

# pick'n'mix for local shopping parades



In June 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published a report on local shopping parades, *Parades to be Proud of: Strategies to Support Local Shops*.<sup>1</sup> The Ministerial Foreword to the report recognises the importance of the many retail units which are not part of planned shopping centres or cities and town centres.

The long-standing gap in spatial retail data and the increasing privatisation of place-based data on retailing (collected by, for example, Local Data Company and Experian) have meant that we have an incomplete picture of UK retailing, with the many local parades not included or covered in the data.<sup>2</sup> Despite the very large number of small shops in local parades distributed across the country, there is no mapping or understanding of their composition or changing nature. Given their significance to consumers and places, this is odd. For these reasons the DCLG report is particularly welcome; it deserves to be brought to a wider audience and subject to widespread discussion.

The DCLG definition of local parades is that they:

- are largely defined by how people use them and their relation to other centres (i.e. they vary from five to 70 shops);
- have a mainly local customer base, with strong local links and local visibility, rather than being places people travel a significant distance to shop at;
- have a high number of independent small or micro-businesses with some multiples (such as Tesco Metro, Boots) and symbol affiliates (for example Spar); and
- have a mixture of retail-based shops (convenience stores, newsagents, greengrocers, bakers etc.) and some local service businesses (hairdressers, cafés etc.).

The data used in the DCLG report is panel-based data collected by Verdict.<sup>3</sup> A key finding is that

parades have low vacancy rates despite the recession. There has often been an amalgamation of units in local parades in order to create unit sizes which are more viable for modern businesses and which provide the levels of choice that consumers expect at their local neighbourhood store. The small shops in local parades are not necessarily independent shops, as multiple retailers are increasingly found in these local parades. These findings broadly agree with other research using longitudinal survey data on local parades<sup>4</sup> which showed that over a ten-year period the shop units which make up local parades have often remained the same. Churn has occurred but it has been of fascia rather than type of use.

The difference between what is happening in high streets, as highlighted in the Mary Portas Review,<sup>5</sup> and what is happening in local parades is important. Local parades seem to be faring better. There is thus a danger that headline figures on shop closures based on town centre data will be used to effect changes in policy which may then have unintended consequences for other types of retail areas.

In the first section of the DCLG report four types of local parade are identified: local neighbourhood parade; local neighbourhood hub; radial parade; and radial destination. Sadly, this typology is not then used in the rest of the report. Previous authors<sup>6</sup> looking at the role and function of the independent small shop set out a typology of locations for small shops in local parades in a variety of settings. A key finding of their research was that the role, function and success of small shops depended intimately on their location. Shops in parades in different types of location will face different challenges.

Academics<sup>7</sup> have also questioned the ways in which top-up shopping is changing; this will inevitably create new challenges for local parades. Such places are not immune to change, and the challenge is to understand how national trends and local factors come together in the context of local parades.

Recent academic research has drawn attention to the community role of local parades. Aspects such as trust, certainty and meeting people have all been highlighted.<sup>8</sup> Research has also suggested that local traders need to embed their businesses in the local

