



Pershore

Understanding the Heart of Our Town May 2017 Summary Town Benchmarking Report

Produced for
Wychavon
District Council,
in association with



Executive Summary

The Process

The People and Places Town Centre Benchmarking System has been developed to address the real issues of how to understand measure, evaluate and ultimately improve town centres. The approach offers a simple way of capturing data on 12 Key Performance Indicators selected by those involved in town centre management. By having the tools to measure performance, strategic decision making is both encouraged and improved. By considering performance, forward strategies and action planning can be more focused and effective.

The Place

The business data for Pershore in 2017 indicates that two-thirds (67%) of businesses in the town centre are shops and that this is high compared with other benchmarked towns nationally. Of other businesses there are less professional and financial services (10%), drinking establishments (3%), takeaways (3%), and non-residential institutions (3%) than in other comparable towns. Only the numbers of restaurants/cafes (8%) and unique Sui Generis establishments (5%) are comparable with national averages otherwise.

The majority of shops in Pershore town centre are comparison retailers (81%). This is comparable with small towns nationally. Whilst this percentage of comparison retailers indicates Pershore is an established local shopping centre, it also suggests a continued vulnerability to competition from neighbouring centres and on-line. It will be important for these shops to have a distinctive offer pitched at local customers and/or potential visitors. The proportion of convenience retailers in Pershore is greatly buoyed by the Retail Market which can be an important resource for shoppers in the town.

The data for Pershore indicates that it has a very high proportion (93%) of businesses that are independently owned and this could be used as part of a distinctive marketing message. Conversely, the proportion of key attractors (2%) is very low and there is also a very low number of national multiples (6%) compared to other benchmarked towns.

The vacancy data for Pershore indicates an average level of 10.5% across the town which is higher than the level for small towns nationally (9%). This percentage is skewed by modest clusters of vacancies in two locations: Bakers' Arcade; Royal Arcade.

The presence of an indoor market in Pershore that is open Wednesday to Saturday with the same permanent stallholders is very unusual for a town of its size. This is a good sized market compared to small towns nationally. The



array of stalls including butchers, bakers, greengrocers and florists adds very significantly to the retail mix in the town, especially as a proportion of convenience retailers.

The indicative footfall data shows that Pershore is considerably busier than similarly-sized benchmarked towns nationally with 138 passers-by per 10 minutes on a market day and 134 on a non-market day. This compares to 98 and 86 respectively for small towns nationally on a market day and non-market day. Informatively, the figures are very similar for a market and non-market day in Pershore but this is perhaps to be expected because the indoor market is open four days per week.

Analysis of the data for other locations indicates that footfall in the town centre varies significantly along the length of the High Street and between access points from the car park to the Market and Asda. The counts for the western end of the High Street and Retail Market entrances are around 25% of the total in the busiest part of town. This indicates that people are not migrating relatively short distances across the town centre and that businesses in these quiet areas are not being exposed to the high levels of footfall in Pershore.

The car parking data indicates that overall Pershore is a moderately easy place to find a parking space in during the week. There are 23% of spaces available on a market day and 25% on a normal day. These figures are busier than the average parking vacancy rates of 31% for small towns nationally on market days and 37% on non-market days. This suggests availability of parking is busy but not necessarily, currently a limiting factor for the town centre. An initial indication though is that there is an imbalance between on and off-street parking with the former much busier and hard to find a space for. On a normal day, the indication is that only 3% of on-street parking spaces are available compared to 20% nationally. This is particularly important for the customer looking for 'pop and shop' parking and may be a limiting factor in such instances.

The People

Survey forms were distributed to all the town centre businesses in Pershore. The following percentage figures are based on the 96 returned Business Confidence Surveys from a total of 154 town centre businesses. This is a very high return rate of 62% compared to 25% nationally and suggests a high level of interest within the town's business community. It is also indicative of a high percentage of independent retailers that are often owner-managed.

64% of the businesses that responded to the survey are long-established in Pershore; having been based there for more than six years.

Despite apparent prosperity in the town, it was striking that a high proportion of businesses reported a negative performance over the last year: 41% said



that turnover had decreased compared to 31% nationally; 38% said profit had similarly declined compared to 34% in other small towns nationally.

Looking to the future, an increased proportion of businesses (83%) expect turnover to go up or stay the same compared to 82% for small towns nationally. It remains a concern that a significant proportion (17%) of Pershore town centre businesses surveyed expect turnover to continue to decrease in the year ahead. Such seemingly year-on-year declines in performance suggest that this proportion of businesses may be particularly vulnerable to competition from elsewhere.

Only 23% of businesses surveyed in Pershore had experienced crime over the last 12 months and theft was the most common cause.

Businesses in Pershore mostly reported that they did not have problems recruiting or retaining staff (85%). Only 12% of town centre businesses reported that they currently employed an apprentice.

Businesses in Pershore selected Individual; Festivals; Heritage; Convenient and Traditional as the most popular overall images for promoting the town to customers. The top three key phrases selected as appealing to individual businesses' customers were Independent, Plum Festival and Abbey.

A sample of 83 town centre users was collected by local school students. The responses from these town centre users indicate a sample from this mid-week survey that comprises a modest majority females (55%). There was a good spread of age categories which are broadly comparable with national benchmarks except for a markedly higher percentage of 16-25 year-olds. Most people are in town for convenience shopping (26%), work (25%) and leisure (25%). Despite the high number of comparison shops, only 9% of users are in town for comparison shopping mid-week.

A high proportion of users visit Pershore daily (31%) or more than once a week (39%) suggesting a core of loyal town centre users that is even higher than typically found in small towns.

A relatively high proportion (30%) of users came in to town on foot whilst slightly less than average for small towns (42%) travelled by car. Just over a third of town centre users (34%) spend more than £20 on a visit to the town centre and this is higher than national averages (27%).

The figures for shoppers' origin for Pershore from this survey indicate that 100% come from within 30 minutes of the town. Within this figure, a relatively high percentage come from neighbouring areas within a 30 minute drive compared to benchmarked towns. The absence of any tourists maybe in part due to the time of the year but is nevertheless surprising.

The Positives and Negatives

Businesses in Pershore appear appreciative of the trading environment in general. From the responses by businesses to the survey, potential local



customers (80%), potential tourist customers (66%), physical appearance (51%), transport links (47%), mix of retail offer (49%), prosperity of the town (47%), events/activities (39%), markets (37%), geographical location (36%) and even car parking (34%) are considered as key positives of being located in Pershore by at least a third of respondents. Of these, the potential for tourist customers and the market are more than 10% higher than national averages.

When asked about the positive aspects of Pershore town centre, ease of walking around (65%), physical appearance (64%), cleanliness (63%), cafes/restaurants (63%), customer service and safety (60%) were all valued by at least three out of five users. All of these levels of response compare favourably with other towns nationally.

When asked if they would recommend a visit to Pershore town centre, a very high proportion (95%) said 'yes' compared to small towns nationally.

In terms of negative perceptions about being located in Pershore town centre, only three factors are rated negatively by over a third of businesses. 53% of businesses that responded considered parking to be a key issue and this compares to 53% for small towns nationally. This is followed by the threat of competition from the internet (43%) and out-of-town shopping (35%) as the next two most negative perceptions.

In terms of negative perception by users, there were much fewer responses than positives, with only parking (31%), retail offer (31%) and cultural activities/events being rated negatively by more than one in four town centre users.

The Priorities for Pershore

When businesses in Pershore were asked what two things would improve the town centre, the main set of responses related to parking followed by the retail mix and the opportunities for improved marketing and promotion. This is despite all three of these issues also being recognised as existing strengths by over a third of businesses.

When asked what two things would improve the town centre, significant numbers of users point to transport issues, including public transport, pedestrian access and parking; the retail mix and bank opening times; and leisure provision including eateries and events.

