

**YATE TOWN CENTRE**  
***Health Check***  
**September 2012**

# INTRODUCTION

The Yate Town Centre Health Check, led by Sodbury & Yate Business Association (with support from local partners) aims to identify the work currently taking place in Yate to *improve the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre* and highlight actions that will help it continue to improve.

## BACKGROUND

In 1998 Roger Evans Associates (urban design consultants) were commissioned by South Gloucestershire Council to hold planning workshops with local people. The project was administered by a steering group including Yate Town Council. From feedback collected at the workshops a *Yate Town Centre Update* was produced, which summarised a draft strategy for the future of the town centre.

The following recommendations were made:

- Consolidate Yate as the principal service centre for its immediate catchment area
- Extend the range of facilities available and
- Reduce the impact of traffic in the town centre

Twenty seven potential projects were identified in the draft strategy focussing on **community, environment and movement**. Much work has taken place in the fourteen years since the 'Update' was produced thanks to the hard work and support of Yate Town Council, community groups, Yate Shopping Precinct and the local authority. These groups have continued to work in partnership to achieve the aspirations including the new library, improvements to Yate shopping precinct, revised town centre parking layout, new town square, Pop in Café, Armadillo Youth Café and Health Centre.

Following this work, and subsequently that of the South Gloucestershire Council Area Facilitators, Yate Town Council took on the lead role in coordinating a Town Centre Strategy Group to provide a framework for discussion of issues and proposals affecting the town centre.

## YATE COMMUNITY PLAN

Yate Community Plan Steering Group was formed to produce and publish a visionary document reflecting the aspirations of the people of Yate for the future of the town up to 2028. In July 2008 the Yate Community Plan was published. Some issues identified in the plan (relating to the **Economy and business** and **The town centre** sections) are addressed in this health check. The plan will be updated to reflect progress made to date.

## ECONOMIC CLIMATE

Following the recession, the UK has only shown signs of a modest recovery with a global economic downturn continuing. In 2009 Government bodies published reports and guides that highlighted the need for town centre partners to work together to counteract the decline of high streets and town centres. These included: *21<sup>st</sup> Century High Streets*, British Retail Consortium (2009), *Driving Economic Prosperity: a practical guide for lead members*, I&DeA (2009) and *High Noon for the High Street*, New Local Government Network (2009).

## THE PORTAS REVIEW

In spring 2011, Mary Portas was hired by Government to investigate innovative ways in which the high street could fight back against low consumer spending, inflation and increased overheads. The Portas Review was published in December 2011, detailing a 28-point plan that can help the high street become the vibrant hub of the community it once used to be, in so many communities across the UK. Mary Portas' Vision is set out on the following page.

## WHY A HEALTH CHECK?

Monitoring the health of a town centre was a common theme in the documents mentioned above and important to determine areas for improvement. As a result, these documents were used as the basis for writing this health check (the introductions highlighted in blue at the start of each section reflects this). The 'Key Messages' from these documents are also summarised on the next page.

In spring 2011, Sodbury & Yate Business Association (SYBA) took the initiative and with support from South Gloucestershire Council, started the health check process. The draft document was circulated to local partners for comment (including Yate Town Centre Strategy Group, Yate Town Council, Yate Safer & Stronger Community Group and Yate Community Plan group) and made available online for the public to comment.

## FRAMEWORK

The health check has two primary areas of focus, which are both seen as crucial in helping to create a vibrant town centre. The first area of focus is **developing the town centre** and the second area of focus is **chamber of trade activities**. For the purpose of this health check and to be in keeping with previous studies, 'town centre' refers to the area between Yate Station and the Ridgewood Centre.

This health check will help inform South Gloucestershire Council's future plans for Yate Town Centre and will also act as guide for local partners engaged in developing the vitality and vibrancy of Yate Town Centre.

## KEY MESSAGES

↳ Out of town centres have decreased town centre footfall and spend. The average group spend for out of town centres, across the UK, is £55 compared to £34 within in-town centres. Moreover, money spent in a chain is more likely to leave the local economy.

↳ Research shows that money spent with local suppliers is worth more to the local economy and tends to be re-spent locally. Locally owned businesses can generate up to a 70 per cent local premium in enhanced economic impact.

↳ In contrast, only a small amount of the wealth that supermarkets generate actually stays in the communities in which they operate. For example, retail profits of large chain stores or multinationals typically flow direct from stores to the head office and ultimately to shareholders around the world.

↳ It is important however, to emphasise that chain stores can drive regeneration, contribute to the community and improve local economic prosperity. While the growth of the 'cloned' British High Street may have harmed local entrepreneurship, it has also often provided much needed inward investment to a community.

↳ Town centres are central to local environmental policy and street scene improvements. The aesthetic character of high streets and their design can play a crucial role in addressing crime and vandalism.

↳ Town centres can be the catalyst for regeneration; impact on local employment; central to driving footfall increases; provide important opportunities for entrepreneurship and enterprise.

↳ Town centres are a focal point of encouraging local spending, social inclusion and empowerment. Added to this, regions with higher economic performance, often driven by the performance of the town centre, are recognised to have higher levels of social trust and capital.

↳ Promoting the town centre can encourage less travel and reduce carbon footprints. Other benefits could be accrued on the basis that local shops tend to rely on local produce and suppliers more, with possible benefits across food miles, also leading to a lower carbon footprint.

↳ Town centre partnerships are forums bringing together key local stakeholders to promote the health and wellbeing of the area. The partnership's board of key local actors provides the direction. These partnerships have proved particularly valuable during the recession. Research shows that areas where town centre/high street partnerships exist seem to have reacted more quickly to recent economic pressures.

## THE PORTAS REVIEW

*My vision: I want to breathe economic and community life back into our high streets. Let me spell out my vision of the future...*

I don't want to live in a Britain that doesn't care about community. And I believe that our high streets are a really important part of building communities and pulling people together in a way that a supermarket or shopping mall, however convenient, however entertaining and however slick, just never can.

With town centre vacancy rates doubling over the last two years and total consumer spend away from our high streets now over 50%, the need to take action has never been clearer. Although some high streets are thriving, most have a fight on their hands. Many are sickly, others are on the critical list and some are now dead. We cannot and should not attempt to save every high street but my findings have led me to believe that unless urgent action is taken, the casualties will only continue to multiply.

Fundamentally I believe that our high streets are uniquely placed to deliver something new. I believe that our high streets can be lively, dynamic, exciting and social places that give a sense of belonging and trust to a community. A sense of belonging which, as the recent riots clearly demonstrated, has been eroded and in some instances eradicated. I also fundamentally believe that once we invest in and create social capital in the heart of our communities, the economic capital will follow.

High streets must be ready to experiment, try new things, take risks and become destinations again. They need to be spaces and places that people want to be in. High streets of the future must be a hub of the community that local people are proud of and want to protect.

*Mary Portas (December 2011)  
The Portas Review*

High streets and town centres that are fit for the 21st century need to be multifunctional social centres, not simply competitors for stretched consumers. They must offer irresistible opportunities and experiences that do not exist elsewhere, are rooted in the interests and needs of local people, and will meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

*Action for Market Towns (2011)  
Twenty-First Century Town Centres*

## YATE TOWN HERITAGE

Yate has been on the map for over a thousand years. Both Yate and Chipping Sodbury owe their success to farming more than any other trade. Farming was at the forefront of Yate life for centuries. In the Middle Ages sheep farming and wool dominated, while dairy farming took over in the 17th century.

From 1844, new railway lines built around Yate and Chipping Sodbury had a lasting impact on Yate. The area benefited from raw materials, namely coal, limestone and Celestine. In the 19th century, businesses used railways to transport materials to Bristol. Local companies exhausted remaining local coal and Celestine stocks during the 20th century. Stone quarrying, however, remains a traditional industry that still thrives around Yate and Sodbury. In turn the area grew. New middle class families built palatial homes in Yate, new roads were developed and the population more than doubled in the late 19th century.

Victorian Yate was transformed during and after World War I. The Air Ministry's enormous Aircraft Repair Depot brought modern industry to Yate. These large industrial sites on Station Road re-shaped the old farming landscape and enabled modern industry to use the site. Parnalls, later Jackson and Creda and Newman industries, occupied the vast area and between them, employed over four thousand people during the 1960s.

In the early 1960s Yate changed dramatically. New Town development brought many newcomers to Yate from Bristol, all over Britain and beyond. The local economy boomed and the town was seen as fresh and modern. The population more than quadrupled between 1965 and 2000.

The growth of the town brought about the arrival of a brand new 'American style' shopping centre, developed between 1965 and 1970. New roads and car parks were developed to complement the new retail focus for Yate Town Centre. The centre of life for the town transferred from Station Road, which slowly declined as a result.

The extensive shopping precinct is now a draw not only for local residents but also for people from other parts of South Gloucestershire. It stands alongside the historical centre of the town, St Mary's Church, the Heritage Centre and older developments along Station Road.

*Information courtesy of David Hardill  
Yate Heritage Centre*

*and Yate Community Plan  
Yate Town Council (2008)*

## YATE TOWN CENTRE TODAY

Yate is characterised as a centre providing substantial amounts of convenience and comparison shopping. Its town centre comprises a pedestrianised shopping precinct and the traditional Station Road, which links to the railway station. In 2011, there were a total of 115 retail units with A1 use class. A good range of multiple (national) stores are represented, including Tesco, Morrisons, B&Q New Look, Burtons, Halfords, Argos, and Boots, which are supported by a variety of smaller shops. In addition to its retail function, the town centre also supports a leisure centre, library, health centre One Stop Shop Council Area Office, youth café, over 50s café, job centre and bus terminal.

Convenience shopping forms the majority of retailing activity with 45% of all A1 retail floor space, the Tesco Extra store accounting for two thirds of this. Comparison functions account for 58% of all A1 units and 46% of the A1 retail floor space. Service functions account for 17% of all A1 units but just 4% of retail floor space. At the time of the survey, there were 15 vacant or empty A1 units representing 13% of all A1 retail units in the *town centre*. The occupant and use, together with floor space (where known) is listed in the Town Centres and Retailing Study 2011.

Yate town centre manages to retain footfall and spend from its local residents and those from its rural hinterland, due in part to the lack of any significant nearby out of town retail centres. As a result of three non-independent supermarkets present in the town centre, the majority of grocery spend does not remain in the local economy.

SYBA includes trading locally as a core message in its marketing and promotional material as well as facilitating innovative ways in which local businesses can trade with each other. It has fostered a close working relationship with Yate shopping precinct even though the majority of the precinct's tenants are larger, national chain stores.

These larger national chain stores however, have helped ensure there is not a significantly high vacancy rate in the shopping precinct, which would have had an adverse effect on footfall and consumer spending. Despite the current economic climate, Tesco has made significant investment in the town centre in the last year.

*Information from Local Economic Assessment  
South Gloucestershire Council (September 2011)*

*and Town Centres & Retailing  
South Gloucestershire Council (August 2011)*

# 1. DEVELOPING THE TOWN CENTRE

## A] UNIQUE SENSE OF PLACE

Town centres are vital to the local community. Local people and groups should work together to maximise the advantages of the town centre's local heritage and natural surroundings whilst providing facilities for modern retailing. The town centre's local identity should be complemented by an appropriate retail mix that is marketed effectively. This will encourage shoppers to appreciate the retail experience.

### CURRENT STATUS

- Joint working takes place in Yate to promote the town centre's local heritage. The Yate Community Plan provides a vision for Yate that highlights town centre issues amongst its opportunities.
- Yate has a modern shopping precinct as well as a traditional high street (Station Road) but the variety of shops on the high street is narrow. There is little natural progression between the shopping precinct and the high street, partly due to residential housing.
- The shopping precinct does market its own shops and events using local press and media, however there is no joint promotion for Yate town centre as a whole.

### FUTURE ACTIONS

- Ensure there is more joined up working between existing groups and try to involve more local people in giving their views on how local heritage can be marketed effectively.  
*Lead Partner – Yate Heritage Centre*
- Try to encourage a better variety of shops on Station Road and look at ways to create a 'natural link' between the shopping precinct and Station Road.  
*Lead Partner – Yate Town Centre Strategy Group*
- Encourage all business interest groups to work together in Yate and develop a brand for Yate Town Centre. Promotional marketing activities could reflect this new brand and attract more foot fall to Yate Town Centre.  
*Lead Partner – Yate Town Centre Strategy Group*

## B] ATTRACTIVE PUBLIC REALM

A town centre should have an attractive trading environment with consistent styling, pedestrian signage and where public spaces are maintained to high standards. This should include effective deterrents against pollution. The local authority, public bodies and private interest groups need to work together to achieve such improvements.

### CURRENT STATUS

- Yate Town Centre is an attractive place with a mixture of traditional and modern shops, businesses, residential and community facilities. There is scope to improve street styling and pedestrian signage at Yate Station.
- Highways and public footpaths in Yate town centre are kept clean and tidy. Green spaces are well maintained however, access to larger green space is limited around the shopping precinct due to the arrangement of car parks and surrounding roads.
- The Yate Town Centre Strategy Group meets regularly to discuss and address pertinent issues (with relevant partners) affecting Yate Town Centre.

### FUTURE ACTIONS

- Ensure all street furniture in Yate Town Centre is clean and consistent and encourage the local 'in Bloom' group to install floral displays in the numerous shopping parades.  
*Lead Partner – Yate & Doddington in Bloom*
- Design and install town, heritage and wildlife maps in strategic locations around the town centre.  
*Lead Partner – Yate Heritage Centre*
- Review the present physical state of Yate Town Centre and consider making improvements where appropriate.  
*Lead Partner – Yate Town Centre Strategy Group*
- Encourage Yate Town Centre Strategy Group to work with other relevant partners in the area to ensure issues highlighted in this Town Centre Health Check are prioritised.  
*Lead Partner – Yate Town Centre Strategy Group*

# 1. DEVELOPING THE TOWN CENTRE cont.

## C] PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Monitoring the health of the town centre should underpin any effective town centre system. A clear strategy should be established to address the increasing rates of vacancy and the accompanying decline in fortunes of town centres.

### CURRENT STATUS

- Yate Town Centre Strategy Group uses meetings as a forum to discuss footfall in the shopping precinct but no other data is available for economic activity or footfall in the town centre as a whole.
- No specific, joined-up strategy has been established to promote the take-up of empty units in Yate Town Centre but individual landlords do promote their premises using agents.

### FUTURE ACTIONS

- Investigate ways of accurately measuring present economic activity and footfall in Yate Town Centre to compare with *Future Actions* data (derived from this Health Check) so that informed analysis of trends can be made. This data could be used to access funding for improvements.

*Lead Partner – Yate Shopping Precinct*

- Research previous audits of Yate Town Centre retail locations or conduct a new one, to analyse what sectors are not represented. This will allow a balanced mix of businesses to serve the varying needs of local residents and visitors.

*Lead Partner – Yate Town Centre Strategy Group*

## D] ACCESSIBILITY

Parking and transport policy should reduce town centre congestion and parking demands without affecting footfall. Car parking and cycle locking facilities need to attract customers to the town centre and adequate public transport links should connect local communities to the town centre. Retail premises should be easily accessible to encourage visits from wheelchair users and buggy users.

### CURRENT STATUS

- Yate shopping precinct has revised, adequate time-limited free parking but parking in and around Station Road is poor. Traffic congestion is a problem during peak hours between the Ridgewood roundabout and the South Gloucestershire Council office roundabout.
- There are some local bus routes connecting residents with Yate Town Centre. Yate shopping precinct is now served by a new bus terminal.
- The majority of retail premises in the town centre allow for easy access by wheelchair and buggy users.

### FUTURE ACTIONS

- Investigate the possibility of further off-street parking in and around Station Road to encourage more foot fall to the area. Conduct an audit of local parking facilities in Yate Town Centre.

*Lead Partner – Yate Town Centre Strategy Group*

- Review all bus routes connecting local villages to Yate Town Centre and look at ways to meet transport needs for people in outlying villages.

*Lead Partner – Yate Town Centre Strategy Group*

- Sign-post any town centre business requiring advice and guidance on accessibility issues to relevant organisations and informative, not-for-profit websites. Promote cycling as a sustainable means to access the town centre.

*Lead Partner – Sodbury & Yate Business Association*

# 1. DEVELOPING THE TOWN CENTRE cont.

## E] SAFETY & SECURITY

Retail crime and anti-social behaviour should be deterred, with damaged property and streetscape restored as quickly as possible. Meaningful deterrence can be achieved through a co-ordinated response by local retailers and businesses. Neighbourhood policing should meet the needs of the local community. The town centre should be a safe, inclusive and accessible place for people to live, work, shop and visit.

### CURRENT STATUS

- There is a good uniformed security presence in the shopping precinct. The Neighbourhood Policing Team, Constables and PCSO's are regularly seen within the town centre and have an excellent relationship with the shopping precinct's security team. There is little evidence of persistent damaged property.
- Meaningful deterrence takes place in the shopping precinct and wider town centre. The town centre provides a welcoming place for members of the whole community.
- A good working relationship exists between Avon & Somerset Police and Yate Shopping Precinct, both visibly working in partnership.

### FUTURE ACTIONS

- Build upon the already strong links between local police and local businesses in Yate Town Centre as well as signposting businesses to the Safer & Stronger Community Group meetings, to raise relevant issues.  
*Lead Partner – Avon & Somerset Police*
- Facilitate more joined-up working between Yate Safer & Stronger Community Group, Yate Town Centre Strategy Group and Avon & Somerset Police.  
*Lead Partner – Yate Safer & Stronger Community Group*
- Rejuvenate *Business Watch* by involving members of the Sodbury & Yate Business Association.  
*Lead Partner – Avon & Somerset Police*

## F] CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy sets the strategic planning policy framework to guide future development across South Gloucestershire, including Yate. The main Core Strategy policies likely to affect Yate Town Centre are:

- A proposed New Neighbourhood of up to 3,000 homes, employment land, community facilities and a local centre at north Yate
- Yate Town Centre will be the main shopping area for the residents of this new neighbourhood – and the future residents will also look to the town centre to provide the range of facilities, services and attractions for a market town of Yate's size and function
- Diversifying the range of town centre uses to encourage a more active and vibrant evening economy
- Enhancing cultural and community opportunities, in line with the aspirations of Yate Town Council, particularly where these opportunities are well related to the town centre
- Enhancing the network of open spaces, pedestrian and cycling connections from around Yate to link with the town centre
- Making provision for and seeking contributions towards the improvements of the Yate rail services, station facilities, car park and passenger interchange

South Gloucestershire Council has committed to work with its partners to ensure that the town centre continues to provide a range of facilities and services to support the Yate community and the communities of the surrounding hinterland and villages that rely on Yate as their local centre including making provision for further comparison floor space.

## 2. CHAMBER OF TRADE ACTIVITIES

Sodbury & Yate Business Association (SYBA) was formed in 2009. SYBA is a chamber of trade that encourages businesses in the Yate and Chipping Sodbury area to meet regularly, gain access to business support, trade with each other and promote the local economy. The 'Key Messages' section of this health check identifies the need for a strong and active chamber of trade to be in place, to work with local partners to undertake activities that can improve the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre. SYBA has therefore highlighted a set of ambitions and goals it believes will help contribute towards a vibrant and prosperous town centre.

	CURRENT STATUS	FUTURE ACTIONS
A] Provide a business environment in which entrepreneurship can flourish	SYBA provides environments in which entrepreneurship can flourish such as at business breakfasts, Local Expos, and exhibits at Yate library.	Arrange a calendar of business breakfasts for businesses to attend with speakers presenting business related topics. Continue to take part in local business Expos and encourage local businesses to do so as well.
B] Create and foster a spirit of goodwill, friendship and unity amongst local businesses	SYBA arranges specific events in addition to general meetings to offer opportunities for businesses to socialise, such as charity film screening, summer BBQs and restaurant meals.	There are plans for SYBA to get involved with other local groups, e.g. local Rotary clubs, to run charity events for businesses to take part in.
C] Provide facilities for the exchange of views and interaction between businesses	Networking opportunities are built into every SYBA meeting. During meetings businesses can put their own points of view across for discussion.	Continue to explore opportunities for more business interaction by inviting them to suggest ideas via the forum on the website.
D] Have an informative and up-to-date website	Enormous improvements have been made to the original website ( <a href="http://www.sodburyandyate.biz">www.sodburyandyate.biz</a> ) to both attract new and retain existing SYBA members. There is now a forum to encourage information sharing and communication in-between meetings.	Investigate ways to fund professional maintenance of the website to ensure it is kept up-to-date.
E] Communicate the views of local businesses with Parish, town and district councils	Members from local councils attend SYBA's general meetings and also receive minutes. The views of SYBA are regularly sought by local councils and committees – SYBA responds as appropriate.	Continue to be represented at other local community groups with business interests such as the Yate Town Centre Strategy Group and the Yate Safer & Stronger Community Group.
F] Keep businesses informed on important matters affecting trade, business and industry, retail and tourism	Issues of relevance are discussed at general meetings to inform members. Past examples have included the change in VAT, budget and cheque guarantee.	Continue to encourage local businesses to be actively involved with SYBA, to help improve the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre.



## 2. CHAMBER OF TRADE ACTIVITIES cont.

	CURRENT STATUS	FUTURE ACTIONS
G] Collect and circulate information regarding trade and business that will assist the objects of the Chamber and publish relevant bulletins as necessary	SYBA regularly circulates relevant information to local businesses that it receives from South Gloucestershire Council, Business West and Action for Market Towns.	Make more use of the website to continue to circulate information to local businesses.
H] Maintain relations with bodies having similar objects to promote the vibrancy of Yate Town Centre	Relationships exist between SYBA and Business West, Federation of Small Businesses, South Gloucestershire Council and other business groups in South Gloucestershire. Invitations are occasionally sent to other chambers when an interesting event is taking place.	Participate in South Gloucestershire Business Forum events; the umbrella body representing business interest groups in the district.
I] Support and have presence at local events for promotional purposes	SYBA has been represented at various local business EXPOs.	Identify and participate in future local business Expos and explore other opportunities to sponsor and participate in local community events.
J] Encourage networking between businesses	There have been selected opportunities for networking at recent events including business breakfast meetings.	Provide more opportunities for networking between town centre and non-town centre businesses.

## SUMMARY & CONTACTS

This health check provides a guide that will be used by local partners currently engaged in developing the vitality and vibrancy of Yate Town Centre. Coordinated by SYBA, the lead partners will enlist the help of relevant delivery partners and review the health check regularly to ensure the future actions identified are being achieved. For information about the progress being made with each of the future actions or to offer your support to the lead partners, please contact:

Sodbury & Yate Business Association	exec@sodburyandyate.biz
Yate Town Centre Strategy Group	info@yatetowncouncil.gov.uk
Avon & Somerset Police	John.gillman@avonandsomerset.police.uk
	Angharad.baynham@avonandsomerset.police.uk
Yate Safer & Stronger Community Group	Jacqui.Ward@southglos.gov.uk
Yate in Bloom	Sue.Walker@southglos.gov.uk
Yate Heritage Centre	David.Hardill@southglos.gov.uk
South Gloucestershire Council	business@southglos.gov.uk

Sodbury & Yate Business Association – Helping the Community and Local Business  
For a paper version of this health check, please email: [business@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:business@southglos.gov.uk)