

## Retail Analogies; High Street Locations

The High Street or shopping strip, once thought to be doomed with all the business and retail heading for the shopping mall, is alive and well in many cities and suburbs. Cafés and specialist shops have created life and activity during the day. Parents meet having dropped kids off at school, office staff pour out onto the pavements at lunchtime, business people meet over coffee and students use the Wi-Fi with their laptops and tablets. Hairdressers, travel agents, gyms and many other businesses are used by people who might be working part-time or flexible hours.

In many of those shopping strips sits a traditional church building. In the past they may have had more property which has been sold to provide income. This has become retail/apartments/offices and has brought many people much closer to the churches buildings. This increased nearby activity may be seen by some in the church as a threat as it is encroached upon by society around it. On the other hand, I consider it to be a great opportunity.

We often have potentially the most interesting building in the street and we have a message for the people. We can use its architecture to leverage our message and connect with them. We need to do this at times people are around, not just early on a Sunday morning. Many people don't see inside our lovely buildings because they're closed off. If they do get in, the seating is cramped and uncomfortable, that beautiful lofty roof structure can't be seen because it's too dark and people feel like intruders on the premises of a private religious society.

We could be offering hospitality and refreshment, welcoming people to rest awhile in comfortable seats and check their social media, we could provide good lighting and pleasant background music. We could have an information leaflet about the building that encourages some heritage detective work which itself describes the principles of faith illustrated by stained-glass windows or artefacts. If the church's office was within or at the side of the building, security could be provided by a normal staff member.

Our shopping strip locations could be really valuable assets in the work of the church. They could be attractive and inviting. Architecture has a part to play alongside ministry in achieving this.

Next time: Managing the Threshold.

*Fred Batterton's new book, "Making Property Serve Mission — Rethinking the church's buildings for the 21st Century" will be published in November. More about this next time..*



*The new entrance to St Aldates in Oxford sits within the main street with cafe and shops nearby.*

