief Executive of John Lewis now refers to the importance of *Bricks and Clicks*. This refers to the synergy that must occur between a bricks and mortar retailer combining his business with the internet, at which John Lewis is outstanding.

The role of government in my opinions is:

1. Determine a 5 year, 10 year and 20 year strategy for the main retail areas.
2. Understand the realistic number of retailers that your community can support and where the relevant retail placement should be.
3. Control the areas for retail displacement and ensure they become utilised in a productive manner and do not become retail waste lands.
4. Ensure retailers have the skills to take on the challenges of the internet age and are able to enhance their offer of a unique interpersonal service.
5. It is vital that access and egress to town centres are as easy as possible and that parking is accessible and easy.
6. Create a USP (unique selling point) for your town centre. Jersey already has this with the architecturally outstanding Central Market, unfortunately it is not relevant to the 21st Century as any examination of successful markets in the UK will reveal.

Below is an overview strategy created for the Parish of St Helier Deputies in autumn 2013 this covers the points above.

Introduction

Whilst there are strategies and plans for most aspects of life in Jersey there is no strategy for St Helier Town Centre which takes into account the change in the world retail scene and the importance of aligning the town with Future Trends.

The main points reviewed in this strategy:

1. The Internet and how the town should adapt to this challenge.
2. The creation of a U.S.P for the town centred on the market and the al fresco culture.
3. A review of the core retailing areas.
4. The creation of an effective infrastructure, which would result in a car friendly town with great public transport links.

The town already possesses many advantages that make it stand out from those in the U.K, such as security and cleanliness; however, Government must strive to ensure that it does not become the retail desert that some sceptics predict.

1. Toe to Toe with the Internet.

The arrival of the Internet is the greatest threat that the retail industry has ever experienced. Shopping on the Internet is easy, instant, and available 24 hours a day and price effective.

Unfortunately a large proportion of the retail trade are adopting the ostrich attitude. The Internet is here to stay and cannot be ignored.

The way to compete is:

1. Embrace the internet and work with it. (I.e. Click and Collect)
2. Utilise Social Media. (Facebook and Twitter)
3. Ensure customer service is of such a high level that your customer is your friend.
4. Review opening hours to suit your customer and not the shop workers.
5. Create the town centre as an entertainment hub.

2. St Helier a unique and vibrant Town Centre.

St Helier is already a unique and vibrant town but needs to optimise on the advantages that it currently benefits from.

The Market - the market is a stunning building that typifies the heritage of the island. However it is stuck in a time warp and represents an offer that was relevant in the 1960s. It has no strategy and does not appeal to the current shopper. A visit to Spitalfields or even Blackburn (winner of market of the year 2012) it will show you what should be happening in this area. No business can stand still in this economic time you either move forward or slip backwards. An excellent report was produced by U.K. experts several years ago, yet no action has been taken.

The Cafe culture of the island again should be fostered and encouraged and certain areas such as West Centre and Halkett Place could become the food courts of the town along with entertainment hubs.

Trial car free areas on Saturdays. I.e. Broad Street and Halkett Place.

3. Review of Retail areas of Town.

All towns move the retailing centres an example of which is Sheffield where the Haymarket gave way to the Moore and then Meadow Hall in the space of twenty years. St Helier is no different with the decline of the tourist industry resulting in the closure of hotels. Twenty years ago the town opened until 10.00pm Monday to Thursday every week of the year, now it opens until 7.00 pm one day a week. The way to maintain the vibrancy of town is managing the migration of the shopping areas and creatively converting the void that is created.

1. The retail zones in the town should be reduced and relocated.
2. Assistance should be given to retail areas that are no longer relevant.
3. Review of office space for conversion to housing.
4. Planning review should be made to produce a cohesive strategy for turning empty offices, which are no longer fit for purpose into residential properties. This could also include empty spaces above shops.

4. Infrastructure.

The access and egress of the town is essential and should be based upon car usage and Public Transport. Whilst I do not feel, the bicycle should be used it is still only a small percentage compared to the other two forms of transport and not generally used by shoppers.

1. Review of all parking, potential parking payment systems and suitability of type of parking
2. Installation of Car Parking availability signs
3. Town Hopper Bus
4. Unification of payment schemes such as the Oyster card.

With regard to points 2 and 3 of the review there are currently frequent discussions with the officers of E.D.D specifically Cedric Bird and Mike King who are assisting with strategic points.

A service audit has been taken in 50 shops in St Helier.

An investigation into parking charges is taking place and solutions discussed.

A meeting of retailers to establish the USP for St Helier is planned for early January.

Liaison meeting with Chief Officers of E.D.D, T.T.S, Planning and Property holdings have been held regularly.

Additionally Cedric Bird has been appointed as a retail liaison representative of E.D.D.

I feel that E.D.D is reacting in an efficient, timely and effective manner.

Conclusion

It is important that timely and effective action is taken by government to retain the active and comprehensive retail offer that St Helier currently has. You will see that St Helier has not experienced any increase of footfall over the last 3 years that therefore means that with the reduction of the high street spend that it will not be feasible to retain the current retail footprint without engaging with the internet to expand market capacity.

Key Information

Shops Opening/Closing

Year	Open	Closed	+/-
2010	36	14	+22
2011	42	9	+33
2012	37	15	+22
2013	32	27	+5

As can be seen by this analysis the number of shops opening versus closing has declined seriously in 2013. It is also apparent that the strength of King and Queens St has been maintained and the peripheral areas are beginning to suffer.

Footfall

Customers x 1000

