

## **Retail Regeneration in the SW** – responses to Vivienne Rayner by April 10<sup>th</sup> please

### **Background**

Reports such as 'clone town Britain' and 'Ghost Town Britain' have encapsulated the pressure increasingly being felt by independent retailers in the SW. Over Xmas, we heard that spending on the Internet soared, while SW town centres were full of 'lookers' but not 'buyers' until the very last minute.

At a time when public policy is increasingly focussed on reducing travelling, the FSB should be able to get support for measures to maintain the financial viability of SW shopping areas. In addition, independent shops are often seen as part of the distinctiveness of the SW and hence part of its 'tourism offer'.

The purpose of this discussion document is to explore the reasons for the decline and the availability of public policy options to assist in retail regeneration.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Where do you like to go shopping? Why?
2. Have you changed your shopping habits recently? In what way? What prompted the change?
3. Thinking of other places you have visited where you might like to live, how are they different from your home shopping area?
4. What changes would be required to make your home area more like the area you would like to live in?
5. Would those changes be good for business?
6. Have you bought anything over the internet? Why did you buy it that way instead of going to a shop? What would make you go to a shop instead?
7. Some towns have lots of people coming in to shop, but shop rents are higher than can be afforded so the shops keep changing. Is this a problem in your area?
8. If you wanted to open a shop in your town, how easy would it be to find premises?
9. Does your local Council have an Economic Development Officer who could help you with finding premises?
10. Some towns don't have any empty shops, but they do have lots of charity shops. This often masks a decline in business. Is this the case in your area?
11. Does your locality have a town centre manager? Has it made any difference? How?
12. Mystery shopping is a brilliant technique used by the Retail Sector Skills Council to help retailers better understand what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. Would that help in your town?

13. Bristol City Council has a Retail Forum. One of the objectives is to raise retail's profile within the Council and 'educate' officers on the problems some of their actions cause. Is this a good idea? What else could/should such a group do?
14. Gloucester Council pays for an ice skating rink in the city centre in the run up to Xmas to try and bring people into the town. Is this a good idea? Does your town do something similar?
15. Some places have specialised in a particular kind of retailing and regenerated their local economy as a result. Book Towns are an example - A Book Town is a small rural town or village in which second-hand and antiquarian bookshops are concentrated. Most Book Towns have developed in villages of historic interest or of scenic beauty. There are signs of such development in the SW. Apart from the obvious tourist driven settlements such as Cheddar, can you think of any niche retail towns in your area? Are there any retailing ideas which might work for your area?
16. Thinking about your local High Street, is it getting busier or is it declining?
17. Is this change in business fortunes recent, or part of a long term trend?
18. If the change is recent, what triggered the change?
19. If the change is damaging businesses, what do you need to address it?
20. If it is part of a long term trend, what is the trend and what do you think is the cause?
21. If the long term trend is damaging business, what do you need to address it?
22. What puts you off using your local High Street shops?
23. What would make you want to shop in your local High Street as opposed to the local out of town centres/supermarkets?
24. Some towns (Haslemere for example) offer their customers a Loyalty Card similar to that offered by Tesco etc. Would this encourage you to use your local High Street?

Vivienne Rayner

4<sup>th</sup> January 2007

Amended following comments from Barbara Ellenbroek 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007