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Planning. Design. Economics.

BENTHAM TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK

FEBRUARY 2016

Bentham Town Centre Health Check

This town centre health check provides a snapshot of the current health of Bentham town centre. The assessment of town centre health is based on the indicators set out in National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) (Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 2b-005-20140306) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirement for local planning authorities to assess and plan to meet the needs of main town centre uses in full. It is supported by primary research comprising:

- Site visit to the retail centre;
- Business owner surveys; and
- In-street customer surveys.

The primary information collected is summarised in this document and full raw data sets are included as technical appendices to the associated 2015 Retail and Leisure Study (the 2015 Study). The findings are presented in an Infographic first page with further analysis, commentary, photographs and an updated land use plan given in the pages that follow.

The purpose of the health check is to form part of a robust retail evidence base aiding Local Plan preparation

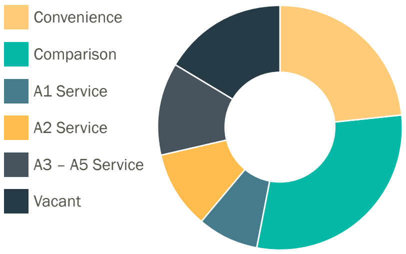
The Bentham Town Centre Health Check is focussed on the Core Retail Area of High Bentham as defined by the adopted Craven Local Plan (1999). NLP undertook its health check site visit on Tuesday 16 June 2015 between 10:00am and 11.00am.

Town Centre HEALTH CHECK

Bentham Town Centre Health Check

Key Indicators

01 DIVERSITY OF USES



A1: Shops - A2: Financial & Professional Services - A3: Food & Drink - A4: Drinking Establishments - A5: Hot Food Takeaway

- Proportion of convenience units is almost three times the national average
- There is an under-representation of both A1 service and A3 – A5 service uses
- A number of dwellings are located along Main Street, which dilutes the retail offer in the centre.

02 PROPORTION OF VACANT STREET LEVEL PROPERTY

16.67% Bentham

11.84% National Average

03 CUSTOMERS' VIEWS AND BEHAVIOUR

- Little interest amongst shoppers surveyed to do non-food shopping in Bentham
- Half of those surveyed never visit the centre for leisure activities
- Most visits to the centre were found to be relatively brief (70% stated that they would spend less than one hour in the shopping area)

04 RETAILER REPRESENTATION AND INTENTIONS TO CHANGE REPRESENTATION

- Bentham does not contain any of the 31 'major retailers' identified by GOAD
- Spar and Co-op both have convenience food stores within the centre
- Many of the retail units are owner-occupied independent businesses, some of which have been operating from the same premises for over 50 years.

05 COMMERCIAL RENTS

- Average rental rates within Bentham reach around £20 per square foot.

06 ACCESSIBILITY

- Free on-street parking on Main Street is limited to 30 minutes between 8am and 6pm Monday – Saturday
- Business owners feel a lack of business and customer parking constrains their operation and performance
- Fairly even split between those who travel to the centre by car and those who walk

07 PERCEPTION OF SAFETY AND OCCURRENCE OF CRIME

- No signs of graffiti, vandalism or antisocial behaviour observed
- CCTV cameras have been erected outside of the Co-operative Food store on Main Street
- 8% of customers said that they did not feel safe during the evening

08 STATE OF TOWN CENTRE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

- Some of the shop fronts and fascia's appeared to be in need of attention
- Clusters of road signs in the vicinity of the Main Street/Station Road and Main Street/Robin Lane junctions compete with views of the retail units
- Most people were satisfied with the state of the town centre environmental quality

Design and analysis by NLP (August 2015)

BENTHAM OVERVIEW

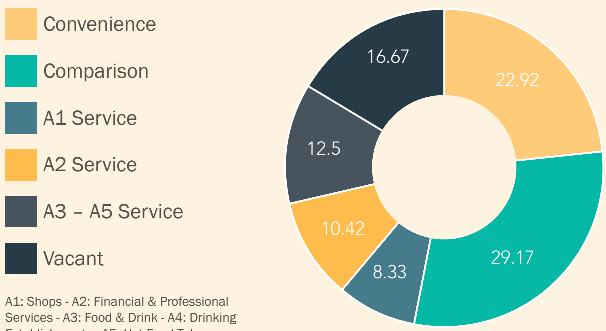
Bentham is located in the north-west of the District, approximately 37km north-west of Skipton and has a population of approximately 3,030[1]. The village is just over 5km south of the A65, and this separation from the strategic road network means that the centre is one of the more isolated centres that NLP surveyed. There is a railway station within walking distance of the retail centre but services are infrequent and do not therefore encourage visits to the centre by rail by shoppers or rail commuters.

The retail centre is located along Main Street which bisects the village from east to west. Land use to the north of Main Street is predominantly residential whilst two large employment sites and a caravan park are located to the south of the centre.

DIVERSITY OF USES AND PROPORTION OF VACANT STREET LEVEL PROPERTY

Diversity of Uses

Bentham has a proliferation of convenience retail units, with the proportion of this use class standing at almost three times the national average. This could be due to the nearest large supermarkets being located approximately 10 miles to the west in Lancaster (Booths at Kirkby Londsale), which allows for a more traditional separation of provisions (butchers, bakers and green grocers) within Bentham. The results of the Business Survey show that retailers in Bentham consider Lancaster to be the centre which provides the biggest competition to their business.



A1: Shops - A2: Financial & Professional Services - A3: Food & Drink - A4: Drinking Establishments - A5: Hot Food Takeaway

Figure 1: Diversity of Uses in Ingleton Town Centre

Use Category	Number of units	Percentage of units in Town Centre	National Average*
Convenience	11	22.92	8.40
Comparison	14	29.17	35.77
A1 Service	4	8.33	12.33
A2 Service	5	10.42	10.75
A3 – A5 Service	6	12.50	19.38
Vacant	8	16.67	11.84

Table 1: Diversity of Uses in Bentham

Source: NLP / Experian GOAD (2015)

*National Average as provided by GOAD (June 2015).

The number of A2 service uses is on par with the national average, although three of the five units which fall within this category are in use as estate agents. The former Natwest Bank on Station Road is currently vacant and this plot, which includes a car parking area, represents a potential redevelopment opportunity.

There is an under-representation of both A1 service and A3 – A5 service uses. The proportion of comparison units is approximately 6% below the national average.

A number of dwellings are located along Main Street, which dilutes the retail offer in the centre, although they do not harm the integrity of its function.

Figure 2: Independent businesses, Station Road

Proportion of Vacant Street Level Property

There is a high vacancy rate within Bentham, five percent higher than the national average (eight units).

Many of the vacant units appear to be neglected with no signs of active marketing, indicating low interest in the centre. The results of the Business Survey show that the majority of business owners feel that Bentham has either stay the same or declined over the last year, with a lack of footfall being the main constraint on the operation of their business.

Due to the small size of the retail centre, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions regarding the distribution of vacant units. However, it was clear on the site visit made by NLP that Station Road suffered from a deficiency in the passing trade which frequents Main Street. A number of vacant units can also be found clustered to the south of the Core Retail Area on Station Road.

Figure 3: Former Natwest Bank, Station Road

RETAILER REPRESENTATION AND COMMERCIAL RENTS

Retailer Representation and Intentions to Change Representation

The Core Retail Area of Bentham does not contain any of the 31 'major retailers' identified by GOAD[2]. Spar and Co-op both have convenience retail food stores within the centre. (346sq m & 231sq m respectively).

As may be expected in a rural centre, many of the retail units are owner-occupied independent businesses, some of which have been operating from the same premises for over 50 years.

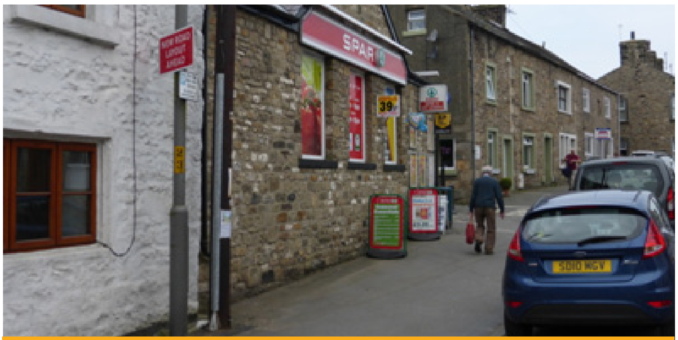


Figure 4: Spar, Main Street

Bentham and Cross Hills are the only centres considered in this Study where no business operators indicated a reliance on tourist and leisure visitors.

There are fewer restaurants and cafés than in other comparable settlements in Craven District, which may be a reflection of the more modest tourist attraction to Bentham compared with nearby Ingleton and Kirkby Lonsdale (outside of Craven District). There are however three bakeries within close proximity of each other, which could be a sign of catering for visitors to the centre in addition to local needs.

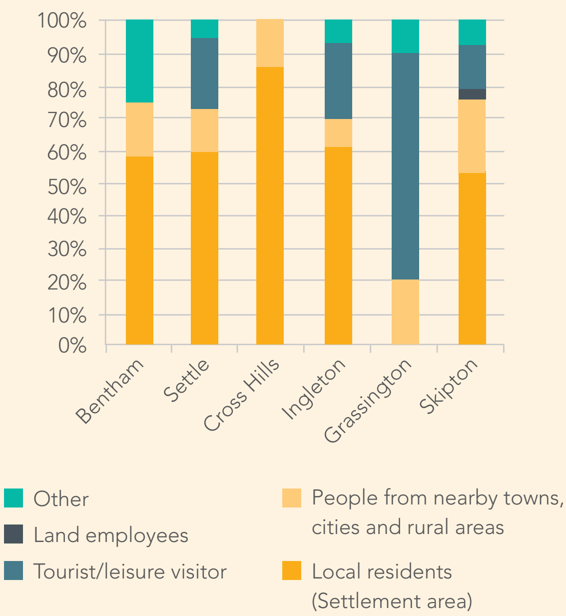


Figure 5: Customer base on which business operators most rely on

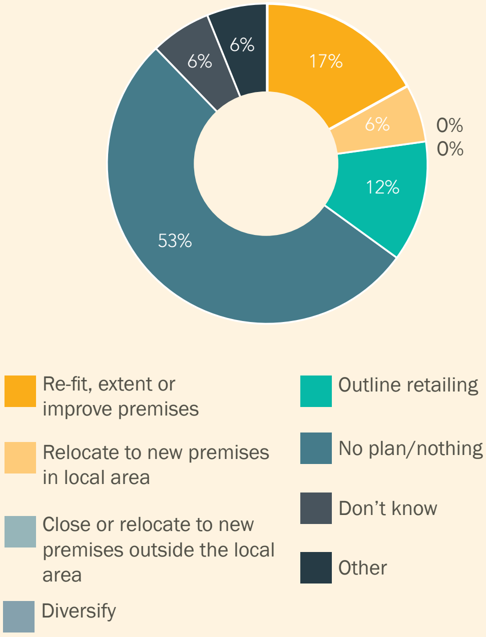


Figure 6: Business Operator Plans to Change Business in Bentham

The majority of respondents to the Business Survey in Bentham (53%) stated that they had no plans to change or expand their businesses in the near future, although three respondents (17.6%) did state that they intend to re-fit, extend or improve their premises. This indicates a stable retail market in Bentham & an opportunity to explore the potential to stimulate interest in improving the quality of retail premises.

Commercial Rents

Discussions with local agents have indicated that within Bentham (and other settlements in the north-western portion of the District), the number of enquires agents receive is more seasonally dependent than in Skipton to the south-east, which could be an indication of the reliance of towns in the north-west of the District on tourism. Average rental levels within Bentham are quoted as up to £20 per square foot, lower than Settle (£15-25 per square foot) & Skipton (£45-70 per square foot).

Business Operator's Perceptions of Centre

As part of the town centre business surveys, business operators were asked to provide their opinions on the state of the retail centre in which they operate, as well as the performance of their own business.

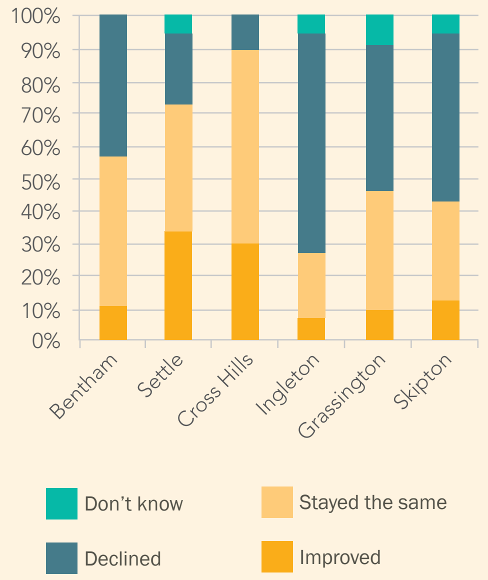


Figure 7: Business operators' opinions of performance of centres over last 12 months

As shown in Figure 7, in Bentham, business operators demonstrated a relatively even split between those who felt the centre had declined (41%) and those who felt it had remained the same (47%). The remainder felt that the centre had shown some improvement. 18% of business owners felt that the centre could be improved with greater promotion and marketing of the town.

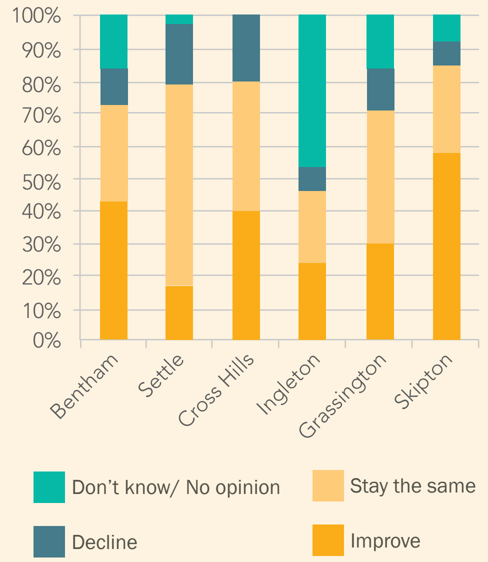


Figure 8: Business operators' expectations for the performance of their business over the next 12 months

Just over 40% of business operators expect the performance of their business to increase over the next 12 months.

The centres which are considered to be the biggest competition to business operators in Bentham are (the centre which is considered to be the biggest competition is listed first):

- Lancaster
- Settle / Kirkby Lonsdale (joint second)

The results of the household survey (see main report and accompanying appendices) show that, in terms of comparison shopping, the majority of comparison expenditure drawn away from Bentham is spent in Lancaster and Kendal.

ACCESSIBILITY

There are three Council-owned car parks within Bentham (Grasmere and Cleveland Square, Lairgill amd Harley Bank), although the main car park for shoppers is the Grasmere car park, which is free of charge. This car park is accessed via Goodenber Road/Banks Rise with footpath links through to Main Street.

Free on-street parking is available on Main Street, however a time restriction of 30 minutes (and no return within two hours) operates between 8am and 6pm Monday – Saturday. This was reported by one business owner during the site visit as being severely detrimental to trade in the centre, and the availability of business/customer parking was ranked as being the second most important issue constraining the operation and performance of businesses on the Business Surveys (level of trade/lack of visitors/customers ranked as most important).

Bentham is served by a railway station which is within walking distance of the Core Retail Area, and bus stops are located on Main Street and Robin Lane.

Figure 9: Attractive bus stop and well maintained street furniture, Robin Lane

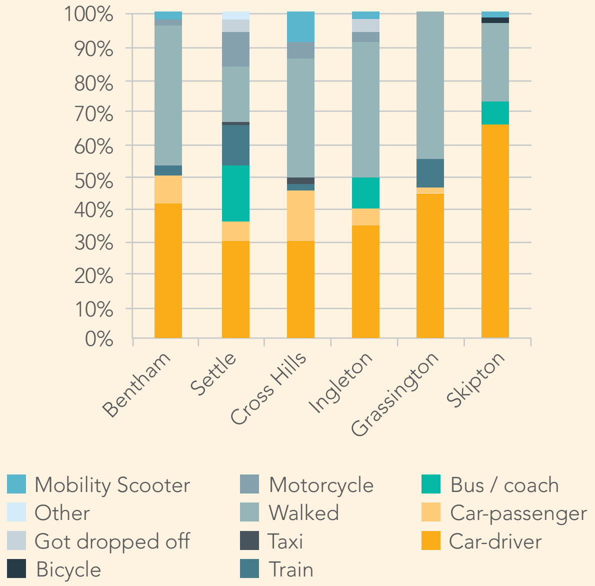


Figure 10: Visitors' mode of transport to centre

Analysis of the in-street survey results shows a relatively even split between those who travelled to the centre by car (50%) and those who walked (44%) (the remainder travelled by train (2%), motorcycle (2%) or mobility scooter (2%). 82% of journeys to the centre took fewer than 10 minutes, and this, coupled with the modes of travel listed above, indicates that the retail services are predominantly supported by the local community.

Of those who travelled into Bentham by car, 68% parked in free on-street spaces, and 20% parked in the Grasmere car park.

The accessibility of the centre by car and the availability of and charging regime for parking spaces were generally considered to be good in comparison to other centres which shoppers visit. However, 30% of those surveyed rated levels of traffic congestion as 'poor'. Accessibility by public transport was deemed to be 'quite good' (52%) in comparison to other centres, although 36% commented that they didn't know how the public transport provision compared.

CUSTOMERS' VIEWS AND BEHAVIOUR, AND PERCEPTION OF SAFETY AND OCCURRENCE OF CRIME

Customers' Views and Behaviour

The most commonly cited reason for visiting Bentham amongst those surveyed for this study is food shopping (36%). It is clear that customers do not view Bentham as a destination which is particularly good for non-food shopping, with 22% indicating that they visit for non-food shopping less than once a month, and 28% stating that they never do non-food shopping in Bentham. Half of those surveyed never visit the centre for leisure activities(such as bars and restaurants).

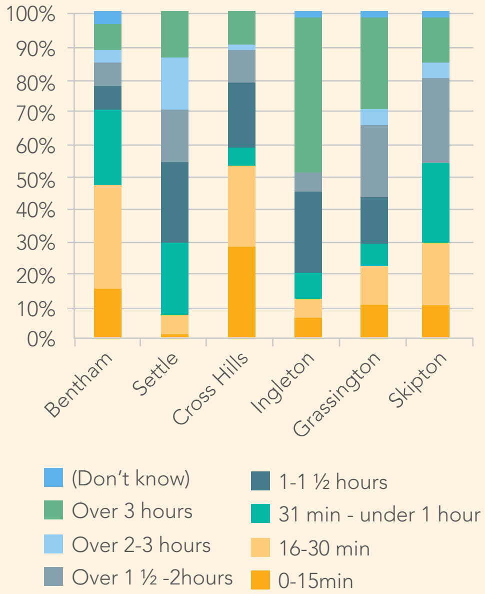


Figure 11: Customers' time spent in shopping area

Most visits to the centre were found to be relatively brief (70% stated that they would spend less than one hour in the shopping area), and this may be in part due to the on-street parking restrictions. General opinion is that the range and quality of food shops is high, however a number of those surveyed (24%) indicated that they felt the range of non-food shops wasn't as good as other centres they regularly visit.

A high proportion of people answered that they didn't know how Bentham compared to other centres in terms of evening entertainment and leisure facilities, or town centre events. This suggests that people may not consider Bentham as a destination which could actually offer such amenities.

Perception of Safety and Occurrence of Crime

During the site visit no signs of graffiti, vandalism or anti-social behaviour were observed. CCTV cameras are erected outside of the Co-operative Food store on Main Street, although these are privately operated.

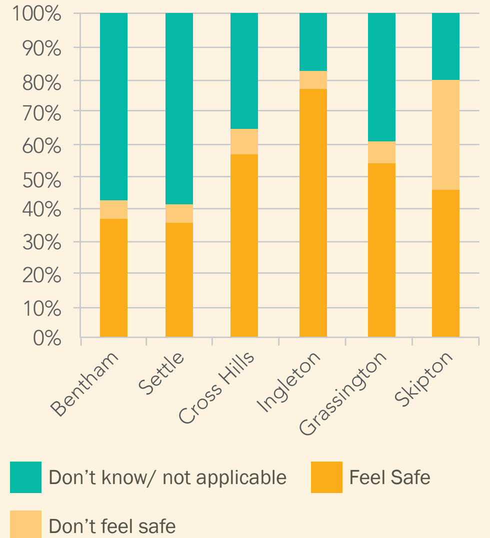


Figure 12: Proportion of visitors who said they feel safe / un-safe in town centre during evening hours

Everybody who participated in the in-street survey stated they felt safe walking around the centre during the day. 8% said that they did not feel safe during the evening, although 56% answered said they did not know/not applicable. There was no appetite for increased policing or CCTV use.

State of Town Centre Environmental Quality

The Core Retail area was free from litter at the time of the NLP site visit and the street furniture appeared to be of reasonable quality and reasonably well maintained. Some of the shop fronts and fascias appeared to be in need of attention, which, coupled with the high proportion of vacant units and non-retail/leisure uses (i.e. dwellings), detracts from the commercial appeal of the centre. Many of the building facades need renovation works. This is most evident along Station Road.

Clusters of road signs in the vicinity of the Main Street/Station Road and Main Street/Robin Lane junctions compete with views of the retail units. Although it is acknowledged that space is limited to accommodate road signs in these locations, further investigation of the placement and design of signage is recommended to aid navigation for visitors and improve the appearance of the environment.

Notwithstanding the above, the results of the in-street surveys indicate that people feel that the attractiveness of the built environment and shopping environment in general is good in comparison to other centres they regularly visit.

Figure 13: Main Street

DIGITAL HEALTH

Data from Ofcom shows that shoppers in Bentham are unlikely to obtain 4G mobile network coverage at the present time.

There are three Wi-Fi hotspots via 'The Cloud' in the retail centre. These are based in public houses/a social club, but their proximity to the retail centre may enable use by shoppers dependent upon access restrictions.

The SPAR on Main Street includes a Collect Plus for the collection of online shopping deliveries.

Land use Plan

FOOTNOTES

1
Population estimate for 2013 as at 30th June 2012, Office for National Statistics

2
It should be noted that whilst the GOAD list of 31 major retailers is a helpful indicator of the presence of established high street multiples in a centre, the list has not been updated for a number of years. The list still includes Phones 4 U, which ceased operations in September 2014, and HMV which only has a handful of stores in its new guise. The full list can be viewed within the appendices of the 2015 Study.

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