Scrutiny Review of Retail Policy

Submission from David Dodge focusing on the Markets and North of St Helier retail offer

29th January, 2014

I offer a small local food producer's perspective. I think our experience may give an insight into how strategic policies are affecting change at a practical level in our small part of the "coal-face". I think it is timely to review retailing and that this is of importance to our community.

I am pleased to add my support the positive comments raised in earlier submissions to this Review in favour of the St Helier Markets. Though relatively small in overall sales volume on the Island, the Markets are an important, perhaps even iconic part of Jersey's diverse food culture and food industry knowledge base.

There is renewed interest from many of the government partners involved in mapping the Markets' future, for which I am very grateful. Developing a "shared vision" for this part of St Helier within a retail strategy for the Island is, in my opinion, now critical.

Office employee migration, a dip in the global economy, a changing tourism industry and e-commerce are all factors driving change in Town shopping, particularly along the Colomberie, Queen Street and King Street axis. However the need for daily, fresh, local food remains a compelling element of the Jersey way of life. Fortunately, Jersey's supermarkets are excellent supporters of local produce. There remains in my view an important role for the small independent Market businesses and in particular the fresh and specialist food trades and provided that the public have convenient access and traders are confident of a secure future, then investment will flow, activity of the Markets' will flourish and attract footfall to St Helier every day.

In my opinion the social, economic and environmental benefits to the community of the small independent local food trades are not always fully appreciated within the strategic process, which is the States of Jersey blue print for managing change. The Island Plan and Sustainable Transport Policy support the Markets and Town retailing on one hand and yet on the other, these and other States' policies instigate intervention and create incremental challenges for retailing in the North of Town.

It is certainly a frequently made mistake to benchmark our local food offer against the UK alone, where out-of-town shopping dominates shopping culture. Within our own industry, it is estimated the 2% of the UK's bread is produced by the craft baker and in France this is over 60%. Jersey's bakery offer is diverse and lies between the two market places. We can learn from other places, but we are different.

An example

I would like to add to the discussion by offering an example, via an analysis of St Helier's shopper parking needs. Frequent, convenient and welcoming shopper visits to Town is a key issue and without which, the small independent fresh food trades will struggle to adapt.

I have drawn from a recent Parson's Brinkerhoff (PB) study*. I commend this type of professional report because it provides an opportunity to debate and consider the challenges in a balanced, measured and intelligent manner, rather than relying on a potentially subjective view of any single "player".

I conclude from the PB study that there is adequate shopper parking serving the South of St Helier, but heavy bag shopper faces barriers in the North. The specific needs of the areas around the Markets are not identified, which is a disappointment.

I have calculated the capacity and space survey results for the shopper car parks in the North of town in PB's survey conducted on 4/2/13, (table 3, page 5)* including; Minden Place, Snow Hill, Charles Street and Charles Street temporary, Ann Court and Ann St Brewery. They have a combined total of 518 spaces. The surface car parks fill quickly and at 11:00 on this date there was a space availability of 11%, almost exclusively in Minden Place and at this level shopper's perception of convenient access may dip.

Conversely, Sand Street, which has a total capacity of 545 spaces, had 54% spare capacity at that time and shoppers favouring this area are well served.

The Jersey Annual Social Survey 2012 is quoted and 48% of those surveyed rated shopper parking as being "poor or very poor". This is a startling indicator for the North, given the excellent parking availability at Sand Street, serving the South.

From the above it is clear that there is a major problem in the North of Town, which has nothing to do with Internet shopping, events management or promotions, but the provision of essential day-to-day infrastructure.

David Dodge

Vienna Bakery

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*Robert Maclean and Andrew Potter, Parsons Brinkerhoff; "States of Jersey, St Helier Parking Needs Study", June 2013