



Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum

Research into the impact of the recession on the high streets of GMTF's 16 member communities



Update October 2009



October 2009



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COMMUNITY LIST

Survey results in detail, by community:

1. **Chipping Campden**
2. **Churchdown**
3. **Cinderford**
4. **Cirencester**
5. **Coleford**
6. **Fairford**
7. **Lechlade**
8. **Nailsworth**
9. **Newent**
10. **Northleach**
11. **Stonehouse**
12. **Stow-on-the-Wold**
13. **Tetbury**
14. **Tewkesbury**
15. **Winchcombe**
16. **Wotton-under-Edge**

Background

In May 2009 Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum published a report on the impact of the recession on the high streets of its 16 member communities.

This report has been taken up by the Commission for Rural Communities and forwarded as part of their research to MPs. It has also been highlighted through Action for Market Towns and has been referred to SWRDA and the Government Office for the South West as well as Gloucestershire First, the county's economic partnership, which is a key member of the county's Economic Task Force.

Following this initial piece of research, GMTF commissioned a survey update to find out the latest information on numbers of vacant shops, closures and openings since the May survey.

A further aim of this update is to gain an insight into steps the market towns are taking to help high street shops and other businesses to weather the storm of recession, and thereby share good practice.

Between September 17 and October 12 2009, contact was made with all 16 Forum member communities and contacts were asked to complete a brief questionnaire by e-mail.

It should be stressed that the figures contained in this report are estimates as provided by District and Town Councils, Chambers of Commerce and/or Business Clubs or groups.

We hope they will give a reliable 'snapshot' of the economic health of Gloucestershire's market towns.

As before, we are indebted to all those in their communities who took the time to provide information for this survey.

Martin Whittaker
Viva Communications Limited
www.viva-communications.co.uk

Headline findings

More than twice as many new shops and other town centre businesses have opened than have closed in GMTF's 16 member communities since April 2009.

The figures gathered during this update research appear to indicate that the economic climate is improving for Gloucestershire's market towns.

Update research findings – on the high street since April 2009:

- There have been an estimated **15 closures**, six of them attributed to the recession. But during the same period an estimated **35 new shops or other businesses have opened**.
- In our last survey, there were at least **95 town centre shops and business units empty**. Now there are **an estimated 79**. Two member market towns have seen new shop unit developments opening.

Asked whether they considered the outlook for the local economy had improved, worsened or remained the same, of those who expressed a view:

- nobody felt the situation had worsened
- five felt it was the same *and*
- three felt it had improved

May's survey found that at least 70 town centre shops or businesses had closed since July 2008, while during the same period, 49 new shops had opened.

Please note – the results do not include Stow-on-the-Wold, which was unable to supply figures for the update.

Overview of the 16 GMTF member communities

TOWNS	Empty shops & businesses in May '09 survey	Empty shops & businesses at October '09	Closures since the last survey	Of these, closures due to recession	Openings since the last survey
Chipping Campden	2	2	0	0	1
Churchdown	2	1	0	0	2
Cinderford	18	16	1	1	3
Cirencester	+/- 10	+/- 8	2	0	4
Coleford	11	8	1	1	4
Fairford	0	0	0	0	1
Lechlade	Up to 2	2	0	0	1
Nailsworth	3	2	1	1	2
Newent	7	7	2	1	4
Northleach	1	1	0	0	0
Stonehouse	7	4	0	0	3
Stow-on-the-Wold	8	no figures			
Tetbury	8-9	3	1	0	4
Tewkesbury	16	17	5*	2	3*
Winchcombe	4	4	2	0	1
Wotton-under-Edge	4-5	4	0	0	2

* Includes one shop relocating

CASE STUDIES

The recession update also asked for details of activities and initiatives towns are undertaking or planning to help shops and town centre businesses through the recession. Here are some examples:

CROWDS FLOCK TO WOOL TOWN CELEBRATION

In June an 'I Love Cirencester' weekend brought crowds of visitors into the town, as nearly 70 businesses and other organisations joined forces to stage a range of events, street entertainment and special offers.

There were also some valuable lessons learned – for example, once a few companies were signed up, it was easier to sell it to other companies. It was harder to get larger multiples involved and costs need to be kept as low as possible to encourage businesses to sign up.

“Overall the event was good, and helped raise the profile of Cirencester,” said organiser Jonathan Davies. There are now plans for a similar event in November to coincide with the Advent Festival and Christmas lights switch-on. Organisers are also considering staging a fashion show to showcase what Cirencester has to offer in terms of fashion and clothes shopping.

FOREST'S RETAIL SUPPORT TOOLKIT

Building on Forest of Dean District Council's successful 'First Stop Local Shop' retail support programme, the council produced an on-line interactive Retail Support Toolkit to help share the best practice learned.

The toolkit, available to download free from www.firststoplocalshop.co.uk includes 'top tips', practical advice and a wealth of experience gained through running the support programme, which received substantial investment from the county's Rural Renaissance Programme.

The toolkit has proved very popular with market towns both throughout Gloucestershire and nationally. "A lot of other areas have used the toolkit to set up their own initiatives – people are finding it really helpful," said

Richard Morgan of Forest of Dean District Council.

"We get about a call a week from other areas inquiring about it."

The Retail Support Toolkit was also due to be highlighted as an example of good practice at the Action for Market Towns Convention 2009 in Melton Mowbray on October 13/14.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT..

Fairford and Lechlade are planning a series of initiatives to increase numbers of visitors and boost local trade. They are launching a new Food and Drink Festival, scheduled for April/May 2010, to attract visitors and promote local food and drink producers.

“Fairford and Lechlade have more than their fair share of eating and drinking establishments and could be considered the gastronomic centre of the Cotswolds,” said Chris Roberts of Fairford & Lechlade Business Club (FLBC). “We want to introduce more people by having an event in both towns.”

Fairford will also stage a national Town Crier’s Competition next August, again aimed at bringing in visitors from throughout the UK, boosting local businesses, hotels and B&Bs. And the FLBC’s annual Business Awards is now in its third year, recognising the achievements of local businesses and their contribution to the community.



SELLING TEWKESBURY

In Tewkesbury, key players including the Chamber of Commerce, Tewkesbury Abbey, the Roses Theatre and local businesses have joined forces to develop a Christmas marketing campaign, including producing a Christmas events/shopping directory.

Another idea being progressed is encouraging retailers to “raise their game at Christmas”, using awards as an incentive, for example a Christmas window display competition, or customer service awards.

There are also plans to develop some training workshops in the New Year. This work all forms part of the Local Shop Campaign, a partnership project undertaken by Gloucestershire First and Tewkesbury Borough Council, Funded through the Severn Trent Flood Recovery Programme.

A new logo featuring the medieval Abbey has also been launched as a wider branding initiative to market Tewkesbury to visitors, tourists and local people.



WALKERS WELCOME IN WINCHCOMBE

This summer Winchcombe became the first town in the Cotswolds – and one of only 32 nationally – to attain ‘Walkers are Welcome’ status. The town even has its own website – www.winchcombewelcomeswalkers.com – listing walks and well known sights, as well as accommodation and other local businesses.

Gaining ‘Walkers are Welcome’ status brings a number of benefits, including helping to strengthen a town’s reputation as a place to visit and boosting the local economy.

Ashley Grainger of the Winchcombe Business Forum welcomes its new accolade. “Winchcombe has one of the greatest numbers of walking routes going through it, and walkers do stop and spend money in the town,” he said.



VIEWS ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Our questionnaire asked: Do you consider that the outlook for the local economy has improved, worsened or remained the same since April 09? Here are some of the member towns' comments. Those not included here did not express a view or felt unable to answer the question.

■ Chipping Campden:

"Generally it has improved, more confidence but overall the economy remains flat with a worry going into winter."

■ Cinderford/Coleford/Newent:

"It could be that the three Forest towns reported on are stabilising. I believe that they have all 'held their own' throughout the downturn and should continue to do so. Many of the vacant units reported on back in May were long-term vacancies not related to the recession. Newent lost a popular attraction last year when The Shambles Museum closed. However, new shops are opening in the Victorian units and seem to be attracting shoppers although it's very early days."

■ Cirencester:

"Overall I would say that the position is much the same and Towns/Local Authorities need to work hard to attract shoppers/visitors. The Christmas period will be very important for many retailers."

■ Fairford & Lechlade:

"Quietly confident!"

■ Nailsworth:

"Many retail outlets and restaurants report less income during the past year. I have no information that this has changed, although some specialist outlets report a continued healthy turnover. Interestingly, whilst retail shops do close, it is surprising just how quickly another enterprise takes over. Shops seem not to remain vacant for long."

■ Stonehouse:

"We consider the outlook for the local economy to have remained the same since April 2009."

■ Tetbury:

"Things/appearance in Tetbury improved overall."

■ Winchcombe:

"There is a general feeling of relief that the worst is over but also concern that coming out the other end will be difficult. In general the outlook hasn't changed considerably."

■ Wotton:

"It seems to be much the same."

Survey results in detail

CHIPPING CAMPDEN

Organisation/contact James Keitley, chair of Chipping Campden Chamber of Trade info@chippingcampden.info

Town population	2,300
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	60-70
Number empty in May survey	2
Number currently empty	2
Number closed since May survey	0
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	1

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

Unfortunately no such initiatives, just all plodding along hoping to continue and survive. The biggest problem that many businesses face is the massive pressure on excessive rents and rates. They are set on past activities and are not concurrent for today's markets, but what landlord is going to turn face and offer long term reductions? Maybe if powers-that-be set a guideline by which, say, no landlord could charge any more than £25 per square metre in rural towns etc, and councils set fairer rates for businesses in rural towns.

CHURCHDOWN

Organisation/contact Ruth Warne, clerk, Churchdown Parish Council churchdownpc-clerk@wwmail.co.uk

Town population	11,739
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	20*
Number empty in May survey	2
Number currently empty	1
Number closed since May survey	0
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	2

* Previously 19 – one premises has been split into two.

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

One local hotel/restaurant has started to offer free tastings of coffee and cake to community groups and businesses – the idea is to go and have the free tasting, network with other businesses and groups, and make a donation to a charity (eg Wateraid). The hotel/restaurant then uses the free tasting sessions as an opportunity to market its various promotions (eg disco nights, special food nights, etc).

Survey results in detail

CINDERFORD

Organisation/contact Richard Morgan, Forest of Dean District Council

Richard.Morgan@fdean.gov.uk

Town population	8,489
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	116*
Number empty in May survey	18
Number currently empty	16
Number closed since May survey	1
Number of these attributed to recession	1
Number open since May survey	3

* 117 reported in May survey – one unit has been changed to residential use.

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

We are pleased to be able to share the Retail Support Toolkit with GMTF member market towns. The toolkit can be downloaded by clicking here:

www.firststoplocalshop.co.uk/media/firststoplocalshop/First_Stop_Local_Shop_Toolkit.pdf

Survey results in detail

CIRENCESTER

Organisation/contact Jonathan Davies, Cirencester Chamber of Commerce
Andrea Pellegram, project manager, Our Future Cirencester

jsjdavies@yahoo.com
andrea@pellegram.co.uk

Town population	19,342
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	265*
Number empty in May survey	+/-10
Number currently empty	+/-8
Number closed since May survey	2
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	4

* Was 255 in May survey – increase due to new development.

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

Continuation of 'I love Cirencester' initiative with plans for event in November to coincide with the Advent Festival/Lights switch on.

We are also exploring the option of staging a fashion show to showcase Cirencester and what is available in terms of fashion/clothes shopping.

Lessons learned from 'I Love Cirencester' event:

- Once we had got a few companies signed up it was easier to sell it to other companies
- It was harder to get larger multiples to get involved (some were very good) but some were just not interested and said 'our Head Office does not allow us to get involved in this sort of initiative'
- It does take determination to get these things off the ground and it relies very heavily on the goodwill of a few to continually push the event and get people to sign up
- Leaflets / sign up forms etc need to be very clear so it is easier for businesses to sign up
- Costs need to be kept as low as possible to encourage businesses to sign up
- Essential local media is involved and supportive
- Overall event was good, and helped raise the profile of Cirencester. We are planning more to keep the initiative going.

Survey results in detail

COLEFORD

Organisation/contact Richard Morgan, Forest of Dean District Council

Richard.Morgan@fdean.gov.uk

Town population	8,567
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	145
Number empty in May survey	11
Number currently empty	8
Number closed since May survey	1
Number of these attributed to recession	1
Number open since May survey	4

Views on local economy

See Cinderford

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

See Cinderford

FAIRFORD

Organisation/contact Chris Roberts, Fairford & Lechlade Business Club

chris@cotswoldwireless.co.uk

Town population	3,321
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	21
Number empty in May survey	0
Number currently empty	0
Number closed since May survey	0
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	1

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

Set up the Fairford and Lechlade Business Club to help local businesses. We are also organising a Food and Drink Festival and will be supporting a Town Criers' Competition, both next year. We have started having an annual awards ceremony to celebrate the achievements of local businesses and one of the awards is for Outstanding Business Student of the Year, which applauds the young entrepreneurs at the local secondary school.

Survey results in detail

LECHLADE

Organisation/contact Chris Roberts, Fairford & Lechlade Business Club

chris@cotswoldwireless.co.uk

Town population	2,998
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	27
Number empty in May survey	Up to 2
Number currently empty	2
Number closed since May survey	0
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	1

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

See Fairford.

NAILSWORTH

Organisation/contact Norman Kay, Mayor of Nailsworth

normankay@hotmail.co.uk

Town population	5,719
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	+/-50
Number empty in May survey	3
Number currently empty	2
Number closed since May survey	1
Number of these attributed to recession	1
Number open since May survey	2

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

The Chamber of Trade & Commerce has recently revamped its website and launched it at a special opening event.

Nailsworth Town Council issued a Shops and Services directory recently. This can be downloaded from www.nailsworthtown.co.uk.

Our local Fairtrade Group, in partnership with the Stroud Group, has recently issued a leaflet – a Directory of shops, eating places, accommodation, that sell or use Fairtrade goods. We had two public launches with attendant newspaper publicity and photos, one together with Stroud, the second two weeks ago specifically for Nailsworth.

Survey results in detail

NEWENT

Organisation/contact Richard Morgan, Forest of Dean District Council

Richard.Morgan@fdean.gov.uk

Town population	5,231
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	95*
Number empty in May survey	7
Number currently empty	7
Number closed since May survey	2
Number of these attributed to recession	1
Number open since May survey	4

* 93 reported in May survey

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

See Cinderford.

NORTHLEACH

Organisation/contact Chris Hancock, Mayor of Northleach

chris.hancock@northleach.gov.uk

Town population	1,551
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	14
Number empty in May survey	1
Number currently empty	1
Number closed since May survey	0
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	0

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

None – we simply do not have the resources.

Survey results in detail

STONEHOUSE

Organisation/contact Stonehouse Town Council: clerk Richard Lacey
deputy clerk Liz Lawrence deputyclerk@stonehousetowncouncil.com

Town population	8,126
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	78
Number empty in May survey	7
Number currently empty	4
Number closed since May survey	0
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	3

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

The Town Council has been heavily involved in the re-forming of the Stonehouse & District Chamber of Trade & Industry. Local support for this organisation lapsed over recent years but, thanks to gentle persuasion and communication from within the Town Council, a newly formed group of local business people are meeting on a regular basis to draw together an Action Plan for the future.

The Town Council has agreed to offer the Chamber continued free use of the Town Hall for their meetings, at least for the immediate future, with a view to reviewing this at a later stage when things have become more settled.

Survey results in detail

STOW-ON-THE-WOLD

Organisation/contact Stow Business Association – Mark Vance
Sue Adams

mark@vines.co.uk

Note: *No updated figures supplied – only limited information on ‘activities or initiatives’ received.*

Town population	2,112
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	100+
Number empty in May survey	8
Number currently empty	No figs.
Number closed since May survey	No figs.
Number of these attributed to recession	No figs.
Number open since May survey	No figs.

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

The Cotswold Festival was staged in Stow on September 26/27 and was a success (attracting around 1,500 people, according to a local newspaper report). The only problem was it wasn't a great success for the retailers. The way the market stalls were laid out covered the entrances, which restricted access.

Note: A local news report quoted festival organiser Brian Honess, who said he felt more businesses would have benefited by joining in. "All businesses were offered a stall, although only a few took it up, and those that did embrace the festival did really well," he said. "For those shops who didn't do well, they should have grasped the opportunity to do something festival-themed to attract people." (Source: www.thisisgloucestershire.co.uk)

Survey results in detail

TETBURY

Organisation/contact Kathryn Limoi,
chairman Tetbury Chamber of Commerce and Industry

kathrynjlimoi@o2email.co.uk

Town population	5,345
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	130-150
Number empty in May survey	8-9
Number currently empty	3
Number closed since May survey	1
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	4

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

Our Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been behind a new upmarket guide to the town, backed and funded through advertising. It carries several articles on the history and events through the year particular to Tetbury - available through tourist info offices, hotels etc.

Survey results in detail

TEWKESBURY

Organisation/contact Katie Power, Economic Development Officer,
Tewkesbury Borough Council
David Smith, Retail Support Officer

Katie.Power@tewkisbury.gov.uk
david.smith@tewkisbury.gov.uk

Town population	10,130
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	255
Number empty in May survey	16
Number currently empty	17
Number closed since May survey	5*
Number of these attributed to recession	2
Number open since May survey	3*

* Includes one shop relocating

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

Tewkesbury Borough Council is currently operating a number of schemes as part its VAT Fund, these are all aimed at helping businesses in the current economic climate. These schemes are as follows:

Small Business Grant Scheme: a small grant of up to £500 is being offered to help local businesses with marketing and promotion. Demand has been high take up and it has helped businesses to promote themselves at a time when they may otherwise not be able to.

Free internet training courses: The free courses are aimed at helping businesses during the economic downturn after it was revealed that internet training is seen as a key area of support that would help businesses develop.

A Business Showcase Event: This event is being planned for early 2010. It will promote local business to business networking and encourage local knowledge transfer.

Survey results in detail

WINCHCOMBE

Organisation/contact Ashley Grainger, Winchcombe Business Forum

ashley@ruffit.com

Town population	4,475
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	+/-55
Number empty in May survey	4*
Number currently empty	4
Number closed since May survey	2
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	1

* May figure updated from 3

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

There are several groups working to make Winchcombe more viable in terms of footfall. The town has recently become a 'Walkers are Welcome' town and the Fairtrade status has been promoted more actively. Several websites providing details on retail and tourism features in the area have been developed and launched, and plans are currently being pursued to increase shop footfall during the Christmas trading period. There is no single initiative to highlight but the combined initiatives do make for a good overall promotional campaign.

WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE

Organisation/contact Glenys Sykes,
Wotton-under-Edge Town Council clerk

towncouncil@wotton-under-edge.com

Town population	5,699
Total retail/business units in High Street/main shopping area	93-94
Number empty in May survey	4-5
Number currently empty	4
Number closed since May survey	0
Number of these attributed to recession	0
Number open since May survey	2

Activities or initiatives to help shops and businesses during the recession

The Chamber of Trade is inviting speakers to address their supper or breakfast meetings on specific topics of interest to traders. The 'We Love Wotton' event in April (detailed in May survey report). Several traders reported people returning to the town to shop on later dates because they liked what they saw and wanted to see more.

TYPE OF SHOP CLOSURES AND OPENINGS SINCE MAY '09 SURVEY

Types of shops closed:

- 3 clothes shops
- 2 pubs
- 1 off licence
- 1 department/clothing store
- 1 dress hire
- 1 estate agent
- 1 bookshop
- 1 kitchen shop
- 1 solicitors
- 1 jewellery/massage
- 1 kitchenware
- 1 kitchens/bathrooms*

Types of shops opened:

- 5 cafes/tea/coffee shops
- 5 ladies fashion or vintage clothes/accessories
- 2 home accessories
- 3 books/arts/crafts/gifts
- 2 restaurant/takeaway
- 1 garden centre
- 1 second-hand goods
- 1 sweet shop
- 1 shoe shop
- 1 clock shop
- 1 remote control car retailer
- 1 babywear shop
- 1 charity shop
- 1 multi retail unit
- 1 tattoo studio
- 1 motorcycle repairs, parts
- 1 homewares
- 1 beauty salon
- 1 antiques shop
- 1 estate agent & building society
- 1 pub
- 1 kitchens/bathrooms*
- 1 unknown

* Business closed and re-opened due to relocation

RECESSION UPDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **What is the current total capacity for shops/businesses in your High St/Main shopping area? (ie total number if all units are occupied)**
 - Figure given in May survey:
 - Please indicate whether there have been any changes to this since then and give reasons, eg new shop units developed.
2. **How many town centre shops/businesses are currently empty?**
 - Figure given in May survey: Please confirm whether this was correct at the time.
 - Please give current number of empty shops/businesses:
3. **How many closures have there been since April 2009?**
 - Please list types of shop/business
 - Please indicate by each whether closure was caused by recession (R) or other reasons (O)
4. **How many new shops/businesses have opened since April 2009?**
 - Please list types of shop/business
5. **Do you consider that the outlook for the local economy has improved, worsened or remained the same since April 09?**
6. **We are looking for examples of good practice to share between the member market towns. Please give details of any recent activities or initiatives your town has adopted to help shops and businesses during the recession.**