

Themes emerging from live chat social media - Support for the Retail Sector Scrutiny Panel

Themes	
Multiple chain stores	
1.	Supermarkets take money out of the local economy.
2.	Stop allowing Supermarkets and large chains to open, it ruins character and takes trade from local retailers. It must not be allowed to come to Brighton.
3.	Big business isn't always a bad thing. Brands are welcomed to areas which require regeneration such as London Road, yet are attacked when they look to open in other areas of the city. Supermarkets and convenience stores are here to stay: people like them, we all use them, they do what they do so very well. Perhaps it would be better to engage with them. Encourage them – through legislation if possible – to support community groups, to stock more local produce (perhaps as a condition of their liquor license?). Our city centre only has Christmas lights because the businesses within the BID choose to pay for them, and I dare say that the multiples along Western Road are heavily subsidising the lighting infrastructure of North Laine through their financial contribution. Brighton is renowned for its 'different' thinking so lets think differently rather than throw all of our toys out of the pram every time Tesco or Starbucks are mentioned.
4.	As a north laine trader, I strongly agree with your comments, but wonder if Brighton had more of a unique selling point (USP) 10 years ago than it does today .it has been very sad to see the demise in trading conditions ,in Brighton, and the rise of the mainstream, which is resulting in this city losing its unique edge.
5.	Independent – unique – retail is a very broad church, taking in professional retailers through to those with 'a good idea' and some cash. It's very (too?) easy for us all to gang together and blame Big Business for the demise of the essence of unique Brighton. Brands shouldn't be made the whipping boy; a lot of the blame for the problems in the city's independent retail sector lies on our own doorstep.
6.	Protect independent and local businesses. Put a stop to supermarket sprouting like weeds at every corner and tax them heavier than small businesses. They can afford it!
7.	Find a way to stop supermarkets a) opening stores everywhere and b) ignoring planning rules when they do open. See Tesco's disgraceful work at Palmeira Square or the way they block Queens Road to do deliveries as an example. It costs a fortune to live, drive, socialise etc. in Brighton, and we all put up with the cost because the city has so much character, but I now pass 4 Sainsbury's and 3 Tesco stores on my walk to work, its getting depressingly like much cheaper high streets out there.
8.	Please stop allowing supermarkets to open in empty retail spaces and do we really need anymore mini market/newsagents/off licences?
9.	Want to know how to protect our retail charm. don't give permission for starbucks/tecso et al for starters
Rates & Rents	
1.	Business Rate Relief needs to continue and maybe extend to above the existing valuation limit. There needs to be more control on rents....why are so many properties sitting empty even in prime retail locations? There should not be business rate exemption on empty properties. This will make landlords charge more affordable rents and adjust to the tough retail environment that businesses are facing.

2.	Reduce Business Rates for small, independent traders, promoting the unique qualities of the North and South Laines. Brighton's infamous, unique retail sector will lose its character if more of the small, independent retailers are forced to close. If we become one massive Churchill Square, why would visitors come?
3.	Small businesses are desperately handicapped by add-on taxes and boundless expenses. To run a shop in Brighton today you must consider; Rent, Rates, Business Insurance, Public Liability Insurance, A Board fees, PPL/PPS – Music Licensing for background music, Table/Chair/Street License fees, Commercial Waste at £2 per bag, Recycling fees at £2 per bag, Christmas Lights and Decoration fee, Excessive, Parking costs for staff - £10 per day approx. Wages and Holiday pay, PAYE, Book-keeping fees, Account fees (to finish books) Income Tax, Corporation Tax (for Limited Companies) VAT– 20%, Excessive Electricity Bills, Water/Sewage Rates, Telephone/Internet, Bills, Security. And finally ... Stock, if there's any money left! I would advise people against joining the retail sector just to be trapped and to feed the local councils coffers etc. Retail Entrapment.
4.	Ideally lower rates!
5.	Rent control for small shops and businesses in Brighton. The ratcheting up of rents in the North Laine has driven several friends of mine out - they're doing well online but it doesn't help keep Brighton alive.
6.	Keep costs down so that our present retail sector can remain open. By cutting business rates and not increasing car parking charges, that would free up much needed cash flows for local businesses.
	Council
1.	The Council should have more face to contact with retailers. We need a dedicated Retail Carer.
2.	The council needs to decide if they want to see more pound shops and supermarkets or whether to support independent businesses that create a destination favorable to tourists and surrounding towns
3.	The council needs to interact with the businesses and start to experience what's on their doorstep. Acknowledge and support existing and developing business networks, there are lots of them and most are being led by hard working volunteers.
4.	It is marvelous that the council is opening a debate with small retailers. When did that ever happen before?.....Oh yes round about this time last year! And the year before and..before.....And what was the outcome?...not a lot really. Some money was spent employing consultants to give advice on window dressing. That's a bit like painting the sails because there's a hole in the bottom of the boat. Joking aside it is good that this debate has been kicked off but it will be a fruitless (no worse than that - destructive) exercise if the council fails to listen and take appropriate action. I live in hope...have done for the last 10 years. And if there is a hint of cynicism in my words it is because I'm still waiting for some appropriate action. I have a long list of proposals but will save them for the meeting.
5.	My own experience over the past five years with the city council has been incredibly frustrating. Whether officers or councillors, the organisation has no apparent will to engage with the private sector unless it is entirely on its own terms. The council appears quite happy to take the credit and spin out the PR value, but does little to nurture and support entrepreneurship (throwing a pittance at the

	<p>Chamber for business guides and lifebelt activity really doesn't count). Either a rapid shift needs to be made (forced?) in the culture of the council, or non-statutory services need to be seriously evaluated as to whether they are contributing to the economy and culture of the city, or are they strangling it. It seems to me self-evident that the independent retail sector is best served by people who live in and understand the world of commerce.</p> <p>This forum is all well and good, however I suspect many of the people I work with in Brighton – all of whom have a long history in this sector – are so jaded by their dealings with the city council that they won't bother wasting their time responding to this. Despite the recession, Brighton & Hove appears to be in a good place at the moment, but I fear that the lack of understanding of, and engagement with, the private sector that drives the economy of the city – employing residents, creating reasons whether retail or hospitality-based for visitors to spend – will ultimately be to all our detriments.</p>
	City Centre Manager
1.	<p>It is shocking that a city the size of Brighton & Hove no longer has a City Centre Management team. The BID ('Brilliant Brighton') has a manager who is responsible for those streets/businesses within the Brighton town centre business improvement district, however since funding was cut from the Business Forum, we no longer have an organisation looking after the retail sector in the city. Having very recently met with the combined Town Centre Initiative and BID in Worthing, who run an impressive public/private partnership, there is an awful lot Brighton can learn from our smaller neighbours on how to run an effective, integrated city centre. Brighton needs an independent TCI immediately to represent city centre businesses – an identifiable person or persons who understand how businesses think and their needs (security, waste management, promotions, street cleansing...). This must have the support of the city council, even when it is critical of council actions or political policy.</p>
	St. James' Street
1.	<p>St. James's and the area is often overlooked when it comes to decisions about retail in the city. The local plan seems to be ignored when it comes to retail which specified there should be a majority of A1 outlets. At the moment A1 is far from the majority. A few years ago the Gay Business Forum carried out a survey of the area and submitted a visualisation scheme for pedestrian priority. The majority were in favour of such a scheme. The street is very narrow and not suitable for the volume of buses. These could simply be rerouted via the two parallel roads, Eastern Road or Marine Parade and pick up the existing route at Lower Rock Gardens. This would enable the businesses and residents in using the area for community activity, such as street farmers markets.</p>
	Pedestrianise
1.	On a more selfish note push the full pedestrianisation of East Street through to really encourage easy free flowing north (station) to south (seafront) pedestrians /shoppers/diners.
2.	Good to pedestrianise St James's Street and only allow buses and taxis along Church Road.
3.	Pedestrianise St James' Street, traffic here detracts from the retail attraction of shopping here and opens up a wealth of possibilities for

	independent traders to have markets and stalls at weekends plus community events. It is dangerously narrow and overcrowded as it stands. The bus stop outside Morrisons is not needed, buses can travel along the seafront and turn up at lower rock gardens. People travelling in to the area use stops not on St James' Street and so the return journey would prove equally viable. Creating a pedestrianised area here will attract trade, give identity and promote the area. My business is at the bottom of St James' St and would support this.
	Markets
1.	Any suggestion of street markets in Sydney St, will be met with massive resistance!
2.	Themed event markets (ie; Food Market/Chilli Festival/Chocolate Festival etc.) are good, but too expensive for locals to trade at, with little or no profit achievable due to expenses and variables such as the weather.
3.	Markets should be contained to the New Road area away from the shops to avoid taking business from the permanent retailers.
4.	We should promote the markets we have, not open more.
	Food festival
1.	<p>I must point out though that perhaps the perception of the food festival is vastly different from the reality. A pitch at our anchor event – the Big Sussex Market – is £40 for growers, £85 for producers and £200 for hot foods (compare this to another food festival that appeared in Brighton last year that attempted to charge local restaurants £3,500!).</p> <p>Bearing in mind we attract 40-45,000 people over two days at that event alone, it's a safe bet that we deliver a good ROI for any local food business. We are completely unsubsidised by the council (I dare say we could reduce the cost of pitches if we weren't paying the city council a small fortune to use public land), and we only generate income from a couple of events and (very, very hard won) commercial sponsorship activities which then goes to subsidise the infrastructure, promotion and the much wider reach of events and activities that make a 'festival' rather than a 'market'.</p> <p>This city's food festival is now one of the biggest and most influential in the UK, and that has been created by a decade of pretty much voluntary commitment from local business people working together to support the food and hospitality economy. We have a phenomenal marketing and PR machine behind the festival and it's all given for free – our reach is phenomenal: I took a phone interview with the New York Post at the end of January!</p> <p>I'm just one of 15 members of the festival committee and I would say I work at least 30 weeks of the year to deliver our April and September events (and a lot behind the scenes in terms of supply chain and sustainability that people would never see).</p> <p>Always happy to talk with any local food business as to how they can become successfully involved with the festival and make a worthwhile return. We wouldn't have survived for a decade without the ongoing interaction with every level of the local food economy.</p>

	<p>We're very proud that our economic impact study for 2011 showed £4.1m for Brighton and surrounding Sussex.</p> <p>If there was ever a case study of the Big Society in action then I truly believe our city's food festival is it.</p>
2.	<p>From the food festivals perspective, it never fails to amaze me how little support (ie. none: in we actually pay the council to use public land to host these free events; there is no will to support a full weekly farmers market... I could go on and on...) we receive from our city council in terms of supporting and promoting small growers, producers and restaurants. Food festivals across the UK are at the heart of local authority economic development policies whereas here we appear to be little more than an inconvenience to the council. Brighton's food festival is now one of the biggest in the UK, attracting 160,000 people in 2011 with an economic impact of £4.1m. Run by a team of volunteers from the business community, we are an entirely sustainable event that, by its very nature, works hand</p>
3.	<p>Brighton is fast becoming a regional foodie hub, with Brighton and Hove food and drink festival showing the way, but they do not get sufficient support from BHCC, they could be much bigger and more regular as the consumer appetite (excuse the pun) for high quality produce is expanding. The commercial trickle down to the surrounding retail community is obvious.</p>
	Parking (Access)
1.	<p>Make parking more accessible/cheaper for visitors and locals and advertise cheap parking where it is provided.</p>
2.	<p>The council shouldn't underestimate the impact of increasing parking fees on the day visitor trade (day tourists from London, shoppers from outer districts and surrounding region). Without serious investment in traffic management and parking infrastructure (and yes that includes the political hot potato that is Park and Ride), we put our independent retail and hospitality sectors at risk by ramping up the cost of parking. We should never be so arrogant to think that Brighton will always be the consumers choice: we do have competition and, as with any market, those competitors will take advantage of any gaps that open up. I haven't heard a single endorsement from local businesses for an increase in parking charges. Unfortunately businesses don't vote Councillors in.</p>
3.	<p>Not increasing car parking charges, that would free up much needed cash flows for local businesses.</p>
	Marketing
1.	<p>Electronic notice boards/maps in Jubilee Square; Centre of information. Close to the Pier/Town Centre, promotes events to visitors.</p>
2.	<p>Offer free pamphlets to visitors, detailing shopping in the North and South Laines and Kemp Town. Include maps.</p>
3.	<p>Create a leaflet drop and information board (solar powered?) at Brighton station detailing local events, shopping and places of interest.</p>
4.	<p>Support tourism initiatives coming from the businesses, don't compete, don't duplicate.</p>
	Recycling
1.	<p>Why not encourage and reduce the costs of recycling for small businesses – Lets walk the Green Talk!</p>

Organisations	
1.	There are very active organisations within the city who support the independent sectors. I am involved in both the Tourism Alliance and the Brighton & Hove Food and Drink Festival, both of which are doing much to promote the independent retail environment.
2.	Keep up the good work Brilliant Brighton, Northlaine.co.uk and Brighton Business partnership.
Churn	
1.	The apparent buoyancy of central Brighton's independent retail sector has been propped up by the inward investment of lifestyle business owners, who are buying into the Brighton 'dream'. If we actually looked hard at the average lifespan of a small retail business in central Brighton, rather than the PR driven numbers game of occupancy/vacancy which the council naturally favours, then I'd say we'd see very significant churn compared, say, to the longevity of businesses in neighbouring areas. Churn is, of course, a bad thing for the stability and resilience of our economy (and failed business owners lives).
Pop up shops	
1.	Pop up shops have been a great way to create buzz over recent years and I'd like to see empty spaces used in this way more.
Miscellaneous	
1.	Retail is changing (internet etc) and small business needs time to adapt.
2.	With convenience stores, Supermarkets and multi-nationals with numerous sites all over the City, appalling rip-off parking, over-zealous parking warden's keen for bonuses – what is our unique retail offer and how different is it from 13 or so years ago? Mainstream Brighton is here.
3.	Are the Green Party alive and well in Brighton? Most people are not aware that this is the first Green Council in the U.K; the message hasn't yet reached street level. There has been no action taken on Green issues and no promotion of Green ethics. An excellent opportunity has been lost.
4.	Our USP a decade ago was that we genuinely had something different. Compare a walk through North Laine now to 10 years ago. The rise of the lifestyle business owner has resulted in functioning retail mutating into seasonal, experience retail (independent but ubiquitous coffee shops and cafés; trinkets and greeting cards). All glorious on a sunny summer weekend when the city is awash with visitors and leisure spending locals, but slightly less wondrous on a wet Wednesday in February.
5	All this talk of keeping Brighton Unique and not main stream but no suggestions, other than keep the big stores out, and how to do this! We feel as a retailer in the North Laine that to bring back that unique feeling Brighton had you need to create the right atmosphere for shoppers, if you look at how the big stores out there spend thousands a year on shopper experience there is obviously some method to their madness.

One of Brighton's untapped resources, buskers, people that go out to entertain the public in return for a few coppers from their audience. This basically amounts to free entertainment, yet anytime a busker sets up on our street (Gardner Street) they are moved on in a matter of minutes, even after drawing a large crowd of people that stop, listen and watch all around our shops, cafés and other services. Why not utilise this 'free' service and allow busker pitches in set parts of certain streets (TfL have done this perfectly in the underground.) Create small areas, marked with paint or some form of stickers, it may even be possible to get a commercial sponsor for the scheme (again similar to TfL) these would be able to be used by buskers for a set period of time each to allow an every changing difference of music, performance etc, maybe 1-2 hours each. This scheme would add to the atmosphere for shoppers in the area helping to keep them longer in retail districts.

Yes I know a lot of shop keepers are going to complain that not every busker is good and they don't like certain types of music but by keeping a allocated time slot it means that if they are bad at worse they are going to be there for an hour or two.

This scheme could be set up relatively cheaply and provide another reason for shoppers to keep visiting and staying in our areas and out of churchill square.

Lets stop moaning about big chains moving in and start making our own solutions! And really the only ones that can stop the big chains moving in are the landlords. Just because the council didn't give Sainsbury's a alcohol licence didn't stop them opening the stores they have!

