

Prepared by:
Donaldsons
St Paul's House
23 Park Square South
Leeds
LS1 2ND
Telephone 0113 246 1161
Facsimile 0113 244 1637

February 2005

CRAVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Smaller Centre Health Checks Executive Summary

Report

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Donaldsons was appointed by Craven District Council in 2004 to undertake Health Checks of four of the smaller centres within the Craven District (Settle, Bentham, Ingleton and Cross Hills) to gain an objective view of each of the centres and factors affecting their current and potential future performance. The Council also wished to gain information to assist in the formulation of future planning policy and the making of decisions in respect of planning applications.
- 1.2 The studies were informed by:
- Retailer and business operator surveys in each of the centres.
 - Visitor (in-street) surveys in Settle and Ingleton.
 - A district wide household (telephone) survey.
- 1.3 These surveys together with our own inspections and research, have allowed us to produce quantitative and qualitative analysis of the retail offer in each of the centres.

2 Settle

- 2.1 Settle is a very attractive town both architecturally and in respect of the stunning scenic backdrop within which it is situated. The combination of these two factors alone make Settle not only a great place to visit, but also a beautiful place in which to live work and play.
- 2.2 From the viewpoint of a resident, Settle benefits from a wide range of services catering for the community, as well as a retail offer to satisfy day to day needs made up of a number of established independents and commercial multiples such as Booths which provide an excellent range of convenience goods. As may be expected in a small rural town, Settle lacks provision in the fashion sector and its residents will doubtless continue to patronise other centres for higher order purchases. Nevertheless, Settle fulfils the role of a town centre, as defined in PPG6 and the draft PPS6.
- 2.3 Tourism is a key aspect of Settle, and there are a number of shops providing high quality niche market products such as Mary Milnthorpe, which attracts people to the town from a wide area, and Castleberg Sports / Cave and Crag which serve the leisure market.
- 2.4 With a few exceptions, the town appears to trade well, but its vitality and viability requires enhancement to ensure its sustainability. It cannot rely solely upon its immediate resident catchment population, but needs to ensure that it continues to capture an increasing amount of expenditure from the wider surrounding area and from tourists/visitors from further afield. The initiatives which are being undertaken in the form of Renaissance Market towns and Creative Rural Enterprises provide a focus for the advancement of the town centre and its businesses.
- 2.5 The potential environmental improvements, particularly to the Market Place, some of which can be carried out relatively quickly and cheaply, could do much to enhance the attractiveness of the town centre.
- 2.6 Our key recommendations are:-
- environmental improvements are carried out to the Market Square, to improve its attractiveness and its surface;
 - measures are put in place to control parking in the Market Square;
 - improvements are made to the some of the town's signage – in particular that at the front of the Market Square;
 - under the RMT Initiative, consideration is given to the possibility of targeting one or two potential new retailers, who can demonstrate a realistic business plan and who have the vision and creativity to offer something currently unavailable in Settle and which will appeal to a wide range of customers. Support could be given in the form of a subsidised initial rental package, together with business training or support from the CRE;

- If such an initiative is not possible, it is essential that existing retailers strive to respond to changing consumer demands and expectations, in terms of the goods on offer, the way in which they are displayed, the level of customer service and attractiveness/standard of the property itself. Potential customers need to be aware of what is available in the town centre and regular marketing campaigns, preferably in which all retailers take part, can be extremely successful;
- to encourage retailers to improve their offer, the Council consider working with CRE to expand the marketing and training events aimed at promoting local products;
- to heighten awareness of what Settle has to offer, the Council considers the production of an up-to-date shopping guide – perhaps in the form of an attractive leaflet which could be displayed in Tourist Information Centres and hotels throughout the Region;
- the Council investigates the potential to encourage small businesses to improve their performance by adopting modern practices, for example by moving into internet trading. Whilst on the face of it, this may appear to be aimed at reducing visitors and is certainly not suitable for all types of retail, we have found a surprising range of those who have been able to benefit from this type of business, and some who have found that new internet customers or web surfers will come and seek them out – to see for themselves what is on offer. and
- a feasibility study be undertaken to consider the viability of redeveloping the car park adjacent to the Shell Garage.

3 Bentham

- 3.1 Bentham is a small centre providing a valuable service role for its residents and the surrounding area. It performs the role of a local centre reasonably well, but is unlikely to grow in the foreseeable future.
- 3.2 Whilst the centre appears to have contracted over time, and some properties have clearly been lost to residential uses, we would conclude that at the current time it is a relatively robust centre. With the exception of its convenience offer, Bentham is unlikely to attract demand from multiple retailers. It does, however, benefit from some established independents, who appear to trade well.
- 3.3 Whilst there is an established need for a number of banks within Bentham, given its role as a service centre, we have concerns over the future of these facilities, arising from the changing nature of the banking industry. We would expect many of those using the centre for banking purposes to patronise some of the shops on the same occasion and any reduction in the available financial services may well impact adversely upon the vitality of the centre.
- 3.4 The railway station is a key link and will draw people into the centre from a reasonable catchment area. The weekly market, monthly Farmers' Market and cattle market clearly attract customers to Bentham and are an important element in the village's continued vitality. We have some concerns about the quality of the weekly market, but acknowledge that it is no easy task to bring about an improvement.

Our key recommendations are:-

- We understand that the farmers' market is growing in size and popularity and believe that it should be given every encouragement as experience elsewhere has found that these ventures attract regular visitors from a wide area. This is particularly so now that there is such a growing interest in the quality and provenance of fresh food.
- The alleyway providing access to the main car park off Main Street is highlighted as an opportunity in the SWOT analysis. Measures to remove graffiti and enhance the lighting and drab appearance would significantly improve what is currently a rather uninviting yet key access to the centre.
- Consideration should also be given to the better enforcement of parking restrictions in the centre in order to reduce hazards, congestion and conflicts with pedestrians. This could be coupled with the consideration of traffic calming measures.
- Overall, the centre would benefit from improvements to shop fronts/facades, street furniture/signage and the general quality of the public realm. This could be addressed by undertaking a townscape analysis to identify in detail priority areas for improvement to produce the greatest beneficial impact for the centre. This should include an Action Plan for the delivery of proposed improvements, along with the identification of key partners and sources of funding.

- The analysis process should seek to engage retailers and property owners to encourage private sector involvement. Consideration could be given to the establishment of a grant scheme to encourage owners to invest in property improvement.

4 Cross Hills

- 4.1 Overall, Cross Hills is a small service centre, with a number of established independent businesses, which caters for the local residents. The addition of the Co-op is a welcome one and goes some way to breaking up the linear nature of the centre, whilst providing a key attraction evidenced by its use for top up shopping.
- 4.2 Given the retirement of some proprietors in the coming years, it is difficult to see sufficient demand for space within the centre, to sustain it in its current format over time. It is likely therefore that Cross Hills will contract, and centre around the Co-op store.
- 4.3 Furthermore, the survey analysis concludes that a considerable proportion of convenience expenditure is leaking out of Cross Hills, and that in our view it is unlikely that the centre will recover a significant amount of that leakage, given the attraction of the larger superstores in Skipton and Keighley, particularly for main food shopping.
- 4.4 Cross Hills does, however, serve its local community very well in respect of top-up shopping and caters for many of its basic everyday comparison needs. However, it lacks the range of outlets and goods to satisfy all comparison needs and, in particular, higher order purchases. Given the proximity of Skipton and Keighley and the shopping facilities available there, we do not regard Cross Hills as having any significant potential for retail growth.
- 4.5 This said, we do consider that opportunities present themselves to help the future of Crosshills by addressing some of its key problems. We would therefore recommend the following:-
- Consideration of a shop front improvement scheme
 - Consideration of the feasibility of relocating the Library and creating new public realm to break up the linear nature of the centre
 - Consideration of a traffic calming scheme
 - Better definition of the retail area by providing “gateway features”
- 4.6 It is also worth undertaking consultation with the local traders to encourage them to buy in to any proposals. This may bring them together more and address the negative attitude which we have encountered. By working together, they may have a greater desire to drive forward the future of Cross Hills.

5 Ingleton

- 5.1 Overall we consider Ingleton to be a healthy centre which benefits considerably from the tourism trade. The key attractions, such as the Waterfalls Walk, the viaduct, Ingleborough and the limestone caves, will continue to attract visitors indefinitely, given their unique topographical attributes, and those visitors will continue to supplement the economy of the village if retailers and service providers cater sufficiently and appropriately for their requirements.
- 5.2 The village needs this expenditure as, without it, we believe that there would be very little left in terms of retail and service facilities to cater for Ingleton's residents.
- 5.3 Ingleton is unlikely to expand its retail offer to any great extent and the centre is likely to remain static over time unless there is a significant influx of population. The retail offer is limited largely to small but established independents offering both services and goods to local people as well as niche/tourist shopping.
- 5.4 One opportunity to alter this position and provide a greater critical mass to the centre without impacting on the character of the village would be to encourage new residential development of an appropriate style and density.
- 5.5 Although Ingleton is extremely attractive and a pleasant place around which to wander, there is no room for complacency and a number of other opportunities exist for improvement.
- 5.6 We recommend that the Council consider taking the following steps:
- public realm works to improve and redefine The Square and its position/role within the village;
 - the encouragement of the owner of the former newsagency in The Square to seek a new commercial occupier for the premises (or, if unsuccessful, the consideration of the possibility of the Council seeking to exercise its compulsory powers of acquisition);
 - consideration of the provision of new gateway features, themed to reflect the special character of Ingleton;
 - a review of the role and performance of the weekly market to ascertain whether it is capable of improvement and better integration with the wider retail offer of the village;
 - better signage from the A65;
 - encouragement of business owners and shopkeepers to improve the external appearance of their properties (possibly in conjunction with a shop front improvement scheme);
 - encouragement of shopkeepers to improve the attractiveness of their display areas and goods on offer (through liaison with the traders' association);

- a more proactive and cohesive approach to marketing the village and its events to widen the awareness of Ingleton as a tourism destination; and
- the promotion of a wider programme of events to appeal to different groups of visitors.

48 Warwick Street, London W1B 5NL
Tel: +44(0)20 7534 5000 Fax: +44(0)20 7434 0045
www.donaldsons.co.uk
enquiries@donaldsons.co.uk

Donaldsons UK Offices

Birmingham

120 Edmund Street, Birmingham,
B3 2ED
Tel: +44 (0)121 212 1090
Fax: +44 (0)121 212 1099

Cheltenham

Vittoria House, Vittoria Walk, Cheltenham,
GL50 1TW
Tel: +44 (0)1242 521 102
Fax: +44 (0)1242 221 754

Leeds

St Paul's House, 23 Park Square South,
Leeds, LS1 2ND
Tel: +44 (0)113 246 1161
Fax: +44 (0)113 244 1637

Bristol

Beech House, 6 St.Paul's Road, Clifton,
Bristol, BS8 1LT
Tel: +44 (0)117 923 9520
Fax: +44 (0)117 923 9521

Edinburgh

9 Hope Street, Edinburgh,
EH2 4EL
Tel: +44 (0)131 260 7300
Fax: +44 (0)131 225 8970

Manchester

Century House, 11 St.Peter's Square,
Manchester, M2 3DN
Tel: +44 (0)161 237 9977
Fax: +44 (0)161 237 3311

Glasgow

90 St.Vincent Street, Glasgow, G2 5UQ
Tel: +44 (0)141 221 2871
Fax: +44 (0)141 221 1099

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