EXETER CITY COUNCIL

ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2009

CITY CENTRE PERFORMANCE UPDATE

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to brief members on current city centre performance levels, with updates on retail unit vacancy rates, car park statistics, retail sales information and pedestrian footfall data.

2.0 RETAIL UNIT VACANCY RATES

2.1 A full retail units vacancy survey was undertaken in March 2009 and the survey makes encouraging reading, with a relatively modest increase in retail unit vacancy rates between August 2008 and March 2009. A summary of survey figures is set out at ***Appendix 1***. It should be noted that 6 of the 16 streets surveyed had no vacancies and a further 4 streets showed no increase in vacancy rates since August 2008. In March 2009 there were a total of 49 vacant retail units in the City Centre – out of a total of 588 units (8.3% vacancy rate). It is worth noting that the national average vacancy rate in March of this year has been reported as 15%, with some centres reporting vacancy rates of up to 39%. Further significant points arising from the vacancy survey are set out below.

2.2 **Fore Street**. The overwhelming majority of vacancies are within the arcades and a number of new retailers have opened in previously vacant units within the first quarter of 2009.

2.3 **High Street**. The number of vacant units within the High Street remains stubbornly higher than it was hoped would be the case. The survey showed a total of 8 vacant units in High Street – this figure has now been reduced to 7 with the recent opening of L'Occitane, an excellent addition to the City Centre retail offer.

2.4 **Princesshay**. Positive dialogue is reported with a number of potential new retailers. An announcement has now been made on the anticipated opening in the late Summer of Carluccio's in the former Orange Tree unit – a major addition to the City's retail and restaurant line-up.

3.0 CAR PARK DATA

3.1 **City Council** car park data is set out in the table below. The table shows total numbers of tickets sold in City Council car parks per quarter, with comparative data listed for each of the last five years.

Year	Tickets Sold – Q1	Tickets Sold – Q2	Tickets Sold – Q3	Tickets Sold – Q4	Tickets Sold – TOTAL
2004/05	673,161	710,390	785,383	635,836	2,804,770
2005/06	684,348	691,999	732,966	614,458	2,723,771
2006/07	616,871	673,455	701,683	590,786	2,582,795
2007/08	625,380	690,601	726,080	593,962	2,636,023
2008/09	577,359	619,750	680,875	557,824	2,435,808

3.2 It should be stressed that, whilst on the face of it, the ticket sales data show a significant drop in ticket sales between 2007/08 and 2008/09, when ticket sales at Princesshay and Summerland Gate car parks are taken in to account, 2007/08 and 2008/09 car park ticket sales comparisons are more encouraging.

3.3 Taking Princesshay and Summerland Gate car park figures in to account, there was a slight reduction in City Centre car park ticket sales between 2007/08 and 2008/09 – a total reduction of 2.3%. The most significant quarterly reductions were shown in quarters three and four (reductions of 4.1% and 3.9% respectively).

3.4 The take up of the concessionary bus pass is likely to be a key factor in the reduction in car park usage, with both the take up and usage figures among the over 60's for the concessionary bus travel pass in Exeter particularly high, with take up standing at 84.5%.

4.0 RETAIL SALES DATA

4.1 Retail sales data have been taken from a number of key retailers across the City Centre. The number of retailers participating in this specific monitoring exercise is limited and the figures only provide one element of a snapshot of city centre performance. The figures are, however, again relatively encouraging within the context of broadly negative prevailing economic conditions. Figures are shown below for the first quarter of 2009.

Month 2009	Sales +/- Comparison with 2008
January	+3.44%
February	-0.7%
March	+3.58%

5.0 FOOTFALL MONITORING

5.1 On-going footfall monitoring is undertaken across the city centre, with the latest city centre footfall survey undertaken in February 2009. The latest footfall survey was undertaken by PMRS. By definition, the footfall survey figures should be viewed within the context of the wider basket of performance indicators.

5.2 Estimated average weekly footfall figures derived from the footfall survey show a 3.3% increase in footfall on March 2008 and a 19.9% increase on March 2006.

5.3 Footfall survey figures were derived from a total of 46 count points across the city centre, with the five busiest survey points (ranked 1-5) being Tesco Metro, Clarks, Boots, Clinton Cards (Princesshay) and Thomson Travel (High Street). The Tesco Metro survey point has an estimated weekly footfall figure of 133,420.

5.4 Significant year-on-year footfall increases (2009 compared with 2008) were seen in High Street near the former Russell & Bromley/NEXT unit, in Little Queen Street and in London Inn Square (near to NEXT). Significant footfall decreases have been identified in Bampfylde Lane (closure of Zavvi and USC have impacted on footfall within this area) and in Paris Street (near Fulfords).

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 Key data set out in section 2, 3, 4 & 5 above provides a snapshot indicator of recent city centre performance.

6.2 The current economic climate is without doubt extremely challenging, however current analysis of key performance indicators in Exeter is relatively encouraging. There are, however, no grounds for complacency, with the economic picture often confusing, contradictory and fast moving. Analysis of performance will be undertaken on an on-going basis and reported to Economy Scrutiny Committee as appropriate.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 **It is recommended that** Members note the performance update.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:
None