

Town Centre Statistics on the DCLG State of the Cities Database – a quick user guide

DCLG has recently released Town Centre Statistics data for the years 1999 to 2004 inclusive on the State of the Cities Database area of its website (<http://www.socd.communities.gov.uk/SOCD/>). There appear to be a few teething troubles with this website; this guide is intended to help NRPF members explore the Town Centre Statistics data on the site and avoid the problem areas.

At present the site only appears to work with the Microsoft Internet Explorer web browser, albeit with a few difficulties mentioned below. There are more serious issues when using other browsers such as Firefox. This guide is based on experiences with Internet Explorer 7.0 with a 1280 x 800 screen.

Welcome page

On clicking the web address <http://www.socd.communities.gov.uk/SOCD/>, the user is presented with four options in the middle of the welcome page:

1. View a report for a city or town centre
2. Select a place to report on by location
3. View a report which compares cities and other places
4. Download raw data for cities and other places

These will be considered in turn.

1. View a report for a city or town centre

Select this option to display a box in which three or more letters should be entered.

Click the '*Find*' button to display a list of Town Centres and Retail Cores which contain that sequence of letters somewhere in their names (e.g. "has" brings up Haslemere, Haslingden and Hastings; "sti" brings up Hastings and Rustington). The results list may include other geographical units such as LAs, Tracts and Wards relating to other items in the State of the Cities database; ignore these. Town Centres and Retail Cores tend to appear last in the list.

Click on a Town Centre or Retail Core and click the '*Go*' button to display an overview map showing the surrounding area. The statistics for the centre for all years are presented below: centre size; employment; floorspace and rateable value, broken down by category (e.g. convenience retail).

A chart for each variable can be created by clicking '*chart an indicator*' which appears at the end of each section; the option to '*thematically map an indicator*' does not work with the Town Centre Statistics. The red question mark next to each heading leads to a description of that variable, but take care - it does not seem possible to return from this without starting again. There is a link on the right-hand side of the screen which allows the report to be exported as a pdf file.

Note that for Retail Cores (which cover approximately 50 central shopping areas in London and major cities), the wrong map displays and data is only available for 2002. More detailed maps and lists of the Town Centres and Retail Cores for 2000 and 2002 are available at <http://62.73.191.157/towncent/2002/englandAndWales.htm> - these are based on the original work by Geofutures. These maps and data are available in a more accessible format on Geofutures' own website at <http://www.geofutures.com/online/towncentresfullscreen.html>. Note that the Areas of Town Centre Activity and their boundaries for the other years may be different.

2. Select a place to report on by location

3. View a report which compares cities and other places

There are problems with both these options which prevent their use. There appear to be boxes or buttons missing from the webpage so that it is not currently possible to select places or regions.

4. Download raw data for cities and other places

There are two ways to specify data for download: by theme or by subject. To access the Town Centre Statistics choose either '*by theme*' and then '*urban competitiveness*' as the theme or choose '*by subject*' and then '*economy*' as the subject; both give the same outcome. In either case select '*Town Centre*' or '*Retail Core*' as place type.

If *Town Centres* are selected, a region (e.g. West Midlands) must also be chosen – it is not possible to download statistics for the whole country at once. The dataset – i.e. Town Centre Size, Employees or Floorspace – must then be chosen, and then the start and end years.

A download button now appears – if Excel format is chosen, the statistics for each year appear on a separate sheet; if the simpler CSV format (which works in Excel) is chosen, everything is shown on the same sheet.