

Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration

Evidence from Jan Miller

I am glad you have asked for comments about the demise of our town centres in Wales. I have lived near Holywell in Flintshire for 26 years, and I have been observing and thinking about the town for a long time.

The footfall in the high street is still fairly good most days, but it is a town in a poor area and is used by local people for the following services which are long-term residents;

Hairdressers (by far the most numerous!)

Cafes/restaurants

Post Office

Doctor

Dentist

optician

Banks

Estate agents

solicitors

Newsagents

Peacocks (cheap shoes and clothes)

Chemist

Pet supplies

Bakers and sandwiches

Iceland

Shoe and sportswear shop.

Cards and party supplies

Florist

stationary

Toy shop (closed?)

Butcher (struggling)

Greengrocer (struggling)

Curtains/blinds etc.

(and to lesser extent Bevan's – some DIY and tools, electrical, gardening, which save a longer journey to B&Q)

Charity second-hand shops.

Because these are the only services and supplies that cannot be obtained at Tesco's or out-of-town malls, and not so easily on-line.

Any other shops which try to start up soon close after a few months (ones that have tried and failed include computer games shop, book shop, baby clothes shop, computer shop, lighting and electrical, craft supplies, health foods, clothes,

Or any specialist interest shops.)

Talking to the shop owners I find the subject that always comes top of the list of problems is the council rates on the shop itself; the new shopkeepers cannot make enough from sales in the first 3 to 6 months to cover the cost of rent and rates, never mind any other bills and set up costs. So they soon close.

There are always a number of empty shops in the high street. Then people like me who live out in the villages and have to get in the car to go to Holywell start driving just 15 minutes more to get to Mold or another local town that we know will have much more to offer. And Holywell gets less and less visited.

It seems to me that the best way to start getting towns like Holywell vibrant again would be for the Council to lower the rates on new shops and offering subsidies/grants for starting new shops. Once the shops are making a profit then the grant or reduced rates could be gradually increased.

Best wishes

Jan Miller

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