



**Photographs of Sowerby Bridge Town Centre**



**Figure 70 (top left):** Car park, Tuel Lane

**Figure 71 (top centre):** Retail frontages, Wharf Street

**Figure 72 (top right):** Outdoor market, Station Road

**Figure 73 (bottom left):** Tesco store, Sowerby Bridge

**Figure 74 (bottom right):** The River Calder, Sowerby Bridge



### **Centre Overview**

Sowerby Bridge is defined as a town centre by the Replacement Calderdale Unitary Development Plan (August 2006). It is located on the A58, north of the M62, 5 km south west of Halifax and 15km north west of Huddersfield. According to the 2001 census, Sowerby Bridge has a population of 10,518.

The main focuses of retailing within Sowerby Bridge are Town Hall Street and Wharf Street. There are also secondary retail frontages along Bolton Brow, Regent Parade, Station Road, Tower Hill and West Street.

**Table 34: Diversity of Uses in Sowerby Bridge Town Centre (2009)**

Number of Outlets			
	Number	Sowerby Bridge (%)	UK (%)
Convenience	12	8.0%	8.8
Comparison	35	23.3%	34.6
Retail Service	22	14.7%	13.0
Leisure Services	43	28.7%	21.5
Financial and Business Services	18	12.0%	11.2
Vacant	20	13.3%	10.6
Total	150	100.0%	100

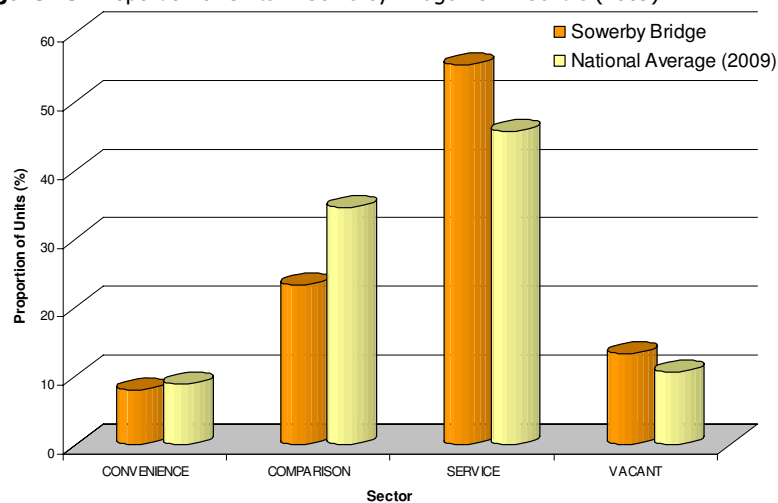
Source: Experian GOAD (August 2009)

**Table 35: Existing Floorspace in Sowerby Bridge Town Centre (2009)**

Existing Floorspace			
	Sq m	Sowerby Bridge (%)	UK (%)
Convenience	3,268	17.2%	14.2
Comparison	5,423	28.5%	37.8
Retail Service	1,535	8.1%	7
Leisure Services	5,864	30.9%	22.7
Financial and Business Services	1,559	8.2%	8.7
Vacant	1,357	7.1%	8.9
Total	19,006	100	100

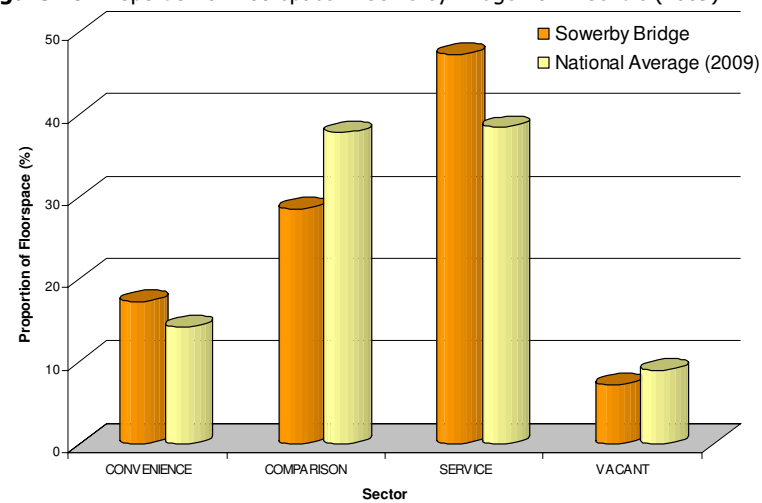
Source: Experian GOAD (August 2009)

**Figure 75: Proportion of Units in Sowerby Bridge Town Centre (2009)**



Source: Experian GOAD (August 2009)

**Figure 76: Proportion of Floorspace in Sowerby Bridge Town Centre (2009)**



Source: Experian GOAD (August 2009)



### **Convenience**

In August 2009, 8% of all units in Sowerby Bridge were in use for the sale of convenience goods. This compares to a national average of 8.8%. The proportion of convenience floorspace is above the national average (17.2% compared to 14.2% nationally). Given the role performed by Sowerby Bridge, it is not surprising to discover that the proportion of floorspace used for the sale of convenience goods is above the national average. There are an average number of convenience outlets which are large in size. At present, this sector is dominated by the existing Lidl store on Tuel Lane. Other convenience traders in the centre are: B & M Bargains on Regent Parade; and a number of independents. There is an outdoor market on Station Road, which operates every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. In addition to this, there is a Tesco store on Sowerby Street (2,881 sq m), however this is located outside the town centre boundary.

### **Comparison**

Comparison traders in Sowerby Bridge occupy 23.3% of outlets against a national average of 34.6%. Similarly, when it comes to comparison goods floorspace, Sowerby Bridge is below the national average with a figure of 28.5% compared to a national average of 37.8%. The town is made up of mostly independent comparison traders.

### **Overall Service**

In 2008, the service sector comprised 83 units and occupied 8,958 sq m of floorspace. The proportion of service outlets (55.4%) are above the national average (45.7%) as are the proportion of service floorspace (47.2% compared to 38.4%).

### **Retail Service**

Retail services, which comprise such uses as hairdressers, dry cleaners and petrol filling stations, account for 14.7% of outlets and 8.1% of floorspace in Sowerby Bridge, which compares to a national average of 13% and 7% respectively. 'Health and beauty' traders are particularly dominant in this sector, accounting for 13 (or 59%) of all retail service outlets. The town contains a Post Office on Wharf Street.

### **Leisure Services**

Leisure services as defined by GOAD include uses such as restaurants, cafes, bookmakers and public houses. Sowerby Bridge is well provided for in this sector with both the proportion of outlets (28.7%) and the proportion of floorspace occupied (30.9%) being above the national average (21.5% and 22.7% respectively).

### **Financial Services**

In terms of the proportion of units occupied by financial and business services the figures closely reflect the national average occupying 12.0% of outlets compared to a figure of 11.2% nationally. A number of 'high street' banks are present in the town centre, including: Barclays; Halifax; and Lloyds.

### **Non Retail**

In addition to the retail services on offer, there is a public library and three religious institutions. Furthermore, Sowerby Bridge town centre is surrounded by residential areas.

### Unit Sizes

Table 36 below highlights the composition of Sowerby Bridge Town Centre in August 2009 in terms of the size of retail units. This is taken from an assessment of retailing facilities provided by Experian GOAD for 2009.

**Table 36:** Size of Units within Sowerby Bridge Town Centre

Size of Unit (ground floor area)	Number of units	Proportion of Total (%)	
		Sowerby Bridge	GB
Under 93 sq m (1,000 sq ft)	103	68.7	39.1
93-232 sq m (1,000-2,499 sq ft)	34	22.7	39.6
232-464 sq m (2,500-4,999 sq ft)	7	4.7	12.6
465-929 sq m (5,000-9,999 sq ft)	4	2.7	5.1
929-1,393 sq m (10,000-14,999 sq ft)	1	0.7	1.5
1,393-1,858 sq m (15,000-19,999 sq ft)	0	0	0.7
1,858-2,787 sq m (20,000-29,999 sq ft)	1	0.7	0.7
Above 2,787 sq m (30,000 sq ft)	0	0	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Experian Goad 2009

Sowerby Bridge has a higher proportion of small vacant units less than 93 sq m (68.7%) compared to the national average (39.1%). There are no units in the centre with a floorspace above 2,787 sq m. Retailers are increasingly looking for bigger units which can only be addressed by combining existing vacancies or through redevelopment.

### Vacancies

**Table 37:** Vacancies' in Sowerby Bridge (2009)

	Vacancy		
	Total	Sowerby Bridge (%)	UK (%)
No. of Outlets	20	13.3	10.6
Floorspace	1,357	7.1	8.9

Source: Experian GOAD (August 2009)

Table 37 illustrates that in August 2009 there were 20 vacant retail units in the town centre, which occupied a floorspace of 1,357 sq m. This represents 13.3% of all outlets and 7.1% of floorspace, compared to respective national averages of 10.6% and 8.9%. This indicates the presence of a high number of small vacant properties in the town centre. It was evident when undertaking the survey that there were vacancies present. From examining the data for Sowerby Bridge, it can be seen that Wharf Street (nine units) and Town Hall Street (three units) have the highest number of vacant units within the town centre. The other vacant units are sporadically placed throughout the centre.

## In Street Survey Results

### Accessibility

In respect of accessibility, the on-street visitors survey undertaken by NEMS identified the following:

- 57% of visitors to Sowerby Bridge had no access to a car for personal use during the daytime. During the night-time, the proportion of visitors who did not have access to a car for personal use was 54%;
- 40% of visitors walked to the centre. 30% of visitors arrived in the centre by bus, minibus or coach, with a further 28% arriving by car or van (either as driver or passenger);
- Of those who drove, the most popular place to leave their vehicle was at Tuel Lane car park with 36% of drivers parking here. 21% parked on-street;
- 87% of drivers did not encounter any difficulty when obtaining a car parking space on the day of the survey;
- 71% of visitors travelled for 10 minutes or less to reach the centre. An additional 14% travelled for between 11 and 15 minutes, with 8% travelling for between 16 and 20 minutes and 4% for between 21 and 30 minutes. No visitors travelled for over an hour to reach the centre;
- Visitors were asked to consider car parking provision in Sowerby Bridge. Of those that answered this question, 42% deemed this to be 'about the same' as that in other centres;
- In terms of car parking prices, 42% considered prices to be 'about the same' as in other centres; and
- Accessibility by public transport was stated by 55% of visitors as being 'about the same' as in other centres, although 37% felt that this was 'worse' or 'much worse' in Sowerby Bridge than in other shopping centres.

## Perception of Safety and Occurrence of Crime

The on-street visitors survey asked specific questions to visitors about their perceptions of crime in Halifax. During the day-time, some 55% of visitors indicated that safety in Sowerby Bridge was 'about the same' as that in other centres, however, 44% considered it to be 'worse' or 'much worse' than in other centres. However, with respect to safety during the evening/ night-time, the proportion of visitors who deemed safety to be 'about the same' as in other centres fell to 47%, with some 46% considering safety to be either 'worse' or 'much worse' than that in other centres. 8% of visitors indicated that they did not know either way.

### Customer Views and Behaviour

The main findings of the on-street survey undertaken by NEMS Market Research were:

- 91% of visitors to the city had travelled directly from home;
- Most of those shoppers interviewed (94%) live in the centre, with 5% visiting the centre and the remaining 2% working in the centre;
- The main reasons why visitors indicated that they were in the centre were: food and grocery shopping (26%), to visit the bank/ building society/ Post Office (21%), social/ leisure activities (12%) and due to work/ school/ college (8%);
- 29% of visitors planned to stay in the centre for up to half an hour, with a further 51% planning to stay in the centre for up to two hours and 12% planning to stay in the centre for half a day;
- The majority of visitors (70%) did not plan to undertake their main food shop on the day of the survey;



- When asked whether they were planning to buy anything other than food goods on the day of the survey, 28% of respondents stated that they planned to purchase, clothing, footwear or household goods;
- 56% of visitors stated that they visited Sowerby Bridge 'about as frequently' today as compared to five years ago. 31% stated that they visited the centre 'more' or 'much more frequently' than five years ago; and
- 60% of visitors indicated that they did not visit the centre during the evening.

Visitors to Sowerby Bridge were asked to consider a number of different aspects of the centre compared to other shopping centres which they used. The majority of aspects were considered to be 'about the same' in Sowerby Bridge by the largest proportion of visitors. Notwithstanding this, areas of weakness were seen to be the choice of shops, which 80% of visitors rated as being either 'worse' or 'much worse' than other centres, the quality of shops (70% stating this was worse than elsewhere), leisure facilities (54%) and shopping environment (48%).

Visitors were asked about the types of shops and services they would like to see more of in the centre. Popular responses were clothing stores (49%) and footwear stores (44%). Visitors were also asked about the types of leisure facilities they would like to see more of in the centre. Popular responses were a cinema (32%), a swimming pool (19%) and a health and a bowling alley (16%).

### **Business Survey Results**

A questionnaire was distributed to all local businesses within Sowerby Bridge by WYG in conjunction with Calderdale Council in order to gain an understanding of the opinions and views of retailers. A total of 160 questionnaires were distributed with 11 being returned: a response rate of 7%. The main findings of the business survey results were as follows:

- 36% of respondents had been trading in the town centre for under ten years, with some 36% having been in operation for in excess of twenty years and 18% had been trading for under three years;
- 100% of respondents were independent traders;
- 44% of respondents indicated that they were food retailers, with 22% being non-food retailers, 22% being leisure services and 11% being retail services;
- Most businesses (64%) employed between one and five members of staff;
- 73% of traders stated that since they had begun trading business had either 'grown significantly' or 'grown moderately', with 9% indicating that business had 'remained largely static'. 18% indicated that their business had declined to some degree since they began trading;
- 82% of respondents indicated that their business was currently performing 'very well' or 'well', illustrating strong performance, with 9% stating that their business was currently trading 'moderately';
- The majority of respondents (73%) leased their premises;



- The survey indicated that 40% of traders relied primarily on residents in the wider Calderdale area for the majority of their business, although a further 40% relied upon local residents primarily and 10% on office employees. 10% relied mainly on tourists'
- When asked about measures that would improve the town centre, 17% of respondents stated that an increased choice/ range of shops would have this affect. Other important measures included improved security/ CCTV (13%), more parking (12%) and improved street cleaning (12%);
- 56% of respondents felt that there were too many non-retail uses in the town centre, with 44% stating that there was a good balance between shops and other non-retail uses;
- Respondents identified the main barriers to trading performance as being inadequate customer car parking (10%), lack of day visitors/ tourists to the town centre (7%) and high rents/ overheads (5%);
- 43% of respondents indicated that they had no plans to alter their business in any way over the next five years, with a further 36% planning to refurbish their existing floorspace;
- 42% of respondents considered that shop front improvement grants would help their businesses;
- The greatest proportion of traders (10%) considered Halifax to be their biggest competitor.

The business survey asked respondents to rate a number of different aspects of Sowerby Bridge in terms of whether they were 'good', 'average' or 'poor'. The majority of aspects were rated as being 'average' by the largest proportion of respondents. However, a number of aspects were rated as being 'poor' by a majority of respondents. These aspects were: range of shops and services (11%), shopping environment (10%), CCTV security (10%) and evening security (8%). Respondents were also able to add any additional comments they would like to make at the end of the survey. There was no general consensus brought about from this process, however some retailers highlighted that traffic can be a hazard, and there is a litter problem in the centre. On a positive note, certain retailers felt that the new market is an improvement on the town, however better quality products would further enhance Sowerby Bridge.



### Accessibility

**Car:** Sowerby Bridge is situated on the A58, which connects to Halifax to the north east and Huddersfield to the south east. The M62 (junction 24) is nearby. When surveying the centre it was noticeable that many people pass through Sowerby Bridge to get to other centres. This made Town Hall Street and Wharf Street particularly busy, however pedestrian crossings are provided to aid pedestrians.

**Car parks:** There is adequate parking in Sowerby Bridge, with there being four main car parks which are all short and long stay. These car parks include: Ashtree (5 spaces); Stanley Street (29 spaces); Tuel Lane (81 spaces); and West Street (21 spaces). There is also limited on-street parking available.

It is free to park on Ashtree car park. Aside from this, typical pricing is set out below (table 38).

**Table 38:** Car park pricing

Time (hours)	Price (£)
Up to 1	0.30
1 to 2	0.60
2 to 3	0.90
3 to 4	1.20
4 to 5	1.50
5 to 6	1.80
6 to 7	2.10
7 to 8	2.40
8 to 9	2.70
9 to 10	3.00

*Source: Validated by site visit*

**Public transport:** The town centre also benefits from adequate accessibility by public transport. There is a railway station on Station Road which connects to Hebden Bridge, Leeds and Manchester. Buses provide services to Brighouse, Dewsbury, Halifax and Leeds amongst others.

### Environmental Quality

Sowerby Bridge is an attractive, small town in Calderdale and is focused on Town Hall Street and Wharf Street. Whilst the centre is not pedestrianised, the centre is a safe environment for shoppers. At the time of the survey, there was a low level of footfall in Sowerby Bridge. Pavements in the centre tend to be narrow, and where the centre meets busy roads, pedestrian crossings aid movement by foot. The streets are clean with no evidence of litter, whilst shop units themselves are maintained to high standards, creating an attractive shopping environment. Units are mostly old build and made of local stone. Street furniture in this area includes: lighting; benches; bins; and flowers. It should be noted that there are adequately maintained public toilets in the centre, of which there is a 20p charge.