

Matter 18 – Retailing and town centre policies

Issue – Does the Plan set out positively prepared policies for protecting and enhancing town centres and supporting retail growth, which are justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

a) – j) HVV Response

As noted in Matter 17, Kirklees has recently failed to implement its town centre first policy in relation to the application from Aldi.

The Council has declined the opportunity to participate in the work we are doing with the Institute of Place Management and Manchester Met University which aims to promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres. We find this regrettable as we believe this work could help Kirklees with its other more challenging town centres.

This reluctance on the Council's part suggests to us that Kirklees does not fully understand the way in which town centres are changing and the impact employment close to town centres has on footfall. In centre living is important but unless people are around during the day for reasons other than shopping, town centres will die. Huddersfield and Dewsbury town centres are living examples of the slow death of town centres.

Holmfirth and Honley by contrast are doing comparatively well. The former has one of the lowest vacancy rates in the country and there is only one vacant property in Honley. Most of the vacant town centre properties are in council ownership. We believe the attractiveness of the town centres are due to the efforts of local people and businesses. We run events and festivals, take part in local activities and undertake positive and creative activities, such as the Big Data project, river clean ups, Holme Pride, Christmas lights etc and the work of the Conservation Group which show the very strong sense of ownership we have and our willingness to act, despite the lack of support from the Council. In the absence of any Council funding, events rely on local support from individuals, businesses and charities such as One Community.

j) - l) HVV Response

The evening and night time economy in both Honley and Holmfirth is thriving and acting as a draw to people from surrounding areas. However, there needs to be a balance to ensure that the day time economy is not jeopardised. The importance of people working in close proximity to the town centre cannot be over-stated. Kirklees does not seem to appreciate this point; or if it does, does not appear to be acting in a way that encouraged more employment opportunities in the Valley.

Crime and anti-social behaviour in the Valley is at a level best described as irritating. There is little graffiti or night time disturbance when compared to other places. Our Young Adults survey indicates that the respondents were not concerned about crime.

However, this does not remove the concern we have about the lack of facilities for younger people, including the provision of public toilets and the poor standard of public transport.