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# Do Planners Have the Tools for the Job?

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# Do Planners Have the Tools for the Job?

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- What job?
- Which tools?
- Who will provide them?
- Focus of presentation is on retail planning by public authorities at regional and local authority levels

# What Job?

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- Statutory Planning System in England:
  - Retail / Town Centres policies in RSSs
  - Retail / Town Centres policies in LDFs
  - Development Control
- Supplementary planning activity:
  - Town centre strategies
  - Local retail strategies
  - Site-specific: Development Briefs etc.
- On the Horizon:
  - 'New impact test'
  - 'Competition test'
  - More protection for independents in town centres?

# Which Tools?

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- Information
- Analytical skills
- Consultation & negotiation
- Policy formulation & interpretation
- Implementing development

# Who provides the tools?

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- Central government:
  - Core policies
  - Advice on methods, criteria etc.
  - Data on population trends, development trends, town centres, etc.
- Private sector:
  - Data on local development & expenditure trends
  - Expertise in need & impact assessment
  - Expertise in town centre strategies & development
- Voluntary sector & local interest groups:
  - Local knowledge and experience

# What are the gaps in provision?

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- Information:
  - Local turnover estimates
  - Vitality & viability database
- Skills:
  - Competition assessment
- Expertise:
  - Consultation at local level
  - Land assembly

# A longer-term skills deficit?

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- Nationwide shortage of qualified planners, likely to become worse
- Demise of specialist retail planning teaching in University courses
  - 3 modules recently ceased due to staff retirement
  - Few (if any) academics entering planning schools with retail planning interests

# Issues for further consideration

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- The 'competition test'
- The 'new impact test'
- More protection for independents in town centres?
- Sub-regional planning of retail growth and change



# The 'competition test'

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- Proposed in Competition Commission's Groceries Market Investigation, final report
- Test would be applied by Office of Fair Trading
- Applied to any proposal for new or extended food store of >1,000 sq.m. (net sales area)
- OFT to act as statutory consultee to LPA
  - i.e. would advise on LPA's decision, not direct
- Requires amendment to GDPO
- Not certain to happen: DCLG appears lukewarm

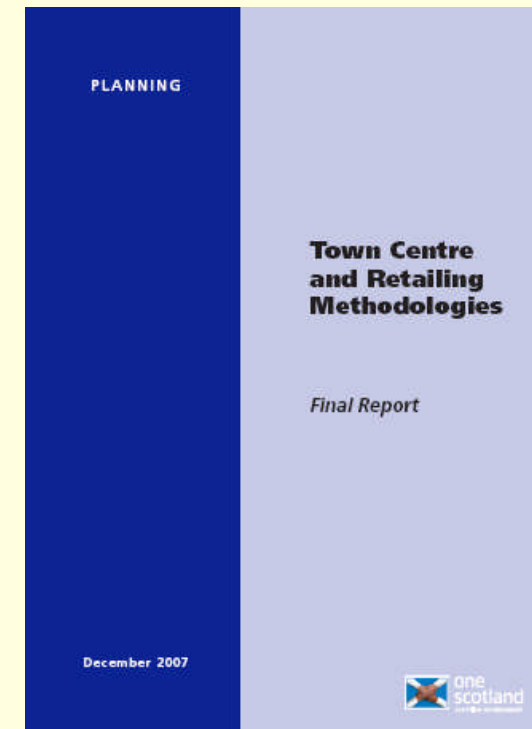
# The 'competition test' (2)

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- OFT would advise rejection of proposal if
  - There are 3 or fewer 'large grocery retailers' within 10 minutes' drive-time of the proposed store
  - And it would lead to the retailer concerned having >60% of 'groceries sales area' within the 10-min. limit
  - Unless it's a 'new entrant' to the area
- LPA could overrule OFT if
  - 'identified benefits for the local area would clearly outweigh the detriment to local people' [from lack of competition]
  - 'the development ... would not take place without the involvement of' [the retailer concerned]

# The 'new impact test'

- Imminent revision by DCLG of guidance on 'need' and 'impact' in PPS6
- Follows:
  - Barker Report, which recommended scrapping 'needs test'
  - Aborted 'daughter document' on need and impact methodology
  - Competition Commission proposal for 'competition test'
- May be part of revised PPS6
- Danger that it will add even more complexity to guidance
- Note recent Scottish Government report on 'Town Centre and Retailing Methodologies'  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/24105030/0>



# More protection for independents in town centres?

- Growing concern over
  - 'clone towns'
  - multiples' convenience stores in town centres
- Are these concerns felt by majority of local people?
- Need for better techniques:
  - Local opinion polling
  - Consultation with local businesses, food suppliers, property interests

## Tories join the battle to save small shops

Joe Lepper

Small shop owners have welcomed Conservative Party support for their battles against crime and the proliferation of out-of-town superstores.

Conservative leader David Cameron this week unveiled proposals to make councils give greater consideration to high street vitality and retail diversity in planning decisions.

He said the Tories strongly opposed government



David Cameron wants councils to help shops tackle retail crime

Conservative Party's Small Business Committee chair James Lowman.

*The Grocer, 26.04.08*

*LGA/NRPF 'Retail Planning – A Review'*

# Sub-regional retail planning: a policy vacuum?

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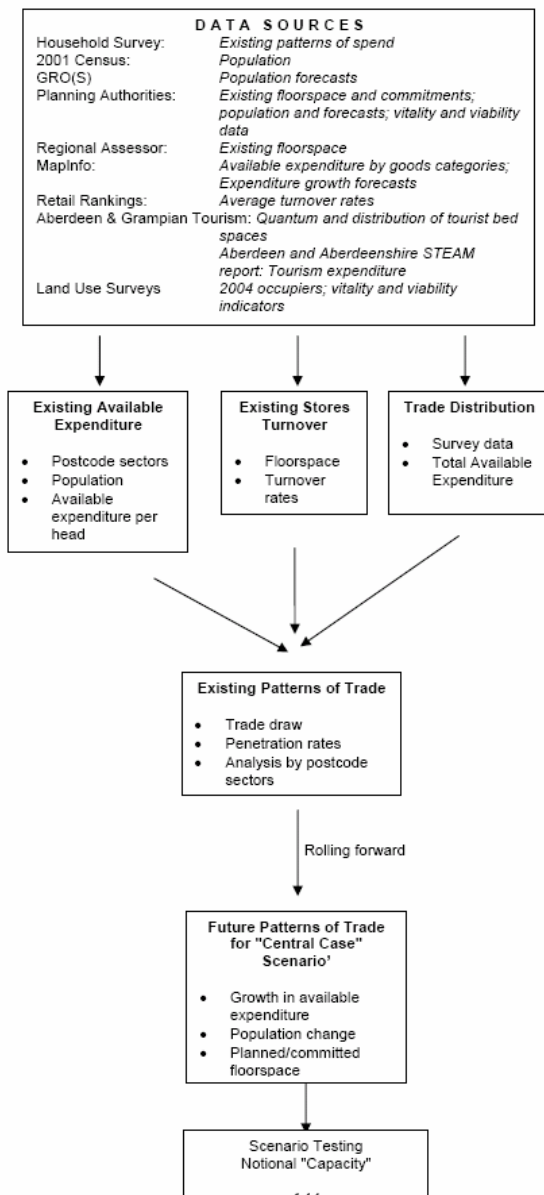
- Sub-region (i.e. 1 or more Counties in extent, with several major city/town centres) is vital focus for retail planning policy.
- But, with demise of Structure Plans, responsibility for sub-regional planning is split between regional and local authorities.
- Some RSSs include retail policies for sub-regions, but:
  - These do little more than list the main centres
  - Blanket refusal for new off-centre retailing without consideration of possible benefits

# Sub-regional retail planning: a policy agenda?

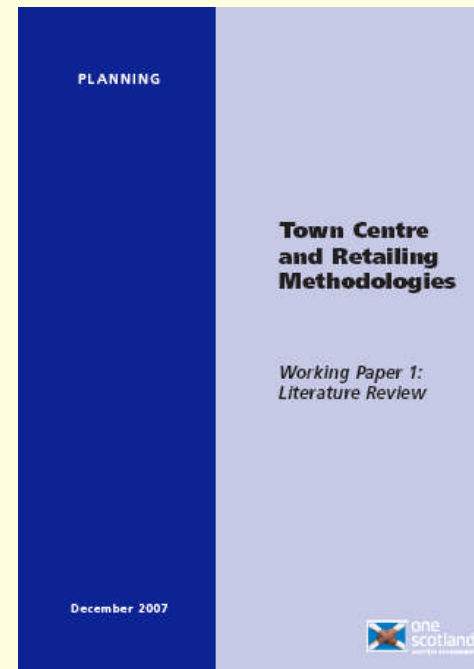
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- These are tentative suggestions: need for debate
- RPAs and LPAs should work together to produce meaningful sub-regional strategies :
  - Agree a standardised approach to capacity assessment and forecasting
  - Consult seriously with developers and retailers
  - Show awareness of regional and local distinctiveness
  - Formulate policies to:
    - Select city/town centres for expansion and/or quality improvement
    - Encourage specialisation in smaller centres
    - Rationalise off-centre retailing
    - Explore role of retailing in assisting regeneration and social inclusion

Structure of AASRM



# Sub-regional retail planning: ‘Strategic Retail Model’



Source: Scottish Office (2007, p.144)  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/20105342/7>

# Sub-regional retail planning: further steps

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- Consultation with developers, retailers, property consultants and town centre managers to examine scope for town centre improvement
- Use of Strategic Retail Model (or other capacity assessment) to examine impacts of major development possibilities
- Assessment of local deficiencies (quantitative and qualitative) in retail facilities



# Conclusions: do planners have the tools for the job?

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- Competition test:
  - OFT would apply the test
  - Suspect that these circumstances may occur only rarely
  - Planners will have to use judgement as to whether the test should be over-ruled
  - Unclear whether appellants will be entitled to question OFT assessment
- New impact test:
  - Likely to employ existing methods and expertise
  - May also involve assessment of competition
- Sub-regional planning:
  - Mainly using existing methods and expertise
  - Planners will need to consult and listen more effectively

# Conclusions: broader issues

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- 'Production line' of retail planners is faltering:
  - Greater contact needed between practitioners and planning schools
  - Should RTPI set up additional training?
- Unfortunately, retail planning is unlikely to become more straightforward
- But, central government could
  - Be less prescriptive on policies and methods
  - Compile up-to-date, accurate and affordable data on town centre and major off-centre retailing
  - Prepare advice on good practice