Local Needs Shopping Review – Final Report

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 This review is one of four "In-depth Reviews" selected by the Council to be undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Panels in 2002/3. The review was allocated to the Planning, Transportation, Economy & Sustainability Overview & Scrutiny Panel, who agreed the Terms of Reference on November 7th 2002, thus formally beginning the review. Support to the Panel was provided by Council Officers in the Corporate Performance Unit, Sustainability & Economic Development and Property & Legal Services.

1.2 The agreed purpose of the review was "to make recommendations as to what the Council should do to help meet any identified shortfall in the supply of local needs shopping and shopping opportunities in the centre of Bath." The Terms of Reference for the review are attached as Annex 7. It was considered that to include "shopping opportunities" in the study would be beyond the resources of the Panel within the given time limits, so the study concentrated on "local needs shopping".

1.3 The review began by agreeing the area in the centre of Bath for consideration, mapping the "supply" of "local needs shops" in the town centre and then researching the "demand" for local needs shops in that area. In particular, the review aimed to find out if lower income households felt their local shopping needs were being met in terms of both access and affordability.

2. Definition of "Local Needs Shopping"

2.1 In background research for the review, no official definition of "local needs shopping" was found. However many Local Authorities (including Bath & North East Somerset Council) refer to "convenience goods" and "comparison goods" in planning and policy documents. There are recognised definitions for these types of goods, which the Office for National Statistics lists as follows:

2.2 **Convenience goods:**

- Food
- Alcoholic drink
- Tobacco
- Other goods - newspapers and magazines, cleaning materials and matches

2.3 Convenience goods are typically those of relatively low value required for frequent use which are bought on a frequent and regular basis and where the customers therefore require convenience of shopping.

2.4 **Comparison goods**

- Clothing and footwear
- Do-it-yourself goods
- Household goods – furniture pictures etc.; carpets and other floor coverings; major appliances; textiles and soft furnishings; hardware
- Recreational goods – radio, television and other durable goods; television and video hire (excluding licenses and repairs); sport goods; toys, games and camping equipment; other recreational goods; books; bicycles
- Other goods – pharmaceutical products and medical equipment, toilet articles and perfumery, jewellery, silverware, watches and clocks; other goods

2.5 Comparison goods would tend to be purchased less frequently than convenience goods and would be goods for which there would be more comparison between style, quality or price. The city centre of Bath is mainly a comparison goods shopping centre, but with a significantly large convenience shopping role for residents, workers and visitors.

2.6 In its discussions the Panel included consideration of the distance a person would need to travel to a supply of goods. It was felt that the most essential goods would usually be goods that would be carried home.

2.7 For the purposes of the research a working definition of “local needs shopping” was developed and list of “local needs shops” agreed (see Annex 8). The research findings support revisions to both the working definition and the list of “local needs shops”.

2.8 The suggested definition of “local needs shopping” is as follows:

*“**Frequent purchase essential goods and services** refer to standardised goods required for frequent use, for which little comparison between style, quality or price is inherently necessary and for which convenience of purchase is important. Residents should be within 500 metres or a five- to ten-minute pedestrian travel of these goods or services. These include bread, milk, newspapers, fruit and vegetables. In addition, there is another sub-category of convenience goods which are purchased less frequently and for which local access is not imperative. We have called these **less frequent purchase essential goods and services.** There is still the need for a minimum supply of these in a given area. These goods and services include schoolwear, dry cleaning and children’s wear.*
The availability of both these types of goods and services makes an important contribution to people’s quality of life”

Table 1: Suggested lists of "Local Needs Shopping" goods and services

Frequent purchase essential goods & services	**Less frequent purchase essential goods & services**
Beverages	Children's wear
Bread	Dry cleaning
Dairy Produce	Drapery
Fish	Electrical items (not white goods)
Fruit and Vegetables	Hardware
Meat	Motor accessories
Newspapers	Pet foods/products
Pharmaceuticals*	School wear
Post Office Services	Stationery
Toiletries*	Toys

**Some of these types of goods may be less frequent purchases*

2.9 In the suggested definition for "local needs shopping" the term "pedestrian travel" has been used rather than "walk" and 500m has been equated to 5-10 minutes travelling. This is in recognition that people have different walking speeds and some may travel by wheelchair or other mobility aid.

3. Context

There is no definitive corporate policy statement relating to "local needs shopping". However, there are a number of related statements and initiatives established within individual service areas. These include:

3.1 The Council's Commercial Estate

3.1.1 Rentals within the Council's commercial estate are determined on an open-market basis, but a number of measures to support local needs shopping are in place:

a) Promotion of the Guildhall Market, with local needs uses preferred
b) Uses in leases of Council-controlled shops in Cheap Street and Westgate Street are restricted to a range of local needs shopping uses (see Annex 1). This may result in a reduction in the rent achieved, compared with leases which contain unrestricted A1 use.
c) Councillors are consulted on use proposals which fall outside the local needs list. Under the modernised political arrangements this is an Executive Member.

3.1.2 Fuller details of support given by Council services to local needs shopping, including support in relation to the Council's Commercial estate, are given in Annex 9.

3.2 Local Plan – Deposit Draft 2002

3.2.1 The introduction to the shopping section of the B&NES Local Plan – Deposit Draft 2002 begins:

"Shopping is a fundamental part of day to day life. The availability of a good range of convenience and comparison shops makes an important contribution to people's quality of life. Convenience shops are those that sell essential goods, principally food, and comparison shops generally sell durable goods e.g. clothes, shoes, electrical items etc."

(Convenience goods include food, newspapers and magazines, alcoholic drink, tobacco, cleaning materials and matches. See Annex 2, section 3 for further information.)

"The Strategy of Balanced Communities means providing for a choice and diversity in shopping, ensuring that it is accessible to all especially those without a car.

Shopping provision is primarily focused in town, district and local centres which also provide a range of other services and facilities. PPG6 (Town Centres and Retail Developments) and the Joint Replacement Structure Plan stress the importance of maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of these centres, as they are able to meet the various shopping needs of residents and visitors in the most sustainable way. The need to travel is reduced and opportunities for walking, cycling and using public transport are increased."

3.2.2 The Deposit Draft 2002 recognises the difficulty of retaining local convenience shops but states that the Council should adopt a positive role in encouraging such shops. A section on local convenience shopping states:

"As well as its regional shopping role the central shopping area acts as a local shopping centre meeting the day to day needs of residents and workers. The Council recognises the significant economic and social benefit of local convenience shops and the important role they play in City centre retail provision.

In addition there are likely to be increased numbers of people living in and close to the City centre e.g. within the redeveloped Southgate Area and in accommodation that may be created over shops.

The Council's ability to protect local convenience shops through the planning system is severely restricted by the present Use Classes Order (UCO). The UCO currently classifies retailing as an A1 use and changes of shop type within this use class do not require planning permission.

However, the Council will seek to encourage the provision of local convenience shops through its role as a significant property owner and where appropriate will seek to use planning obligations to ensure such provision is made in new developments."

3.2.3 The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 defines various classes of use of buildings. Changes of use within a class do not require planning permission. Class A1 includes most types of shops as well as post offices, travel agents, hairdressers, funeral directors' premises, hire shops and dry cleaners. Class A2 relates to financial and professional services whilst Class A3 covers hot food takeaway shops, restaurants, public houses, cafes and the like.

3.3 Street Vendor Licensing

3.3.1 The Council's Street Trading Policy was decided in December 2002. The policy states:

"The Council's street trading policy is to create a street trading environment which complements premises-based trading, is sensitive to the needs of residents, provides diversity and consumer choice, and seeks to enhance the character, ambience and safety of local environments."

3.3.2 In referring to the types of goods covered by street vendor licensing the Policy refers to local needs shopping:

"Goods will normally consist of craftwork, fresh flowers, ice cream or soft drinks. Other types including services will be considered on a pitch by pitch basis and have particular regard to local needs shopping, product/ service diversity and balance".

"The Council would not normally grant a consent for the sale of goods or services which conflict with those provided by nearby shops"

3.3.3 Along with location, trading days and hours, local needs shopping can be taken into consideration when determining pitches and fees.

3.3.4 The Council will consider applications from individuals to create new pitches in specific locations if the applicant can demonstrate that there is a clear demand for the goods or service to be provided. Before creating a new pitch the Council consults a wide range of stakeholders including occupiers of nearby premises.

3.3.5 Environmental and Consumer Services is currently seeking a location for a greengrocer pitch in the city centre.

3.4 Transport Plan

3.4.1 Although this review specifically excluded transport issues, the Transport Plan nevertheless does form part of the context for local needs shopping and was referred to by one of our contributors. Attempts have been made in the Transport Plan to adopt a number of Local Agenda 21 (LA21) principles. The plan states:

"all necessary measures should be taken to allow all sections of society to participate fully in a wide range of social and economic activities: work, education, shopping and leisure"

"[It aims to] facilitate the prosperity of local businesses… Contribute to an efficient economy and to support sustainable economic growth in appropriate locations… [and] reduce traffic congestion…. [by] providing alternatives to the car"

3.5 Business Rates

3.5.1 Business rates are determined by the Treasury but collected locally by the Local Authority. Some relief is available as discussed below. There is no policy relating Business Rates to "local needs shopping".

3.5.2 Under Section 49 of Local Government Act 1988 “hardship relief” can be used to offer reduced rates where it is believed hardship will be caused if relief were not granted. The criteria include:

- community hardship e.g. caused by possible closure of a village post office
- loss of jobs locally
- hardship to the community

3.5.3 Hardship relief is viewed as the exception not the rule and there have only been 3 cases granted in 2001 and 2002 combined.

3.5.4 “Village shop relief” (under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988) refers specifically to rural settlements, and cannot be used to help urban businesses.

3.5.5 “Discretionary rate relief” relates to organisations that are not established for profit and/or are charitable. The relief can only be awarded in certain circumstances and cannot be awarded to businesses or individuals at all.

3.6 Markets – central area

3.6.1 The Council supports markets in a number of areas. Within the city centre the following are supported:

3.6.2 Guildhall Market, Bath

The Guildhall Market is open 6 days a week and has 25 stalls, of which around 11 are currently used for local needs shopping purposes.

3.6.3 Green Park Market, Bath

A Farmers’ Market operates on Saturdays at Green Park. This started as part of overall Local Agenda 21 policy. The Farmer’s Market operates on the basis of promoting locally produced food. Only producers within a 30-mile radius are allowed to participate. Currently stalls providing green grocery, meat, fish and other food products form a major part of the market. A hardware stall also exists in Green Park.

3.6.4 The Sunday Market, Bath

A new Sunday local needs market commenced at the beginning of November in Avon Street Car Park, Bath and has since moved to Southgate. At Avon Street there was provision for up to 250 stalls and it was hoped that around 80% of the stalls would cater for local needs by the definition given in Annex 1. There is to be a stipulation in the final contract relating to “local needs shopping”. As of January 2003 with the move to Southgate there are around 15 stalls, only two or three of which can be termed local needs providers.

3.7 Impact of Southgate Re-development

3.7.1 Because of uncertainty regarding exactly how and when Southgate will be re-developed, it is difficult to comment on what the impact on local needs shopping will be. Currently there is one supermarket and one greengrocer that serve local needs shoppers’ food requirements. Other needs providers are shown on Map 1.

3.7.2 The proposed re-development of the Southgate area will involve the termination of existing retail tenancies, either through agreement, negotiation or ultimately Compulsory Purchase. The project is programmed to commence in 2004 and complete some five years later. The current Planning Committee decision requires, through a Section 106 Planning Agreement, the provision of 'Local Need Shopping' as part of the development. The Developer is currently considering how the future tenant mix will comply with this obligation.

3.8 Other Local Authorities

3.8.1 An initial survey was undertaken of 20 local authorities thought likely to be facing similar issues to Bath and roughly comparable in city centre size. This included Chester, Cambridge, Oxford and York. The main finding was that policy development and practical support directed at issues of “local needs shopping” is not taken up by other local authorities. Approximately a third of the authorities approached did have measures and policy to support retailers who provided an essential service to a **community area**, and who were often the sole traders in that area. A greater number had provision to support retailers serving **rural communities** where that retailer was an essential or sole service provider.

3.8.2 Attention was drawn by a number of local authorities to four areas of support, presented here in order of greatest commonality:

a) Support to village shops, whether on the periphery of urban areas or in very rural parts of the authority was reasonably common. In most cases this was attached to mandatory rate relief to village shops – where that shop is a sole village store. In two cases this was attached to a wider village shop support scheme.
b) Planning policy was raised by a number of authorities, drawing attention to a general presumption against change of use for key (A1) retail units in the urban area.
c) General regeneration or renewal initiatives which aimed to consider the issue of local needs shopping within a context of community / neighbourhood support.
d) One local authority drew attention to a hardship fund, granted both as direct aid and up to 100% rate relief (discretionary) for businesses considered to be of importance to the community and where evidence of financial hardship could be provided.

3.8.3 A list of the local authorities surveyed and details of findings of a further search of all local authority websites are in Annex 2.

3.9 Previous Studies

3.9.1 <u>Bath Shopping Needs Study Review – Nathaniel Lichfield (1995)</u>

a) The objectives of this study were to review the retailing activity of the city and provide material and guidance to assist with decisions surrounding planning applications and the development of former industrial land.

b) The study focused on the provision of shopping to meet local needs in Bath city, both present day and historically. Consultation was also carried out with other historical city centres with regard to any policies in Local Plans which seek to prevent the loss of such shops.

c) The Definition for ‘local needs’ given in this study is similar to this review’s definition and is as follows:

“‘Local Needs’ shops provide goods which need to be purchased on a regular and routine basis for which shoppers would not expect to travel further than their local centre or the City Centre of Bath. Examples of types of Local Needs shops are chemists, newsagents, hardware stores, dry cleaners and off-licences. These shops may be operated by multiple or independent traders, and would include market stalls.”

d) The study includes a street-by-street analysis of the changing roles of varying parts of the city centre based on the shopping character originally identifiable in 1968, and with a particular emphasis on Local Needs Shopping.

e) Westgate Street and Cheap Street had primarily local needs traders in 1968, each area having almost no vacancies. By 1982 the number of local needs shops had declined to 9 in Westgate Street (from 14 in 1968), only to rise back to 14 in 1989. In Cheap Street only 1 local needs shop remained by 1989, rising to 3 in 1995.

f) A further year-by-year summary is given on retail health across the city from 1984 to 1995. The Bath City Plan Mid-Stage Report highlights that whilst there were 23 grocers and provisions dealers in the City Centre in 1971, there were only 7 by 1982.

3.9.2 <u>City and Town Centres Study - Nathaniel Lichfield (2000)</u>

a) A City and Town Centres Study was commissioned by the Council in July 2000 to assess retail needs in Bath and North East Somerset and to consider the relationship between these centres. Whilst taking a broader stance than this review, the report recommended that the Council should continue to be proactive in encouraging Local Needs Shops (in Bath city centre), in its role as a shop owner and through the use of planning obligations to maximise the potential of new developments.

b) A street survey was conducted of people using Bath city centre, resulting in 499 interviews. A significant proportion of respondents (21%) suggested that no improvements are required in Bath city centre. The most frequently suggested improvements in Bath related to pedestrianisation, car parking and improved bus services - with only 10% of respondents asking for a better choice of shops.

c) The study revealed that Bath had a lower proportion (11.2%) of retail shops dedicated to convenience goods than the national average (16.5%), however this is similar to many regional and sub-regional centres.

d) The study recommended that the growth or decline in rents in any given location should be reasonably correlated with occupiers’ overall trading performance.

e) The assessment identified that residents towards the southern part of Bath city are less well catered for in terms of food and grocery shopping. Also, the current large food stores in Bath were over-trading, some up to 40% above their company average. (This study was concluded before the opening of Safeway, which should have had the effect of reducing this issue.) This indicates that additional convenience shopping floorspace in the city centre would not necessarily have an adverse effect on the other larger stores.

f) The study found that Bath (not just the city centre) had over 160 small convenience shops with a total sales floorspace of approximately 8,500 sq m net.

g) The report recommended a replacement food store of up to 1500sq m to be incorporated in the Southgate development. (This conclusion took into account the new Safeway store which would relieve the existing pressure on the current Supermarkets.) The report also recommended that there may also be the potential to establish a specialised food market in the centre of Bath.

4. Current Research Into Supply & Demand

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 As part of this review, a two-part research exercise looking at the issue of "local needs shopping" in Bath city centre was commissioned. There are perceptions that there are residents who live within the city centre, with relatively low incomes, whose needs are not being catered for by the shopping range available in the city and are either excluded by virtue of access difficulties or price. The research was intended to address these perceptions.

4.1.2 The research considered all sources of permanent supply as the interest was in the *availability of goods*, not in the *type of supplier*, i.e. whether it was a chain store, an independent shop or a supermarket.

4.1.3 More information regarding this research, including methodology, definitions used, and the results, can be found in Annex 3 (Supply Research), and Annex 5 (Demand Research). The areas studied in the research are shown in Maps 1, 2 and 3, with Map 1 showing locations of local needs shops. Map 2 relates such shops to areas of socio-economic deprivation, Map 3 shows the areas covered by the telephone survey of residents.

4.1.4 Key conclusions from the supply and demand research are in section 4.4.

4.2 Supply Research

4.2.1 In summary, the research indicated that there is provision of local needs shops in most areas. No resident within the research area was more than 500m (five- to ten-minute pedestrian travel) away from a source of supply for fresh fruit or vegetables, meat, dairy produce, pharmaceuticals or bread & milk.

4.2.2 There are a low number of sources of supply of fish, toys, ironmongery and hardware. This does not necessarily mean that there is demand that is not being met.

4.2.3 These sources include supermarkets, independent shops and the Guildhall Market but not the one-day markets. Numbers of sources of supply found by types of goods appear as a chart in Annex 4.

4.3 Demand Research

4.3.1 The demand research focused on whether city-centre residents feel their "local needs shopping" requirements are being met. In conducting the research lower income households were defined as those with an annual household income of under £15,000. Higher income households were defined as those with income of £15,000 or above. The reasoning for this and further details on the demand research are provided in Annex 5. (Average household income nationally is around £35,000. Source: The Times 1/2/3)

4.3.2 Results relating to the physical accessibility and economic accessibility of local needs shopping provision included the following:

a) 74% of those on lower incomes and 82% of those on higher incomes agree Bath city-centre has stores that meet their needs.
b) 92% on lower incomes and 96% of those on higher incomes agree that Bath City-centre has stores that are convenient to get to
c) 15% of those on lower incomes stated difficulty accessing bakers, 7% butchers, 9% greengrocers, 11% haberdashers, 9% hardware and 15% ironmongers. 72% expressed no problems accessing any of these types of services. For more detail see Annex 5.
d) 14% of those on higher incomes expressed difficulty physically accessing fishmongers, 21% ironmongers and 21% greengrocers.
e) 79% of those on lower incomes and 82% of those on a higher income agree Bath City-centre has stores within their budget
f) 17% of the lower income bracket stated they found bakers expensive, 15% newsagents, 15% florists, 15% butchers, 13% chemists, 12% fishmongers, and 11% hardware. 50% did not find these services expensive.
g) 21% of the higher income bracket found fishmongers expensive, 14% dry cleaners and 14% florists

4.4 Key Findings Of Supply And Demand Research

4.4.1 Key conclusions from the research are as follows:

a) No city-centre resident is more than 500m (a five- to ten-minute pedestrian travel) away from a source of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy produce, pharmaceuticals, bread or milk.

b) Areas of city-centre socio-economic deprivation (as defined by the latest official Indices of Deprivation at the enumeration district level – see Annex 5 for source) are well served in relation to “local needs shopping”.

c) The majority of lower income earners (defined as having less than £15,000 annual household income) use supermarkets for “local needs shopping” because they perceive them to be convenient and price competitive.

d) It is too early to say how the new Southgate development will impact on local needs shopping.

4.4.2 There seems to be no major issue with either the physical or financial access to “local needs shopping”.

4.4.3 There appears to be little support for the perceived view that there is a shortage of local needs shopping provision in the city centre, although there are 3 or less suppliers each of toys, school uniforms and drapery. However there is no evidence that significant demand is frustrated by this.

5. Views of contributors

5.1 Contributors' session

5.1.1 A contributors' session took place on 16th January 2003 with the emphasis on suggestions for what the Council could do to assist better provision of local needs shopping. There were external contributors and also contributors who are Council Officers. Contributors were invited to make comments and then questioned by the Panel. The following took part:

Neil Menneer	Chairman Bath Federation of Small Businesses
Audrey Cloet	Chair of Action for Pensioners
Lyndon Craig and Kanta Dicorato	Representatives of Guildhall Market Traders
Heidi Riardon	Representative of Retail Committee, Chamber of Commerce. Also owner of Bang and Olufsen
Sebastian Long	Media and Communications Officer, Student's Union, University of Bath. Has also lived in the centre of Bath as a student.
Damien Wilson	Policy & Projects Manager, Sustainability and Economic Development
Howard Nowell	Head of Environmental and Consumer Services
Andy Nash and Jane Kirkbride	Valuation Services Manager and Project Leader respectively, Property Services

5.2 Summary views of external contributors

5.2.1 A fuller write up of the contributor session statements is found in Annex 9, including statements brought to the session by Officers from the Council's Property and Legal Services and Sustainability & Economic Development. The following are very brief summaries of **some** of the external contributors' views and are not necessarily the views of the Panel:

5.2.2 "There is a confusion of policy regarding Cheap Street and Westgate Street – there used to be local needs shops in this area. The Council could apply to the Secretary of State to have an area withdrawn from the normal rent structure as part of a defined policy. If this was done and the Guildhall Market was extended and improved, you would have a solution to some of the problems Bath has with local shopping provision and small independent retailers" **Neil Menneer**

5.2.3 "The terms of leases to small businesses could be looked at to provide more flexibility. The Guildhall market could be extended to provide for local shopping needs." **Neil Menneer**

5.2.4 "Students generally have no problems accessing local needs shopping and use supermarkets more than smaller local shops.… [they are] convenient and less daunting…[and] supermarkets are open longer hours." **Sebastian Long**

5.2.5 "There is a lack of access for deliveries [to the Guildhall]; parking problems; listed building consent problems; variation on leases would help; re-vamp the [Guildhall] *market but keep it as a general market; get the experience of somebody in retail."* **Kanto Dicorato & Lyndon Craig**

5.2.6 "Value for money, good service and the personal touch are still important for older people and on certain items they may be inclined to pay more knowing they will receive these services." **Audrey Cloet**

5.2.7 "City centre shopping for everyday goods is essential, but it has to be viable. … Changes to the residents parking scheme should be made to allow more access to local shops." **Audrey Cloet**

5.2.8 "Businesses in the city centre cannot rely on local people alone to make purchases. The importance of independent traders within the city is high, especially as far as revenue is concerned as it will stay in the city and not be used nationally." **Heidi Riardon**

5.2.9 "A market in the right place for accessibility and parking could do well. The market in Avon Street is a good concept, but is not well publicised. The Green Park market needs nurturing and the Guildhall could benefit from some publicity and decoration, at the moment it is cold looking." **Heidi Riardon**

5.3 Contribution from Property & Legal Services

5.3.1 The Commercial Property Service of the Council has the responsibility of managing the property owned by the Council, both within Bath and elsewhere in North East Somerset.

5.3.2 The constraints under which it acts are outlined in Annex 9. Also in Annex 9 is a statement of the Service's local needs shopping policy and how it has developed over the years. Comment is also made that offering rents at below market value could be seen to be acting anti-competitively.

5.3.3 In an oral presentation to the Panel, Officers made the following points:

a) Asked about the option of short term leases or rent reductions, the reply was that the latter resulted in a loss of revenue and the Council would have to decide how to deal with the reduction. It was the Service's role to safeguard the Council's income [as changes in this have an impact on the front-line services the Council provides].

b) Improvements to the Guildhall Market could be made, both in its decoration and in vehicular access for the traders at delivery times.

c) A brief review of the leasing arrangements in the Guildhall Market was given, including the existing possibility of a shorter lease. This had only been taken up by four of the twenty-five stall holders.

5.4 Contribution from Sustainability and Economic Development Service

5.4.1 The Sustainability and Economic Development Service submitted a written statement and gave an oral presentation to the Panel.

5.4.2 With regard to the city centre area it was pointed out that the service has been involved with running the Guildhall Market for many years. More recently its role has expanded to cover street markets including the one in Avon Street / Southgate on Sunday mornings. One objective of this is to provide a range of local needs shopping sources.

5.4.3 Research for the current review indicated that the perception that city centre residents have difficulty accessing local needs shopping is misplaced.

5.4.4 The research findings highlight the importance of supermarkets as providers of convenient, one-stop shopping. They also provide the range ("critical mass") of products which individual smaller shops may find more difficult to offer customers.

5.4.5 Economic support by the Council for independent traders would raise the questions: is this appropriate use of Council Tax-payers' money and would it be undue interference in the competitive relationship between retailers?

5.4.6 Sound economic reasons would be needed if the Council were to consider supporting some independent traders to make them viable.

5.4.7 Markets offer an opportunity to encourage independent traders and provide the "critical mass" necessary to make them viable.

5.5 Press / Responses from the public / Other views submitted

5.5.1 At the beginning of January 2003 a press release invited members of the public to submit their views on local needs shopping to the Panel. In addition the Council's website featured a page on the review with a form for submitting comments. Two responses were received. These views are not necessarily the views of the Panel.

5.5.2 One member of the public who commented felt that the shopping in the centre of Bath compares unfavourably with Brighton and with Bristol.

"There are some big names and a lot of independents, but mostly aimed at tourists or residents who have too much money. Where is Debenhams, Woolworths, H&M, Borders, Topman, Poundland even, Tesco, Asda? Bristol. Bath also closes too early, living right in city centre, you really have to think where you can buy a pint of milk after 7pm or cigarettes after the off-licences are shut. Bath is too dependant on the supermarkets and tourists shops and not on the needs of city centre dwellers, many of whom may well be students and wonder what backwater they have moved to."

5.5.3 Another commented:

"We have sufficient clothes, telephone and shoe shops, we need more butchers and greengrocers. Yes, we have supermarkets but I would like to see local shops not national chains.

I suggest you go and visit Cardiff market to see a large thriving local produce market far more interesting and diverse than the Guildhall market with one or three local food-type stalls."

5.5.4 The review has had press, radio and TV coverage on several occasions, particularly in the Bath Chronicle in November 2002 when coverage included a two-page "Agenda" feature, several letters and mention in an opinion column. Much of the coverage has focussed on the loss of small shops and "independent" shops, whereas the work of the review was centred on local needs shopping to which supermarkets make a vital contribution.

5.5.5 Two people took the opportunity to address the Panel at its public meeting on 16th Jan. Both had concerns regarding the number of responses to the telephone survey (demand research). The first speaker wished that Residents Associations had been directly consulted as part of the research and identified 3 specific issues regarding local needs shopping in Bath centre:

a) There is no longer a local greengrocers selling local produce, except in the bus station. Supermarkets do not provide that benefit to the local community.
b) Hardware is a shortage. There is the stall in the Guildhall Market but that is limited.
c) Millinery/haberdashers are lacking in Bath.

5.5.6 The second speaker made a range of points regarding the Sunday market. These points included noting that a low percentage of stalls in this market seemed to be catering to local needs. He pointed out that historically, Bath's market-place is the High Street and (more recently) the area behind the Guildhall next to the Guildhall Market and that he would like to see it there again.

6. Conclusions

6.1 There is not a major issue in terms of price or accessibility for the vast majority of local needs goods.

6.2 The supply research suggested a limited number of sources of supply for fish, ironmongery/hardware, dry cleaning, drapery, schoolwear and toys, in so much as less than five sources of supply for each were identified within the core area. But there are sources for all of these, and the concern expressed was as much about the cost of the products as about physical access. There is a lack of evidence that demand for most of these goods and services is not being met. Of this list, only fish appears in the list of frequent purchase goods and services provided in section 2.8 above, the others being typically less frequent purchases.

6.3 Supermarkets are important in meeting everyday shopping requirements in terms of convenience, price and choice. High percentages of those on both lower and higher incomes felt having everything available under one roof important. Where everything is not in a single store, having a range of suppliers in a small area is desirable to establish a "critical mass".

6.4 The research has addressed the perception that some Bath city-centre residents, particularly those on lower incomes, do not have their everyday shopping needs catered for by retail outlets in the centre. The research has demonstrated the large degree to which supermarkets are meeting these everyday shopping needs and that making distinctions between independent shops, "small" shops and supermarkets for these purposes is not useful. Independent and small shops may be the preference of some and may be perceived to have benefits such as better customer service, but this does not detract from the finding that the everyday shopping needs of residents are being met.

6.5 There are limitations to what the Council can do to support local needs shopping. For example although the Council owns 60% of freeholds in the centre, some of the property is let on long leases to institutional investors who in turn sublet to the occupational tenant. The Council has a controlling interest in about 35% of the city centre shops.

6.6 As indicated in evidence provided by Bath & North East Somerset Council's Property Services, support to local needs shopping is limited by statute, ownership and the forces of supply and demand. Within these limitations the Council supports local needs shopping by support for markets as listed in section 3.6, restricting lease uses in certain areas, the Council's Street Trading Policy and in other ways. Further details are available in Annex 9 and also in section 3.5 above regarding business rates.

6.7 The Council's Street Trading Policy seeks to complement premises-based trading and has particular regard to local needs shopping. These can be taken into consideration when determining fees for a pitch and so there is the potential to try and attract street traders to improve local needs shopping.

6.8 The Saturday Farmers' Market appears to be a success and provides a widening of consumer choice, although it is not necessarily all low-cost shopping. The Council has promoted the Farmers' Market and three one-day markets around the Authority. Promotion of the Guildhall Market (a six-day market) both in terms of upgrading the site and advertising its goods and services, would seem to be reasonable.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The responsibility for the Council's support of local needs shopping lies with several service departments. The linkages between these services in relation to promoting local needs shopping should be strengthened and clarified with Sustainability & Economic Development taking the lead. Whilst at the present moment there appears to be no significant unmet need, market conditions can change quickly. Therefore the Council needs to continue to monitor the situation and react accordingly.

7.2 Currently in Cheap Street and Westgate Street the Council restricts retail uses to a specified range of local needs shopping uses. The Council should, where there is an identified need, act more flexibily in its consideration of restricted leases within all secondary shopping areas in the city.

7.3 The Council should continue to explore the introduction of flexibilities in terms and conditions regarding leases and rents for the Council's commercial estate, for example shorter term leases and breakout clauses. The purpose of this would be to support a thriving retail environment over the longer term.

7.4 As a result of this review's contributors session, officers plan to produce a general strategy for markets in Bath to clarify and co-ordinate the Council's support to overall market provision. This would include co-ordination of the number and siting of markets in Bath. Currently the Guildhall Market is an under-used asset on a prime site which needs to be better exploited. One possible improvement would be to allow deliveries of large and heavy goods to be made through the Guildhall car park access during limited hours, such as before 8am.

7.5 We recommend that work on this strategy should include contributions from Economic Development, Commercial Property, Development Control (including listed building consents), Environmental & Consumer Services and Planning Policy.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 If these recommendations are introduced, wholly or in part, there will be some financial implications, although these should not be significant. Due to time constraints, it was not possible for this Panel to consider in detail the extent of these. It is the view of this Panel that if the Council "wills the end, it must will the means". If the recommendations are endorsed, financial implications should then be assessed in detail as part of the action planning stage and provision made in the Budget and Financial Plan at the relevant time.

9. Acknowledgements

9.1 The Panel would like to thank those who attended and contributed at the Panel's meeting on 16th January 2003, particularly the external contributors:

Neil Menneer	Chairman Bath Federation of Small Businesses
Audrey Cloet	Chair of Action for Pensioners
Lyndon Craig Kanta Dicorato	Representatives of Guildhall Market Traders
Heidi Riardon	Representative of Retail Committee, Chamber of Commerce.
Sebastian Long	Media and Communications Officer, Student's Union, University of Bath. Has also lived in the centre of Bath as a student.

9.2 The Panel is grateful for the assistance provided to this Review by staff from the Council's Sustainability & Economic Development and Property & Legal Services.

10. List of Annexes and Maps

Annex 1	List of types of shops considered to be "local needs shops" for the purposes of the research
Annex 2	"Local Needs Shopping" in other Local Authorities
Annex 3	Supply Research
Map 1	Map of local needs shops
Annex 4	Bar chart – provision of local shopping categories
Annex 5	Demand Research
Map 2	Map matching local needs shopping provision to areas of socio-economic deprivation
Map 3	Map of the core research area plus adjacent research areas Area 2 and Area 3.
Annex 6	Survey questionnaire
Annex 7	Terms of Reference for the review
Annex 8	Review of definition of "local needs shopping"
Annex 9	Write-up of contributor session