

# Briefing Note



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Subject: Ventura Retail Park Shopper Survey

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1. On behalf of Aucott Developers Ltd, Indigo Planning commissioned a survey of shoppers at Ventura Retail Park. This was undertaken by NEMS market research in May 2015 and 102 shoppers were surveyed. The key objectives of the survey were to; establish the shopping habits of people visiting the Retail Park; where people were travelling from to visit the Retail Park; and to explore the linkages between visits to the Retail Park and Tamworth town centre.
2. Indigo Planning has made representations to the emerging Local Plan, alongside JVH Town Planning Consultants, on behalf of Aucott Developers Ltd in relation to retail matters (Matter 11). The survey results were not available at the time the representations were drafted. However, we consider that it is appropriate to draw the Inspector's attention to the survey results as they are relevant to the consideration of the retail evidence base which underpins emerging retail policy.
3. In particular, the survey results support our concerns that the retail capacity assessment undertaken in the Tamworth Town Centre and Retail Study Update (TTCRSU) 2014 is flawed and under-estimates capacity for new retail floorspace over the plan period. Our representations identify technical issues with the capacity assessment, including the failure to take into account over-trading at existing floorspace, and the premature inclusion of the Gungate commitment at 2016. The results of the survey confirm that the TTCRSU 2014 also deficient because it fails to take into account any inflow of retail expenditure from outside of the Study Area.
4. The results of the NEMS survey show that 33% of the people surveyed lived outside the Study Area boundaries (refer postcode results attached). In short, these shoppers' expenditure is flowing into Tamworth from outside the Study Area. That a third of shoppers are from outside the Study Area indicates very significant levels of inflow, but all inflow has been excluded from the capacity assessment informing emerging retail policy. Taking into account this inflow, and the overtrading (of course, the inflow will increase overtrading further) means that there is significant additional capacity which also been excluded from the TTCRSU 2014. Even if the Gungate scheme did come forward, the town centre simply cannot accommodate all of the additional floorspace that can be supported within Tamworth over the plan period and the Council must acknowledge this.

5. The survey results also establish that there is an existing linkage between the town centre and the Retail Parks. Some 21% of people surveyed indicated that they would link their trip to the Retail Park with a trip to the town centre (see Q6). This is relevant because it has not previously been accepted that there is significant linkage between the centre and the Retail Park. The survey results show that around one in five people link their shopping trips. Those linking their trips were doing so for a variety of reasons<sup>1</sup>; including:
  - Other food or non-food shopping (44%);
  - To use services such as banks, hairdressers or the post office (33%);
  - To use the cafes and restaurants (24%); and
  - To meet with family and/or friends (10%).
6. These results reinforce our view that the town centre and the Retail Parks can complement each other.
7. We consider that there is the potential to improve on this linkage, particularly with the opportunities and improvements identified by the Tamworth Town Centre and Out-of-Centre Linkages Proposals (Feb 2011) document. The survey results identify the reasons why some people rarely or never visit Tamworth town centre (refer Q10):
  - 50% of people consider it is less convenient for various reasons (eg: not convenient/too busy/parking difficulties/have to pay for parking/not as easy to get to); and
  - 16% are unfamiliar with the centre.
8. It is interesting that the results of Q11 and Q12 indicate that the Retail Parks compete more directly with Birmingham City Centre and the internet rather than Tamworth town centre.
9. Our representations underline the important role of the Retail Parks in meeting retail needs and also their valuable contribution to the local Tamworth economy. The Council persistently ignores or fails to recognise the considerable benefits of the Retail Parks and, therefore, ignores the opportunities to develop the relationship and linkage between them and the town centre. The Retail Parks meet the need for new floorspace with the town centre and can accommodate different retail formats that are unsuitable in a historic town centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple responses were permitted for this question.

10. The Retail Parks are a significant draw to Tamworth and with the right approach and strong linkages can encourage more visitors to Tamworth town centre than currently visit.
  
11. We consider that the survey results further underline the need for a new retail strategy in Tamworth that does not exclude the Retail Parks as part of the retail hierarchy. They also highlight the need for a fresh retail capacity assessment and a proactive and positive approach to meeting retail floorspace needs in full.