

## **B** informed: What is wrong with a new supermarket?

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HAY is a town to cherish. It's a tiny, beautiful place with a big reputation – for its scenery, its friendliness, its books and festivals, its vibrancy. Tough economic times are affecting all of us, but Hay remains a beacon showing how small market towns can survive.

It's not all perfect, of course. Hay School needs replacing. The buildings are past their sell-by-date and, when the local village schools close, more places will be needed. A new Community Centre would be a huge benefit for the town too – we've been promised it for years.

The arrival of a new superstore is not a solution, however. It's a threat. Supermarkets close down small independent shops, typically reducing their turnover by between 20% and 75%. In Hay, even if they lost only 20% of turnover, over three-quarters of the shops would be forced to close. No wonder an overwhelming 89% of businesses are worried about the proposals. You don't need to rely on statistics – look at Llandrindod today; remember how Leominster was eviscerated when Safeway opened?

The newsagent and the food shops might be the first to close, but all of us will be affected in the end. As shops become empty, visitors will stop coming. 95% of visitors love Hay's 'uniqueness'; 78% of them think the range of independent shops is a key part of that appeal. No-one is going to come here to see empty shops and a supermarket – they can see that anywhere!

Tourists bring money into the local economy, benefitting all of us. Once small shops close, there will be less work for all the people who support them - plumbers, builders, window-cleaners etc. - and less business for the local producers who supply them. Superstores take money out of the local economy, as profits go to the shareholders and fat cats (Tesco CEO was paid £6.9m last year). And they don't use local tradesmen, they bring in their own contractors. Typically, 276 jobs are lost within a 10-mile radius each time a new supermarket opens.

But it's not all about business. Hay is not designed for the huge increase in traffic a supermarket would bring – the Forest Road and Blue Boar junctions would become congested and very dangerous for pedestrians. There will be more pollution, light pollution and noise.

There's a social cost too. 30% of over-65 year-olds see a friend only once a week. Daily contact with shopkeepers who know their name is literally a lifeline for them. As Chris Davies, newsagent, says, "If Mrs X doesn't turn up for her morning paper, we can go round to check on her." A supermarket can never be part of the community like that. It's something we cannot afford to lose.

But what about 'cheap food'? Don't believe everything they say about supermarkets providing the cheapest food. When a supermarket first opens, it offers rock-bottom prices, but once it has killed off its competition and become the only place to shop, prices rise, and keep on rising. A shopping basket comparison in Cambridge showed that a smaller Tesco was 13% more expensive than the Co-op and 11% more expensive than small shops. A £40 shopping basket may end up costing £5.20 more.

So, who should pay for the school? It's Powys CC's statutory obligation to provide education, and they will have the proceeds from the sale of the village school-sites. The Welsh Government made £1.4bn available for new schools last year. PCC admit they declined to bid for a share for Hay – they already had a supermarket lined up.

Do you trust a developer to produce the school Hay's children deserve? They claimed to have costed the building 'down to the number of whiteboards' even before they met anyone from the school. They're more interested in profits than education.

Plan B for Hay is a group of local residents fighting for an alternative – a new school for Hay's children without ruining the town they grow up in.

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