

The high street and socio-economic diversity

The high street has recently taken the centre of policy recommendations regarding suburban regeneration. Data analysis shows that smaller town centres contain a wide variety of functions. This contradicts the retail-centric, hierarchical view of town centres. Church Street, Rickmansworth, for example, has over thirty different categories of business, including Agricultural Machinery Dealers, Computer Services, Pharmaceutical Manufacturers, Social Club and Waste Disposal Services.



Church Street, Rickmansworth contains within it a wide variety of retail and other functions

We find that there is an untapped potential for: *economic sustainability* in smaller town centres. A network that enables trips of a variety of lengths to and through the centre as well as buildings and layouts that can be adapted to different uses, enables the success of both national and local businesses employing local people, particularly low skilled workers who cannot afford to travel further and highly skilled workers who due to family situation need to work close to home). Such conditions contribute to *environmental sustainability* through fewer, shorter trips and for *social sustainability* through the ability of community activities to be maintained, sometimes converted church halls, cinemas etc.



Former forge, now printworks, Chipping Barnet



The Stables, Forge Mews, Rickmansworth.



Borehamwood village hall

Social sustainability and vibrancy are also an outcome of town centres that can support a variety of activities - rather than mainly retail. Such centres are likely to generate a greater diversity of people, coming from a variety of distances and thus has the potential for greater sociability: "Mutuality and resonance, in their many forms, are the stuff of most human exchange. We chat pleasantly about the weather, share a joke we heard with our hairdresser, pass an hour over coffee gossiping with a friend. These mostly unremarkable events soon fade into the dustbin of memory, yet without them life is apt to feel empty and cold." (Josselson, 1996 "The space between us").