



how the community sees the town centre

Dawlish Tomorrow



5.1 Listening to Dawlish voices

Throughout the course of this study we have focused on **making the town centre the place that the people of Dawlish want it to be**. Although we believe that the future of the town centre will only be sustainable if it is able to attract visitors from the wider city region and tourists, our experience is that this will only happen if the town is attractive to – and used by – local people. Visitors respond to the sense of vitality and well-being that is created by a successful town centre in the heart of the community.

We already had a lot of information about how Dawlish people see their town centre, and how they would like to see it change. The Dawlish Regeneration Group conducted wide-ranging **consultations** before the publication of the Strategic Action Plan. During the course of this study, the consultant team, Dawlish Community Trust and Dawlish Town Council organised the hugely successful *Dawlish Tomorrow* event which attracted more than 500 people.

These consultations have confirmed residents' **disappointment and frustration** with aspects of the town centre, especially the decline in the number and quality of shops, the general air of shabbiness, and the degradation of public open spaces. Our consultations showed that local people had a clear and sophisticated understanding of



the competitive pressures facing the town, but there was a strong sense that **other towns have responded more imaginatively and creatively** to these threats. There is consensus on the broad diagnosis, but there is a range of opinion on what should be done about it:

- there is general concern about the condition of **the Lawn** and the impact of the summer fun fair; some people would like to see the fun fair removed entirely, but others believe it is a vital source of trade
- many people are concerned that the town centre is **car-dominated** and not a pedestrian-friendly environment; they would like to see some streets pedestrianised, but others believe that easier vehicle access and more parking are essential to improve trading conditions
- some people value the town's **waterfowl** collection as a long-standing local tradition and an important visitor attraction, some see the birds as a source of mess and nuisance, still others believe that caged birds have no place in a modern park.

We have attempted to resolve these dilemmas by adopting **a strategy-led approach**. If we are clear about what we are trying to achieve, the answers to these complicated questions may become clearer.



Funfair during Dawlish Carnival 2007



5.2 The supermarket question

The backdrop to our study has been a debate within the community about another big question: **does Dawlish need a large supermarket and, if so, where should it be located?** The supermarket issue does not form part of our remit, but it soon became clear that the outcomes of this study would be compromised unless we addressed it. The *Teignbridge Retail Study Update 2005-2016* concluded that a supermarket of between 1,000 and 2,000 sq m gross would meet quantitative demand in Dawlish through to 2016. A 1,000 sq m store could accommodate one of the major operators' compact formats (Tesco Express, Marks & Spencer Simply Food or Sainsbury's Central). The retail study argues that this could be sufficient to meet quantitative need, but because such stores do not normally cater for bulk food shopping trips they would not meet this qualitative need. The study concludes that, in order to claw back some of the retail expenditure which is leaking out of Dawlish, a store at the upper end of the range (2,000 sq m) is needed.

The provision of a store of this size was one of the key recommendations of the draft Local Development Framework Core Strategy. Council policy would normally be to locate a new store in the town centre but there is no suitable site for a store of this size in Dawlish. A site at Barton Hill has been considered, but it could only accommodate a compact

format store. In any event, the impacts on parking and of traffic – customers and delivery vehicles – on the town’s narrow streets would be severe.

Other sites have been considered, at Sandy Lane and Shutterton. We have not sought to adjudicate on the respective merits of these sites, but if either is chosen it would have significant implications for the town centre. A new operator would be aiming not only to capture expenditure which is currently leaking out of the town, but also the custom of the one-third of households that still shop locally, as well as secondary shopping trips. Although we are not in a position to quantify the effects there would inevitably be a significant **switch of shoppers’ allegiance from existing town centre shops to the supermarket**. If the new supermarket were in the town centre, the additional footfall it would create might help to offset the negative effects and generate net additional expenditure through “linked trips”, but this is much less likely if the store is out of town.

Some negative impact on existing town centre businesses is inevitable, but these effects need to be weighed against the benefits that a new store might bring, in terms of improved quality and choice, local employment and a reduction of road miles travelled by local residents. For the purposes of this study we have used a simple **risk assessment process**



above: shop on the Strand below: amusement arcade



which reached the following conclusions:

- the town centre is in decline and that trend is set to continue for the foreseeable future, although a market-led recovery may be possible in the medium term or beyond
- a supermarket operated by one of the “big 4” would improve the quality of the convenience shopping offer in Dawlish, and provide access to some comparison goods
- if the new supermarket is located at an out of town site, it would have a negative effect on a significant number of local traders and will probably result in some shop closures
- we consider that a new supermarket is probable, but not certain, but action is needed to create better trading conditions in the town centre, *whether or not the supermarket goes ahead*
- the aim should therefore be to get the recovery under way in the short term, to get the town centre on an upward trend, whether or not the supermarket is built
- this would benefit all town centre businesses and improve their prospects of responding successfully to competition from a supermarket.



5.3 Three-stage regeneration

This risk analysis points to the need for a three stage regeneration process, as shown in Figure 5-1. The diagram shows the base case for Dawlish town centre, a continuing downward trend, and it shows the likely impact of an out of town supermarket on already fragile retail base. It therefore proposes:

- early action to **build confidence and reposition the town centre** for the future
- this will help retailers and other town centre businesses to respond positively to the challenge presented by the supermarket and **consolidate**
- after a period of readjustment, the regeneration of the town centre will resume and accelerate, resulting in **sustainable and transformational change**.

At present, the town centre economy is fragile and vulnerable. Our strategy aims to create **a more resilient and adaptable town centre, capable of responding to – and benefiting from – the challenge of change.**

Figure 5-1: Managing the impact of an out-of-town supermarket

